LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE ONE

A WORD OF INTRODUCTION

(1)

Scripture Reading: Isa. 42:1-4, 6-7; 49:5-7; 50:4-7; 52:13--53:12; Mark 10:45

With this message we begin the Life-study of the Gospel of Mark. Mark is not as profound as the Gospel of John, and it does not contain as many teachings as are found in the Gospel of Matthew. Some readers of the New Testament may think of Mark as the "Galilee" of the four Gospels, and some may wonder what good can come out of Galilee. However, the Lord Jesus came from Galilee.

THE LORD'S MOVE IN GALILEE AND JUDEA

The Gospel of John is mainly a record of the Lord's move in Judea and of His profound words spoken there. Mark, on the contrary, is a record mainly of the Lord's ministry in Galilee. Mark does not record much of the Lord's move or teaching in Judea.

If we would have a history of the Lord's life and ministry on earth, we need to learn how to put together the Gospels of John and Mark. When these Gospels are put together, we can see the Lord's move in the regions of Galilee and Judea. Judea was a highly respected province, and the city of Jerusalem was located there. But the province of Galilee was looked down upon and despised. The Lord's move in Galilee covered a longer period of time than His move in Judea. We need to see that the record in the Gospel of Mark is a record primarily of the Lord's move not in Judea but in Galilee.

In the first chapter of the Gospel of John we have a record of profound matters related to Christ's incarnation.

Verses 1 and 14 reveal that in the beginning was the Word, that the Word was with God and was God, and that the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. According to John 1:14, the disciples also saw the Lord's glory, glory as of an only begotten from a father. In the first chapter of his Gospel John goes on to say that the law was given through Moses, but grace and reality came through Jesus Christ (v. 17). In verse 18 John says, "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." Furthermore, John tells us that in the Word was life, and the life was the light of men (v. 4). All these matters are very profound.

THE SLAVE-SAVIOR

In contrast to the profound matters revealed in the Gospel of John, in Mark's Gospel we see the Lord as the Slave-Savior. In the Gospel of Mark we do not have the God-Savior, as in John, the King-Savior, as in Matthew, or the Man-Savior, as in Luke. The Gospel of Mark presents a particular aspect of Christ, the aspect of the Slave-Savior. In John we have God; in Matthew, the King; in Luke, the Man; and in Mark, the Slave. We would hardly expect to hear excellent, profound, marvelous things about a slave. There is a sense in which it is not easy to speak on the Gospel of Mark.

In the Life-study of James we emphasized the contrast between the writings of Paul and the book of James. The writings of Paul are on a much higher level than those of James. Paul's writings are on a divine level, on God's level, and reveal the divine dispensing for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. Therefore, in the Epistles of Paul we have a revelation of the divine economy. The book of James is on a much lower level. Whereas Paul's writings are on a divine level, the book of James is on a human level and emphasizes practical Christian perfection. In his Epistle James deals with matters of godliness and character. The differences between the Epistle of James and the Epistles of Paul are actually very great. How could we compare something on the human level with something

on the divine level? How can we compare practical Christian perfection with the divine economy, or compare living ethically with living Christ? There is no comparison.

If we would know the meaning of practical Christian perfection, we need to come to the Epistle of James. Concerning Christian perfection, nothing is better than the book of James. Consider, for example, what James says concerning wisdom: "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, forbearing, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, unfeigned" (James 3:17). James also says, "The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (v. 18). This teaching certainly is much higher than that of Confucius. Concerning Christian perfection and human ethics, the book of James is excellent. In this regard we all need to respect James. Nevertheless, no matter how excellent James' writing may be regarding Christian perfection, he remains on the human level, and the human level cannot compare to the divine level.

To a certain extent we may use the contrast of the levels of the writings of Paul and James as an illustration of the contrast between Mark and the other Gospels. How, for instance, can we compare a slave with God? Furthermore, how can we compare a slave with a king? Apparently, the Gospel of Mark is on a much lower level than that of John, Matthew, and Luke. As recorded in John's Gospel, the Lord says such profound things as "I am the life" (14:6), "I am the light of the world" (8:12), and "I am the resurrection" (11:25). Such words cannot be found in the Gospel of Mark. However, in the Gospel of Mark we have the excellent record of a wonderful Slave. In the Gospel of Mark we have something that cannot be found in John, Matthew, or Luke.

The Lord Jesus is wonderful and all-inclusive. Even His name is called Wonderful (Isa. 9:6). The Lord is wonderful not only in His divinity but also in His humanity. Where do we see a portrait of the humanity of the Lord Jesus? It is correct to say that the Gospel of Luke emphasizes the Lord's humanity. In his Gospel Luke presents the Lord as

a normal man, as a man fully up to standard. With such a man we see human virtue, excellence, and beauty. However, not even all this can compare with the aspect of the Lord's humanity seen in the Gospel of Mark. In Mark we see a beautiful expression of Christ's virtues in His humanity. I believe that more of the Lord's excellent virtues in His humanity are seen in the Gospel of Mark than in the Gospel of Luke.

Only one of the four Gospels--the Gospel of John--is on the Lord's divinity. The other three Gospels, called the synoptic Gospels, are on the Lord's humanity. The word "synoptic" indicates that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all have the same view, the view of the Lord's humanity. In these three Gospels we see different aspects of Christ in His humanity: the Lord's humanity in being the King (Matthew), the Lord's humanity in being a man who is up to standard (Luke), and the Lord's humanity in being a Slave (Mark).

Suppose the President of the United States, after completing his term of office, would serve as a janitor. After being President, he would willingly lower himself to become a janitor to serve others. Would this not be excellent? The excellency of such a man in his presidency could not compare with the excellency in his becoming a janitor. I believe that most citizens would appreciate him more in his being a janitor than in his being a President. With him as a President we would not see as much of the beauty of his humanity. But if he would become a janitor to serve others, we would see the beauty, the virtue, in his humanity. How beautiful for a person, after occupying the high office of President of the United States, to become a janitor! I doubt that any of us would feel comfortable in the presence of a President, but we would all feel comfortable with a janitor. How excellent it would be to see a former President working as a janitor, for we would see in him excellent human virtue!

Which kind of person do you prefer--a President or a janitor? I would rather be with a janitor than with a President. If the President were to invite me to spend the

night at the White House, I would not feel at home. But if a former President were to become a janitor and invite me into his home for the night, I would feel very comfortable.

I use the illustration of a President becoming a janitor to help us see the position of the Gospel of Mark in relation to the other Gospels. In the Gospel of Matthew we see the Lord Jesus in His kingship, but in the Gospel of Mark we see the Lord in His slavery. Which do you prefer--the Lord as a King or the Lord as a Slave? Do you prefer a King-Jesus or a Slave-Jesus? Naturally, we may be inclined to appreciate the Lord as a King more than as a Slave. But we all need to appreciate the Lord as the Slave-Savior revealed in Mark. If we appreciate the Lord in this way, then we shall understand the value of the book of Mark.

In the Gospel of Mark we have a vivid record of the Lord's humanity as a Slave. The last chapters of Mark are especially long and detailed. The reason is that Mark's purpose is to provide a detailed record to show the beauty of the Lord as a Slave in His human virtues.

A RECORD OF THE LORD'S ACTS AND A DESCRIPTION OF HIS HUMAN VIRTUES

A key to understanding the Gospel of Mark is that in this Gospel we see much more of the Lord's acts than of His words. Mark does not record very much of the Lord's teaching. For example, he does not include the message the Lord gave on the mountain (Matt. 5--7). Neither does Mark include the lengthy prophecies and many of the parables found in Matthew and Luke. For the most part, Mark gives us a detailed record of the Lord's acts. He includes many small points in order to present a portrait of the beauty and excellence of the humanity of Christ as the Slave-Savior. If we see this, we shall love the Gospel of Mark.

The secret to understanding the Gospel of Mark is to see that this book describes in a vivid, detailed way the excellent and marvelous human virtues of the Lord Jesus. Actually, it is quite difficult to speak on this Gospel. More than twenty messages would be needed to cover what is revealed only in the first three chapters, because the

record of the Lord's humanity in this Gospel is so vivid and detailed. How marvelous is the picture of the virtues of the Lord's humanity in the Gospel of Mark! We need a particular kind of utterance from the Lord to speak of these matters. Throughout the years I have become accustomed to speaking on the all-inclusive Christ, the church, and the compound, processed, indwelling Spirit. But when we come to the Gospel of Mark, I sense the need for a different kind of utterance, and I look to the Lord for it.

THE WRITER OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK

The writer of this Gospel was Mark, who was also called John (Acts 12:25), the son of one of the Marys (who was close to the Apostle Peter in the church at Jerusalem, Acts 12:12). He was also the cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10). He accompanied Barnabas and Saul in their ministry (Acts 12:25), and joined Paul in the first journey of his ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 13:5). However, Mark left Paul and turned back at Perga (Acts 13:13). Due to the fact that he had turned back, he was rejected by Paul in his second journey. Mark then joined Barnabas in his work, at which time Barnabas separated himself from Paul (Acts 15:36-40). However, Mark was close to Paul in his later years (Col. 4:10; Philem. 24) and useful to him for his ministry until Paul's martyrdom (2 Tim. 4:11). He was close to Peter, probably continually, since Peter considered him his son (1 Pet. 5:13).

FEATURES OF MARK'S GOSPEL

From the early days of the church Mark's Gospel has been considered a written account of the oral presentation of Peter, who accompanied the Savior in His gospel service from its beginning (Mark 1:16-18) to its end (14:54, 66-72). The record is according to historical sequence and gives more details of historical facts than the other Gospels do. The entire Gospel is summarized in Peter's word in Acts 10:36-42.

Concerning the Gospel of Mark we need to keep three matters in mind: first, that this Gospel is a written

account

of Peter's presentation of the history of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; second, that this Gospel was written according to historical sequence; and third, that this Gospel gives more details of historical facts than the other Gospels do. The Gospel of Mark may actually be regarded as the Gospel of Peter. Peter presented the story of the Lord Jesus orally to Mark, and Mark put this story into writing. This Gospel also gives us a biography of the Lord according to historical sequence. The record in Matthew, on the contrary, gives us a record according to doctrine. If we would know the actual incidents of the Lord's life according to historical sequence, we need the Gospel of Mark. Furthermore, Mark gives more details of historical facts than the other Gospels do. As we have already pointed out, Mark pays much more attention to the Lord's action than to His speaking. This fits Mark's purpose in portraying the Lord as a Slave. A slave is one who works, not one who talks a great deal. Therefore, Mark presents the details of the Lord's actions.

John presents the God-Savior, emphasizing the Savior's deity in His humanity. Matthew presents the King-Savior; Mark, the Slave-Savior; and Luke, the Man-Savior. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are synoptic concerning the Savior's humanity in different aspects, with His deity. Since Mark presents the Savior as a Slave, he does not tell His genealogy and status, as the ancestry of a slave is not worthy of note. Mark also does not intend to impress us with the Slave's wonderful words (as Matthew does with His marvelous teachings and parables concerning the heavenly kingdom, and John with His profound revelations of divine truths), but he impresses us with His excellent deeds in His gospel service, providing more detail than the other Gospels, in order to portray the Slave-Savior's diligence, faithfulness, and other virtues in the saving service He rendered to sinners for God. In Mark's Gospel is the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning Christ as the Slave of Jehovah in Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; 49:5-7, 50:4-7; 52:13--53:12, and the details of the teaching regarding Christ as the Slave of God in Philippians 2:5-11. His diligence in

labor, His need of food and rest (Mark 3:20-21; 6:31), His anger (3:5), His groaning (7:34), and His affection (10:21) display beautifully His humanity in its virtue and perfection. His lordship (2:28), His omniscience (2:8}, His miraculous power, and His authority to cast out demons (1:27; 3:15), to forgive sins (2:7, 10), and to silence the wind and the sea (4:39) manifest in full His deity in its glory and honor. What a Slave of God! How lovely and admirable! Such a Slave served sinners as their Slave-Savior, with His life as their ransom (10:45), for the fulfillment of the eternal purpose of God, whose Slave He was.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE TWO

A WORD OF INTRODUCTION

(2)

Scripture Reading: Isa. 42:1-4, 6-7; 49:6-7; 50:4-7; 52:13--53:12; Mark 10:45

This message is a continuation of the introductory word in our Life-study of the Gospel of Mark. We have seen that this Gospel portrays the excellency of Christ's virtues in His humanity as a Slave. The Gospel of John presents Christ as the God-Savior, the Gospel of Matthew presents Him as the King-Savior, and the Gospel of Luke presents Him as the Man-Savior. But the Gospel of Mark presents Christ as the Slave-Savior. Therefore, the subject of this Gospel is the Slave of God as the Slave-Savior of sinners. First we shall see the Lord as a Slave of God and then as the Slave-Savior of sinners (10:45).

A SLAVE OF GOD

As Prophesied in Isaiah

In this message we shall concentrate on Isaiah's prophecy concerning Christ as the Slave of Jehovah.

God's Choice and His Delight

Isaiah 42:1 says, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth." Jesus Christ, the Slave of God, was God's choice from among billions of human beings. Because He was God's choice, God delighted in Him. Hence, He became the delight of

God's heartGrowing Up before God as a Tender Plant

Isaiah 53:2 and 3 say, "For he shall grow up before him

as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not." If you read chapter two of the Gospel of Luke, you will see Christ growing up like a tender plant and as a root out of dry ground. The Lord was raised in the home of a poor carpenter in the despised town of Nazareth and in the despised province of Galilee This was the fulfillment of the dry ground in Isaiah.

The Lord had no form or comeliness, no physical beauty, that He should be desired. Rather, He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, who was acquainted with grief. The Lord's life was a life of sorrows and of grief.

His Visage Marred More than Any Man

Concerning the Lord Jesus, Isaiah 52:14 prophesies, "As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." This indicates that the Lord's appearance, His countenance, was marred. The word "marred" is a strong word and indicates that the Lord's visage was somewhat damaged or disfigured.

Many years ago a certain artist painted a portrait in which the Lord is depicted as a handsome man. That portrayal is altogether false. Nevertheless, a great many Christians have a copy of that portrait in their homes. While I was traveling in central China in 1936 doing the work of preaching the gospel, I encountered a case of demon possession related to this picture. A young woman had become demon possessed, and those who were trying to help her referred the case to me. I told them that, for the most part, demon possession is due to the worship of idols, and I asked if there were any idols in her home. They told me that there were no idols. However, there was a copy of that well-known picture of Jesus. I told them

that the picture was an idol and that they should take it down and burn it. After the portrait was burned, the demon left that young woman. To have such a picture of Jesus is altogether contrary to the Scriptures. My purpose in relating this story is to point out this fact. According to the Bible, the Lord Jesus did not have a handsome face. Rather, His visage was marred, disfigured.

Despised by Man, Abhorred by the Nation, and the Slave of Rulers

Isaiah 49:7 says, "Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers." According to this verse, the Lord Jesus was despised by man, He was abhorred by the nation, and He was the Slave of rulers. In Hebrew the phrase "a servant of rulers" means one held in thrall by tyrants. The Lord was a Slave kept in thrall, in slavery, by tyrants.

Giving His Back to the Smiters and His Cheeks to the Persecutors

Isaiah 50:6 says of the Lord, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting." This is a very descriptive word telling us how the Lord behaved Himself as a Slave. He turned His back toward those who wanted to smite Him, He gave His cheeks to the persecutors, and He did not hide His face from shame.

Not Crying Nor Lifting Up His Voice

Isaiah 42:2 indicates that the Lord did not cry or lift up His voice: "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street." This means that the Lord did not shout or make noise. Instead of crying out to make His voice known in the streets, He was calm and quiet.

Not Breaking a Bruised Reed and Not Quenching a Dimly Burning Flax

Isaiah 42:3 and 4 say, "A bruised reed shall he not

break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law." According to these verses, the Lord would not break a bruised reed or quench a dimly burning flax. The Jews often made flutes of reeds. When a reed was bruised and no longer useful as a musical instrument, they broke it. They also made torches with flax to burn with oil. The oil ran out, the flax smoked, and they quenched it. Some of the Lord's people are like a bruised reed that cannot give a musical sound; others are like smoking flax that cannot give a shining light. Yet the Lord would not "break" the bruised ones who cannot give a musical sound or quench the ones like dimly burning flax that cannot give a shining light. On the one hand, the Lord would not break a bruised reed or quench a dimly burning flax. On the other hand, according to these verses, He would not faint as a dimly burning flax, nor would He be crushed as a bruised reed.

Given the Tongue of the Instructed

From Isaiah 50:4 we see that as the Slave of God the Lord was given the tongue of the instructed: "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned." Although as a Slave, the Lord was not a teaching one, He was nonetheless given the tongue of the instructed. He was instructed by God to know how to sustain a weary one with a word. Because He had been instructed by God, He could sustain a weary one by giving him a single word. Such a word is able to minister life more than a long message.

Trusting in God and Setting His Face like a Flint

Isaiah 50:7 says, "For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed."

Here we see that the Lord trusted in God and set His face like a flint. As the Lord Jesus was walking in God'sway to fulfill God's will, His face was like a hard stone. In the matter of fulfilling God's will He was very strong.

Having Borne Our Griefs and Carried Our Sorrows

In Isaiah 53:4 and 5 we have this word concerning the Lord Jesus: "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." What is described in these verses is related to the Lord's death on the cross. He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions and was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace, that is, the chastisement for our peace, was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.

Oppressed and Afflicted

According to Isaiah 53:7, the Lord did not open His mouth when He was oppressed and afflicted: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." This means that when the Lord was brought to the cross, He was like a sheep dumb before the shearers. When He was oppressed and afflicted, He did not say a word.

God Laying on Him the Iniquity of Us All

Isaiah 53:6 says, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Then verse 10 goes on to say, "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his

hand." From these verses we see that God laid on Him the iniquity of us all, bruised Him, put Him to grief, and made His soul a trespass offering.

Pouring Out His Soul unto Death

Isaiah 53:12 says, "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" The Lord poured out His soul as He was dying on the cross. He was crucified in the midst of two thieves and thereby was numbered with the transgressors. The fact that He bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors was fulfilled by the Lord's prayer on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34a).

Cut off out of the Land of the Living

According to Isaiah 53:8, the Lord Jesus "was cut off out of the land of the living." For the Lord to be cut off from the land of the living means that He was put to death.

Resurrected to See the Fruit of His Travail

Isaiah 53:11 reveals that the Lord was resurrected to see the fruit of His travail: "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities." It is in resurrection that the Lord sees the fruit of His travail. Now after His resurrection He, as the righteous Servant of God, justifies the many, whose iniquities He has borne.

Exalted and Lifted Up Very High

Isaiah 52:13 speaks of the Lord's exaltation: "Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high." After His resurrection, the Lord was exalted and lifted up very high.

For a Covenant of the People and a Light of the Gentiles

Isaiah 42:6 says, "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and will give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles." After His ascension, the Lord became a covenant of the Jewish people and a light of the Gentiles. This means that in ascension the Lord Jesus Himself became the new covenant, the new testament, to God's people. He also became a light to the Gentiles, to the heathen, through the preaching of the gospel carried out by His disciples.

The Salvation of God unto the End of the Earth

In Isaiah 49:6 we see that the Lord is the salvation of God unto the end of the earth: "And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." Christ in His ascension is now the salvation of God to the uttermost part of the earth. This prophecy concerning the Lord Jesus was spoken by Isaiah seven hundred years before the birth of the Lord Jesus.

In the book of Isaiah we have a detailed prophecy concerning the Lord Jesus as the Slave of God. Not even in the New Testament can we find such a record. By considering the prophecies in Isaiah concerning Christ as God's Slave, we can understand more fully what is recorded in the Gospel of Mark concerning Him as a Slave.

Paul's Word Concerning Christ as a Slave

In Philippians 2:5-11 we have the word of the Apostle Paul concerning Christ as the Slave of God.

Subsisting in the Form of God

In Philippians 2:5 and 6 Paul says, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who subsisting in the form of God did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped." Here we see that the Lord not only existed with

God, but subsisted in the form of God. The Greek word rendered "subsisting" denotes existing from the* beginning. This implies the Lord's eternal preexistence. To say that Christ existed in the form of God means that He subsisted in the expression of God's being (Heb. 1:3), that He was identified with the essence and nature of God's Person. This refers to Christ's deity.

According to Philippians 2:6, although Christ subsisted in the form of God, He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. He was equal with God, but He did not consider this equality a treasure to be grasped and retained. Rather, He was willing to come to earth as a man.

Emptying Himself, Taking the Form of a Slave

In Philippians 2:7 Paul goes on to say, "But emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men." The Lord emptied Himself of His position and glory and of other matters related to His Godhead. Of course, He did not empty Himself of His deity. Having emptied Himself, the Lord came as a man, taking the form of a slave and becoming in the likeness of men.

In Philippians 2:7 we have two important words: form and likeness. In His incarnation the Lord did not alter His divine nature, but altered only His outward expression of the form of God to that of a slave. This was not a change of essence but of state. The form of God implies the inward reality of Christ's deity; the likeness of men denotes the outward appearance of His humanity. He appeared outwardly to men as a man, but inwardly He had the reality of deity. He took the form of a slave and became a man in the likeness of men.

In Luke 2 we can see the Lord as a man. When He came to Jerusalem with His parents, He was a human being, a child. There we do not see the Lord as a Slave. It is when the Lord Jesus came out to minister that we see Him as a Slave. As the Lord ministered, He was a Slave. For example, when He washed the feet of His disciples, He was

in the form of a Slave (John 13:4-5). First, the Lord became a man in man's likeness. Then He behaved as a Slave in the form of a Slave.

If a brother stands up to speak in a church meeting, he will certainly have the form of a man. However, if the same brother would put on work clothes and begin to vacuum the carpet, we may say that he has the form of a janitor. First, he is a man, and then he has the form of a janitor. This simple illustration may help us understand how the Lord became a man and then eventually ministered in the form of a Slave.

When the disciples were arguing about who would be the greatest among them, the Lord told them that He came forth to serve as a Slave: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Here the Lord seems to be saying, "Look at Me. I have come to serve as a Slave, even at the cost of My life. I am ready to give My life as a ransom." By this we see that in His ministry the Lord served in the form of a Slave.

Humbling Himself, Becoming Obedient unto Death

In Philippians 2:8 Paul says, "And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of a cross." The Lord's humbling Himself was a further step in His emptying Himself. Christ's self-humbling manifests His self-emptying. The Lord became obedient even unto death, the death of a cross. The Lord's death on the cross was the climax of His humiliation. To the Jews the death of a cross was a curse (Deut. 21:22-23), and to the Gentiles it was a death sentence imposed upon malefactors and slaves (Matt. 27:16-17, 20-23). Hence, it was a shameful thing (Heb. 12:2).

Highly Exalted and Given the Name Which Is above Every Name

In Philippians 2:9 Paul says, "Wherefore also God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which

is above every name." The Lord humbled Himself to the uttermost, but God exalted Him to the highest peak. From the time of the Lord's ascension, there has not been a name on earth higher than the name of Jesus. Paul's word in Philippians 2:9 concerning the Lord's exaltation is similar to that prophesied in Isaiah 52:13.

With No Record of His Genealogy or His Status

In the Gospel of Mark there is no record of the Lord's genealogy or His status. Because Mark presents the Savior as a Slave, he does not tell His genealogy or status, since the ancestry of a slave is not worthy of note.

With a Record Mainly of His Excellent Deeds

The record concerning Christ as the Slave of God in the Gospel of Mark is not mainly a record of His wonderful words. Instead, it is a record of the Lord's excellent deeds. These deeds displayed both His lovely humanity in its virtue and perfection and His deity in its glory and honor. We need to be impressed with the fact that in the Gospel of Mark we see a Slave with a lovely humanity in its virtue and perfection and with deity in its glory and honor.

THE SLAVE-SAVIOR OF SINNERS

The Gospel of Mark presents the Lord Jesus as a Slave of God and as the Slave-Savior of sinners. As the Slave-Savior, the Lord served sinners and gave His life as a ransom for them (10:45). By giving His life as a ransom for sinners, the Lord as the Slave-Savior accomplished the eternal purpose of God, whom He served as a Slave.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE THREE

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL AND THE INITIATION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR

(1)

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:1-13

In the Gospel of Mark Christ is presented as the Slave-Savior. In this Gospel the Slave-Savior bears the characteristics of His humanity mingled with His deity. The Lord's humanity is lovely in its virtue and perfection, and His deity is magnificent in its glory and honor. As we go through the Gospel of Mark, we can see these aspects of Christ. The Lord's humanity is revealed in its virtue and perfection, and His deity is revealed in its glory and honor. We need to be impressed with these aspects of the Lord. Then as we study the book of Mark we shall see what a wonderful Slave-Savior the Lord is. He is God Himself becoming a Slave to serve us by giving His life a ransom for us.

In this message we shall consider the beginning of the gospel and the initiation of the Slave-Savior (1:1-13). Mark 1:1 says, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The word "gospel" means glad tidings, good news (Rom. 10:15). The gospel is the service, the ministry, of the Slave-Savior as a Slave of God to serve His people. Matthew begins with the kingly generations of the King, Christ (Matt. 1:1-17), Luke with a human genealogy of the Man, Jesus (Luke 3:23-38), and John with the eternal origin of the Son of God (John 1:1-2). Mark begins with the beginning of the gospel, the service of Jesus as a lowly Slave of God (Phil. 2:7; Matt. 20:27-28), not with the origin of His Person. As a rule, the service, not the person, of a slave is notable.

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

According to 1:1, the gospel is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This Gospel is a biography of the Slave-Savior. who was God incarnated as a Slave to save sinners. The compound title "Jesus Christ, the Son of God" denotes the Lord's humanity as Jesus Christ and His deity as the Son of God. Both the Lord's humanity and His deity were adequately expressed by His human virtues and divine attributes in His ministry and His move for His gospel service, as recorded in the Gospel of Mark.

Although we realize that the word gospel means glad tidings, we need to consider more fully what the gospel actually is. Some of us who have been Christians for years may not yet realize what the gospel is. The gospel is the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament. Therefore, in order to know what the gospel is, we need to read the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and be enlightened concerning the revelation that is given there.

THE DISPENSATIONS IN THE SCRIPTURES

Bible teachers have pointed out that in the Scriptures there are seven dispensations. (Some teachers reduce this number to four.) These seven dispensations cover the Scriptures from Genesis 1 through Revelation 20. The first of these dispensations is the dispensation of innocence. This dispensation, in which there was no sin, covers only the first two chapters of Genesis.

Following the dispensation of innocence, we have the dispensation of conscience. This covers the time of man's fall in Genesis 3 until the time of the flood.

After the fall, man was required to live according to his conscience. However, because man failed to do this, the third dispensation--human government--came as the replacement of the second dispensation. After the flood, God required that man would come under the control of human government because he failed to live according to his conscience. During this dispensation, different nations were raised up and governments were formed. This dispensation also ended in failure.

The fourth dispensation began with God's calling of Abraham out of the fallen, corrupted, and rebellious human race. In His calling of Abraham, God gave him a promise. Hence, the fourth dispensation is known as the dispensation of promise.

We have seen that the first four dispensations were innocence, conscience, human government, and promise. It was not God's intention immediately to fulfill the promise He made to Abraham. Because of the intervening period of time, God decreed the law through Moses with the intention that the law would be used as a fold to keep His people in custody so that they would be preserved. The law may be compared to a fold in which sheep are kept during the night. The law given through Moses was such a fold for the keeping of God's chosen people. Therefore, the fifth dispensation is the dispensation of the law.

Following this dispensation, Christ came. Concerning the coming of Christ, John 1:17 says, "For the law was given through Moses; grace and reality came through Jesus Christ." Because grace came through Jesus Christ, the sixth dispensation is called the dispensation of grace.

The dispensation of grace will last until the Lord's second coming, at which time He will set up the kingdom on earth. The kingdom will last a thousand years, and this period of time is called the millennium. The seventh dispensation, therefore, is the dispensation of the kingdom.

Through these seven dispensations God will fully accomplish His purpose. After the end of the millennium, everything will be renewed. Then there will be a new universe with a new heaven and a new earth and with the New Jerusalem as its center for eternity. In the New Jerusalem God and His redeemed people will enjoy eternal life.

As we have indicated, some Bible teachers prefer to say that in the Scriptures there are four major dispensations. Romans 5 says that from Adam to Moses there was no law. This long period of time, which includes the dispensations of innocence, conscience, human government, and promise, may be regarded as a single dispensation, the pre-law

dispensation, or the dispensation before the law. Then according to this understanding the second dispensation, covering the time from Moses to Christ, is the dispensation of the law. The third dispensation is the dispensation of grace, lasting from Christ's first coming until His second coming. Finally, there is the fourth dispensation, the dispensation of the kingdom, lasting from the time of the Lord's second coming until the end of the thousand years. This understanding of the dispensations is easy to remember. In this view there are four dispensations: the dispensation before the law, the dispensation of the law, the dispensation of grace, and the dispensation of the kingdom.

THE CONTENTS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

We have said that the gospel is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Now we need to ask what the contents of the Old Testament are. We may use three words to express the contents of the Old Testament: promise, law, and prophecy.

The Promises

The promise certainly covers the dispensations of innocence, conscience, human government, and promise. This includes the Old Testament from Adam until the giving of the law to Moses. The book of Genesis, in particular, is a book of God's promise.

Do you know what was the first promise given by God in Genesis? The first promise is recorded in Genesis 3:15: "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." This promise was given immediately after the fall of man. Probably Adam and Eve were in fear and trembling because of their disobedience. But God gave them a marvelous promise. This promise was that a seed of the woman would come to bruise the head of the serpent. Although his heel would be bruised, the seed of woman would nevertheless crush the serpent's head. What a great promise this is!

The gospel is the fulfillment of the promise that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent.

We know that Christ, the seed of woman, did come. He was born of a virgin as the fulfillment of the promise in Genesis 3:15. This One, the woman's seed, is the Slave-Savior presented in the Gospel of Mark.

Another promise, also concerning the seed, was given to Abraham. According to Genesis 22:17 and 18 the Lord promised Abraham, "In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Here we have the promise that Abraham's seed would be a great blessing to all mankind, for all nations would be blessed through his seed.

Once again, this seed refers to the Lord Jesus. Concerning this Paul says in Galatians 3:16, "But to Abraham were the promises spoken and to his seed. He does not say, And to the seeds, as concerning many, but as concerning one, And to your seed, who is Christ." Christ was born as a descendant of Abraham, born of the chosen race. Therefore, He was the seed of Abraham.

As the seed of woman, Christ destroyed Satan and thereby solved the problem of the universe. The universe has been troubled by one thing--the serpent. In the Bible we can see the line of the serpent, or the development of the serpent. The serpent first appeared in Genesis 3. By the time of Revelation 12:9 this serpent, called the ancient serpent, has become a great dragon. According to the book of Revelation, this serpent, the Devil, Satan, will be bound and cast into the abyss during the millennium (20:2-3). After the millennium, he will be released and will rebel once again. Then he will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10).

The crucial point here is that the seed of woman promised in Genesis 3:15 is for dealing with this serpent. We need to proclaim this in our preaching of the gospel. However, rarely do today's gospel preachers point out that the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15 is for the destruction of the serpent.

Concerning the Lord as the seed of woman destroying the serpent, Hebrews 2:14 says, "Since therefore the children have partaken of blood and flesh, He also Himself in like manner shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who has the might of death, that is, the Devil." In John 3:14 the Lord said that as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man would be lifted up. The brass serpent lifted up by Moses signified the judgment of the old serpent. When the Lord was lifted up on the cross, He destroyed this serpent. Hence, as the seed of woman the Lord accomplished the destruction of the poisonous serpent by which mankind has been bitten and poisoned. Because we were poisoned by the serpent, his serpentine nature was injected into us. But the seed of woman became blood and flesh in order to destroy this serpent through His death on the cross. This is a great part of the gospel.

Whereas the seed of woman is for the destruction of the serpent, the seed of Abraham is for the blessing of God to be brought to us. The seed of woman terminates the serpent, and the seed of Abraham brings in the blessing of the Triune God. In Galatians 3:14 Paul speaks regarding this blessing: "In order that the blessing of Abraham might come to the nations in Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." According to this verse, the blessing is the Spirit. What is this Spirit? The Spirit is the consummation of the Triune God. When we receive the Spirit, we receive the Triune God and have Him as our blessing. Furthermore, this blessing is our eternal life. The Spirit equals the Triune God, the Triune God is eternal life, and eternal life is the blessing we receive.

Now we can see more fully what the gospel is. The gospel is the fulfillment of two great promises: the promise concerning the seed of woman for the destruction of the serpent and the promise concerning the seed of Abraham for bringing in the blessing of the Spirit, who is the consummation of the Triune God as eternal life to be our blessing.

Before these promises were fulfilled, God gave the law in order to keep His chosen people in custody. During the time God's people were kept in the fold of the law, God raised up prophets. This means that after the promises, we have the custody of the law, and during the period of this custody God gave prophecies to confirm the promises.

We have emphasized the fact that in Genesis 3:15 we have the promise concerning the seed of the woman. In Isaiah 7:14 we have a prophecy that confirms this promise: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." Other prophecies also are confirmations of the promises given by God during the dispensation of promise.

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PROMISES AND PROPHECIES AND THE REMOVAL OF THE LAW

We have seen that first God gave promises. Next He decreed the law for the preservation of His chosen people, and then He sent prophets to utter prophecies to confirm the promises. Eventually, the promised One, the seed of woman and the seed of Abraham, came. Not only did He come, but He was also initiated.

Here we use the word "initiated" not in the sense of originating something, but in the sense of ushering someone into a new sphere. Hence, in our particular usage initiation equals inauguration. We may use the inauguration of a president as an illustration. After the election, the president is known as the president-elect. Later, on inauguration day, he is inaugurated into the office of the presidency. This inauguration is his initiation into the presidency. This illustrates the Lord's being initiated into His ministry.

The Lord Jesus was born as the seed of woman and the seed of Abraham to be our Slave-Savior to destroy the serpent and bring in the Triune God as the blessing of eternal life. However, at the age of thirty it was necessary for Him to be initiated into His ministry. The priests in the Old Testament were initiated at the age of thirty into the

priesthood, and in a similar way the Lord, also at the age of thirty, was initiated into His ministry. Therefore, as the fulfillment of the promises and the prophecies in the Old Testament, the Lord Jesus was born as the seed of woman and as the seed of Abraham and was later initiated into His ministry.

Having covered these matters, now we can say that the gospel is the fulfillment of the promises and the prophecies and also the removal of the custody of the law. This means that the gospel is the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies concerning the unique seed, the seed of woman and the seed of Abraham. Furthermore, the gospel cancels, annuls, and removes the custody of the law. Now we are no longer dependent on the Old Testament promises, the law, and the prophecies, for Christ, the unique seed, has come. This seed is the fulfillment of all the precious promises. Because we have Him, all the promises are fulfilled. As the fulfillment of the promises, He is also the fulfillment of the prophecies, which were given to confirm the promises. Furthermore, with Him is the removal of the custody of the law. Therefore, the unique seed is the fulfillment of the promises and the prophecies and the removal of the custody of the law.

The coming of Christ was the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies and the cancellation of the law. The law has been removed, and God's chosen people no longer are under its custody. We have pointed out that the law may be compared to a sheepfold, a place where sheep are kept at night. When day dawns, the sheep may come out of the fold. Likewise, because Christ has come as the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies, it is no longer necessary for God's chosen people to be under the custody of the law. In a positive sense the law was a custodian, but in a negative sense the law was a bondage, a slavery. But now the law, along with the promises and the prophecies, is over. The seed of woman has destroyed the serpent, and the seed of Abraham has brought in the blessing of the Triune God. Furthermore, this One has removed the law. Now we are no longer in the dispensation of the law, the promises, or the prophecies, for we have Christ.

If we see this, we can understand the significance of what took place on the mount of transfiguration when Peter proposed that three tabernacles be made--one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for the Lord Jesus. This suggestion was offensive to the heavens. Therefore, Matthew 17:5 says, "While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I delight; hear Him!" Then Matthew 17:8 goes on to say, "And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone." Moses represented the law, and Elijah represented the prophets. Christ, the unique One, is everything. He is the fulfillment of the promises and the prophecies and also the removal of the law. This means that He is the full replacement of the entire Old Testament. This is the gospel, the good news, the glad tidings. Praise the Lord for the gospel! Praise Him that Christ is the fulfillment of the promises and the prophecies and also the removal of the law!

If we understand what the gospel is, we shall realize that James made a great blunder in Acts 21 and in his Epistle in bringing the believers back to the law. On the one hand, James preached Christ; on the other hand, he still kept the believers under the law, in the old fold, which God had given up. The very thing that the Lord removed was brought back by James. We need to be impressed with the fact that in the gospel we no longer have the dispensation of the law, the promises, and the prophecies. Instead, in the gospel we have the fulfillment of the promises and the prophecies and also the removal of the law.

Today many Christians have only a superficial understanding of the Scriptures. They may know the terms in the Bible, but not touch the depths of the riches

of these terms. Let us use the word "gospel" as an example. Instead of understanding this matter in a superficial way, we need to see that the gospel is the fulfillment of all the promises and prophecies and also the removal of the law. For this reason, eventually the three disciples on the mount of transfiguration saw no one except Jesus only. No longer did they have the promises, the prophecies or the law; they had the Lord Jesus as the seed of woman and as the seed of Abraham. He is our Slave-Savior, and actually He Himself is the gospel.

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE TYPES

The gospel is also the fulfillment of something else--the fulfillment of the types in the Old Testament. Therefore, in the gospel we have the fulfillment of the promises, the prophecies, and types.

With the Lord's word concerning the seed of woman in Genesis 3:15 we have a promise. But in the Lord's action of making coats of skins and clothing Adam and his wife we have a type (Gen. 3:21). Abel's sacrifice, a sacrifice which was accepted by God, is another type. The lamb offered by Abraham in place of his son is also a type. Other types in the Old Testament are the Passover lamb, the manna in the wilderness, the cleft rock with the flowing river, and the tabernacle. Furthermore, people like David and Solomon are also types. The gospel is the fulfillment of these types. John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord Jesus, pointed to Him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Hence, Christ is the fulfillment of the type of the lamb. In John 1:14 we have this word: "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us." This indicates that Christ is the fulfillment of the tabernacle. The gospel, then, is the fulfillment not only of the promises and prophecies, but also of the types. Furthermore, the gospel is also the removal of the law. This is a full definition of the gospel.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FOUR

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL AND THE INITIATION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR

(2)

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:1-13

In this message we shall continue to consider the beginning of the gospel and the initiation of the Slave-Savior.

TERMINATION AND GERMINATION

Mark 1:1 and 2 say, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Even as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way." The beginning of the gospel of the Slave-Savior is even as what is written in Isaiah concerning the ministry of John the Baptist. This indicates that John's preaching of the baptism of repentance was also a part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It terminated the dispensation of law and changed it to the dispensation of grace. Hence, the dispensation of grace began with the ministry of John before the ministry of the Slave-Savior.

The beginning of the gospel is the termination of law and the germination of grace. The beginning of the gospel terminated the dispensation of the law and started the dispensation of grace. Not only did the beginning of the gospel start the dispensation of grace, but it also germinated the dispensation of grace. To start something is outward, but to germinate something is to cause it to have an inward beginning in life.

The beginning of the gospel is the termination of the entire old dispensation, the dispensation of the law. But in order for a termination to be called a beginning, the

termination must be followed by germination. This germination involves a divine injection, and this injection was the initiation of the Slave-Savior.

THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST IN THE WILDERNESS

Mark 1:3 speaks of "a voice of one crying in the wilderness." The beginning of the ministry of the gospel of the Slave-Savior was only a voice, not a great movement. Furthermore, the preaching of the gospel of the Slave-Savior began not in any center of civilization, but began in the wilderness, beyond the influence of human culture.

It was according to prophecy that John the Baptist began his ministry in the wilderness. This indicates that the introduction of God's New Testament economy by John was not accidental, but was planned and foretold by God through Isaiah the prophet. This implied that God intended His New Testament economy to begin in an absolutely new way. John the Baptist did his preaching not in the holy temple within the holy city, where the religious and cultured people worshipped God according to their scriptural ordinances, but in the wilderness, not keeping any regulation of the old way. This indicates that the old way of the worship of God according to the Old Testament was repudiated, and a new way was about to be brought in. The wilderness is a place without culture, religion, or anything of human society or civilization. The use of the word "wilderness" here indicates that the new way of God's New Testament economy is against religion and culture.

Verse 4 says, "John the baptizer came in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins." John was born a priest (Luke 1:8-13, 57-63); hence, he should have lived a priestly life in the temple to do the priestly service. But he went to the wilderness and preached the gospel. This indicates that the age of the priesthood to offer sacrifices to God was replaced by the age of the gospel to bring sinners to God so that God may gain them and that they may gain God.

Verse 6 says, "John was clothed in camel's hair and had a leather girdle around his loins; and he ate locusts and wild honey." The way John lived signifies that his living and work were altogether in a new dispensation, not according to the way of the old religion, culture, and tradition. As a priest, John, according to the regulations of the law should have worn the priestly garment, which was made mainly of fine linen (Exo. 28:4, 40-41; Lev. 6:10; Ezek. 44:17-18). He also should have eaten priestly food, which was composed mainly of fine flour and the meat of the sacrifices offered to God by His people (Lev. 2:1-3; 6:16-18, 25-26; 7:31-34). However, John did altogether otherwise. He was clothed in camel's hair, he had a leather girdle around his loins, and he ate locusts and wild honey. These things are uncivilized, uncultured, and not according to religious regulations. For a priestly person to wear camel's hair was an especially drastic blow to the religious mind, for the camel was regarded as unclean under Levitical regulations (Lev. 11:4). In addition, John did not live in a civilized place, but lived in the wilderness (Luke 3:2). All this indicates that he had completely abandoned the Old Testament dispensation, which had fallen into a kind of religion mixed with human culture. His commission was to introduce God's New Testament economy, which is constituted solely of Christ and the Spirit of life.

BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE

As one who signified the termination of the old dispensation with the old culture and religion, John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins. Repentance is to change the mind, turning it to the Slave-Savior, and baptism is to bury the repenting people, terminating them, for the Slave-Savior to germinate them by regeneration (John 3:3, 5-6). The Greek word rendered "for" in this verse also means unto. Repentance with baptism is for, and results in, forgiveness of sins so that the obstacle of man's fall may be removed and man may be reconciled to God.

In his preaching John the Baptist emphasized repentance. To repent is to turn our mind from anything other than God, including our culture, religion, knowledge, education, and social life, and turn it to God. Religion, culture, civilization, society, knowledge, and education all distract us from God. Now that the old dispensation has been terminated, we must repent and turn our mind to God.

According to the Gospel of Mark, John the Baptist did not teach the repentant ones what they should do. Instead, he simply buried them. This burial signifies termination. In the wilderness John preached repentance and terminated all those who repented. This is included as part of the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD

Mark 1:1 speaks of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. "Jesus Christ" denotes the Lord's humanity. The gospel is of a Man named Jesus Christ. This Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Mark 1:1 does not say, "Jesus Christ and the Son of God"; it says, "Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The comma here indicates that "Son of God" is in apposition to "Jesus Christ." This indicates that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that the Son of God denotes Jesus Christ. The title "the Son of God" denotes the Lord's deity. Hence, the fact that the gospel is of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, means that it is of humanity and deity. This gospel is full of humanity and also full of the Godhead. This compound title used in relation to the gospel reveals that both human virtues and divine attributes are in this gospel. This gospel is full of the Lord's humanity in its virtue and perfection and also full of His deity in its glory and honor. Therefore, the gospel is of humanity full of virtue and perfection and of deity full of glory and honor. All these aspects can be seen in the sixteen chapters of the Gospel of Mark.

A LANDMARK

If we read 1:1 and 2 carefully, we shall see that the beginning of the gospel was the coming of John the Baptist

to preach the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. When John came out in an uncultured and unreligious way announcing repentance, that was the beginning of the gospel. As we have seen, the beginning of the gospel involves the termination of the dispensation of law and the germination of the dispensation of grace. The dispensation of law ended with the coming of John the Baptist, and the dispensation of grace began also with him.

Among theologians there has been a debate about the beginning of the dispensation of grace. Some say that this dispensation began at the day of Pentecost, and others claim that it began with the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Others hold still different opinions. According to the Bible, the beginning of the gospel, which is the beginning of the dispensation of grace, was the coming out of John the Baptist. Hence, the coming of John the Baptist was a landmark dividing the dispensation of law and the dispensation of grace. His coming marked the end of the dispensation of law and the beginning of the dispensation of grace.

THE WAY AND THE PATHS

Mark 1:2 indicates that John the Baptist came to prepare the Lord's way, and verse 3 says, "A voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make ready the way of the Lord; make His paths straight." In these verses we have the way and the paths. To make ready the way of the Lord is to change the mind of the people; it is to turn their mind toward the Slave-Savior and make their heart right, straightening every part of their heart through repentance so that the Slave-Savior may enter into them to be their life and take possession of them (Luke 1:17).

We need to understand the difference between the way and the paths. To prepare the way of the Lord is to repent. We have seen that to repent is to change our mind, to have a turn in our thinking. To turn our mind is to prepare the way for the Lord's coming. The way in verse 3 refers to our mind. We need to prepare the way, make

ready the way, of the Lord through repentance. John the Baptist did an excellent job of preparing the mind of the repentant ones for the coming of the Lord.

The paths are all the minor, inner sections of our being: thoughts, likes and dislikes, intentions, desires, decisions If we compare the mind to a highway, we may compare the paths to small streets and roads. The highway and all the streets in our being need to be prepared for the Lord.

As human beings we are not simple. Rather, inwardly we are very complicated. Consider how many "streets" and "lanes" we have within us. Consider also how people's minds are away from God and occupied with things of philosophy and culture. How is it possible, then, for Christ to come into people? In order for Christ to enter into a person, the way and the paths within him need to be prepared.

The gospel is not merely an objective matter, for the gospel is actually Jesus Christ Himself as the embodiment of the living God. As such a One, He is waiting for people to open to Him so that He may come into them. However, people have their minds occupied and filled with many things. Therefore, the best evangelist is one who can cut the way in a person's mind and thereby prepare him to receive the Lord. If we preach the gospel properly, eventually the way will be prepared for Christ to come into people and occupy them.

THE REPENTANT ONES USHERED TO THE SLAVE-SAVIOR

Mark 1:6 says, "And all the country of Judea went out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem, and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins." Judea was a region with the holy city, the holy temple, and high culture; hence, it was a region of honor. Nevertheless, verse 5 says that all the country of Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to John the Baptist. When they repented through John's preaching, John immersed them into the death-water to bury them, to terminate them. In this way he prepared them to be raised up by the germinating of the Slave-Savior with the Holy Spirit, through the confession of their sins.

To baptize someone is to immerse him, to bury him in water. Thus, baptism signifies death. John the Baptist baptized the people in order to indicate that the repentant ones were good only for burial. This baptism also signifies the termination of the old person and signifies that a new beginning may be realized in resurrection through Christ as the Life-giver. Hence, following John's ministry, Christ came. John's baptism not only terminated those who repented, but also ushered them to Christ for life. Baptism in the Bible implies death and resurrection. To be baptized in water is to be put into death and buried, and to be raised up from the water means to be resurrected from death.

Mark 1:7 says of John the Baptist, "And he preached, saying, One stronger than I comes after me, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose." Although John preached a baptism of repentance, the goal of his ministry was a wonderful Person, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. John did not make himself the center of his ministry; he did not try to attract others to himself as a magnet. He realized that he was only a messenger sent by Jehovah of hosts to bring people to His Son Jesus Christ and exalt Him as the goal of his ministry.

John the Baptist preached repentance, and he baptized all those who repented. Through baptism the old life of the repenting ones was terminated. This termination prepared the way and straightened the paths for the Slave-Savior to enter into the repenting people. In his ministry John ushered the people to the Slave-Savior. Therefore, he told them that his ministry was not for himself, but was for another One, a great One, who was coming. John even said that he was not worthy to stoop down and unloose the thong of the sandals of this One.

BAPTISM IN WATER AND IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

According to 1:8, John the Baptist said, "I baptized you in water, but He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit." Water signifies death and burial for the termination of the repenting people. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life and resurrection for the germination of the terminated people.

The first was a sign of John's ministry of repentance; the latter, a sign of the Slave-Savior's ministry of life. John buried the repenting people into the death-water; the Slave-Savior raised them up for their regeneration in the Spirit of His resurrection life. The death-water, pointing to and signifying the all-inclusive death of Christ, into which His believers are baptized (Rom. 6:3), buried not only the baptized people but also their sins, the world, and their past life and history (just as the Red Sea buried Pharaoh and the Egyptian army for the children of Israel--Exo. 14:26-28; 1 Cor. 10:2), and separated them from the God-forsaking world and its corruption (just as the flood separated Noah and his family from the world and its corruption--1 Pet. 3:20-21). The Holy Spirit, into whom the Slave-Savior baptized those who believed in Him, is the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:9). Hence, to be baptized in the Holy Spirit is to be baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3), into the Triune God (Matt. 28:19), and even into the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), which is joined to Christ in the one Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). It is through baptism in such a water and in such a Spirit that the believers in Christ are regenerated into the kingdom of God, into the realm of the divine life and the divine rule (John 3:3, 5), that they may live by the eternal life of God in His eternal kingdom.

THE INITIATION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR

Baptized

Mark 1:9 says, "And it came about in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John." Galilee was called "Galilee of the Gentiles," a region without honor; hence, a despised region (John 7:52). Nazareth was a despised city of this despised region (John 1:46). The lowly Slave of God came from this source and grew up in it.

As a Slave of God, the Slave-Savior was baptized. His baptism signifies that He was willing to serve God, and that He would not serve in a natural way, but would serve

through death and resurrection. Such a baptism was the initiation of His service.

The Lord was baptized in order to allow Himself to be put into death and resurrection so that He might minister not in the natural way, but in the way of resurrection. By being baptized He lived and ministered in resurrection even before His actual death and resurrection three and a half years later.

Since the baptism of John was the baptism of repentance, some may wonder why it was necessary for the Lord Jesus to be baptized by him. They may say, "This is a baptism of repentance. Does the Slave-Savior need to repent? Certainly He does not need to repent." If we have such a concept, we may not see the real significance of repentance. Repentance is the termination of our thought, concept, philosophy, and way of doing things. Hence, to repent is not merely to regret wrongdoing. That understanding of repentance is too shallow. Even if someone is not wrong, he would still need to repent, to change his mind and no longer do things by himself or be someone in himself. To repent means that we turn from living, working, and having our being in ourselves and for ourselves. If we realize this, we shall see that the Lord's coming to be baptized indicates that He did not want to live, act, speak, or work by Himself. The Lord wanted to put Himself to an end and be buried. Therefore, the Lord's baptism indicates that He would not live, speak, or do anything by Himself, but would live by God, walk by God, and minister by God. He would be a Slave to God and by God. This was the reason He was baptized. The Lord's baptism was the first step of His initiation into His gospel service, which is the ministry of the gospel.

In 1:10 and 11 it is written concerning the Lord Jesus, "And immediately, coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens being parted, and the Spirit as a dove coming down to Him. And a voice came out of the heavens: You are My beloved Son; in You I delight." Mark's record of a Slave does not reflect the splendor of the status of this

Slave's Person, but reflects the diligence of His service. The word "immediately" is used in his record forty-one times and two more times in alternate manuscripts.

The heavens being opened to the Slave-Savior signifies that His willing offering of Himself as a Slave to God was fully accepted by God, and the Spirit as a dove coming down to Him signifies that God anointed Him with the Spirit for His service to Him (Luke 4:18-19). A dove is gentle, and its eyes can see only one thing at a time. Hence, a dove signifies gentleness and singleness in sight and purpose. By the Spirit of God descending upon Him as a dove, the Lord Jesus ministered in gentleness and singleness, focusing solely on the will of God.

In verses 10 and 11 we have the Triune God. While the descending of the Spirit is the anointing of Christ, the speaking of the Father is a testimony of Him as the beloved Son. Here is a picture of the divine Trinity: the Son went up from the water, the Spirit descended upon the Son, and the Father spoke concerning the Son. This proves that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit exist simultaneously. This is for the accomplishment of God's economy.

Tested

We have seen that the first step of the initiation of the Lord into His ministry was baptism. Now we must go on to see that the second step was His being tested. After the Lord was baptized, He needed to be tested in order that His integrity might be proved.

Concerning this, verse 12 says, "And immediately the Spirit thrusts Him out into the wilderness." After God's acceptance and anointing, the first thing the Spirit did with this Slave of God was to thrust Him into a test to prove His integrity. The word "thrust" is a strong word. This word indicates that after His baptism the Lord was altogether under God's hand. Because He did not live and move by Himself, the Spirit of God could thrust Him out into the wilderness. The Lord was submissive in being thrust out into the wilderness. If He had a strong will to resist this thrusting out, He could not have been thrust

out by the Spirit. But because He was so submissive, the Holy Spirit could thrust the baptized Jesus out into the wilderness. His submission to the Spirit proves that He was completely faithful to His baptism. With the Lord, it was no longer "I" but God.

Verse 13 says, "And He was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels ministered to Him." The number forty signifies a time of testing and suffering (Deut. 9:9, 18; 1 Kings 19:8). Satan, the enemy of God, was used for the testing and proving of God's Slave. The beasts of the earth, in a negative sense, and the angels from heaven, in a positive sense, were also used for this test. Praise the Lord that He passed the test in the wilderness!

Through the two steps of His initiation--baptism and being tested--the Lord was ushered into His service. After He had been tested and it had been proved that He was the right person to carry out this service, He could now enter into His service for God.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FIVE

THE CONTENTS OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S GOSPEL SERVICE

(1)

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:14-45

If you consult the outline of the Gospel of Mark printed in the Recovery Version, you will see that this Gospel is composed of six main sections: the beginning of the gospel and the initiation of the Slave-Savior (1:1-13); the ministry of the Slave-Savior for the spreading of the gospel (1:14--10:52); the preparation of the Slave-Savior for His redemptive service (11:1--14:42); the death and resurrection of the Slave-Savior for the accomplishment of God's redemption (14:43--16:18); the ascension of the Slave-Savior for His exaltation (16:19); and the Slave-Savior's universal spreading of the gospel through His disciples (16:20). In the foregoing messages we have considered the beginning of the gospel and the initiation of the Slave-Savior. With this message we shall begin to consider the ministry of the Slave-Savior for the spreading of the gospel.

We have seen that the Slave-Savior was initiated into His ministry by two steps--the steps of baptism and testing. In 1:14--10:52 the Slave-Savior carries out the ministry into which He has been initiated, a ministry that is for the spreading of the gospel.

In the third message of this Life-study we saw that the gospel is the fulfillment of the promises, prophecies, and types in the Old Testament and the removal of the law. Both the fulfillment of the promises, prophecies, and types and the removal of the law are a living Person, Jesus Christ. Christ Himself is the fulfillment, and He Himself is the removal of the law. What, then, is the beginning of this gospel? The beginning of the gospel is actually the

ushering in of this living Person. For us today, Christ is everything. As long as we have Him, we have everything. We do not have promises--we have Christ. We do not have prophecies--we have Christ. We do not have types--we have Christ. We do not strive to keep the law, because Christ is here, and we have Him. In our spiritual dictionary the unique word is Christ.

Now that we have seen what the gospel is, we need to go on to consider the contents of the gospel service revealed in 1:14-45. According to this section of the Gospel of Mark, the contents of the gospel service include five items: preaching the gospel (vv. 14-20), teaching the truth (vv. 21-22), casting out demons (vv. 23-28), healing the sick (vv. 29-39), and cleansing the leper (vv. 40-45). In simple terms, the contents of the Slave-Savior's gospel service are preaching, teaching, casting out demons, healing, and cleansing. It is possible to read 1:14-46 a number of times without realizing that these verses portray the contents of the gospel service. Let us now go on to consider what 1:14-20 records concerning the preaching of the gospel.

THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL

In a Despised Region

Mark 1:14 says, "And after John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God." John's imprisonment was a sign of the rejection of the gospel, especially in the region of honor. Hence the Slave-Savior left that region and returned to the despised region for His service of the gospel.

Although John the Baptist ministered in the wilderness, not in the holy temple in the holy city, his ministry was nevertheless in Judea, not far from the "holy things." Due to the people's rejection of John, the Lord Jesus came into Galilee to begin His gospel service, far away from the holy temple and the holy city. This occurred sovereignly to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1-2. Galilee was a place with a mixed population of both Jews and Gentiles. Hence, it was called "Galilee of the nations (Gentiles)" and was despised by orthodox Jews (John 7:41, 52).

The gospel service was initiated by the ministry of the Slave-Savior's forerunner (1:1-11) in Judea, the region of honor. But it continued by the ministry of the Slave-Savior in Galilee, the despised region, for a period of about three years (1:14--9:50). Mark narrates nothing of the Slave-Savior's ministry in Jerusalem and Judea during this time, as John does in his Gospel (John 1:29-42; 2:13--3:36; 5:1-47; 7:10--11:57). Mark does not narrate anything of the Slave-Savior's ministry in Judea until He left Galilee for Jerusalem the last time (Mark 10:1) to accomplish His redemptive work. Then the gospel service continued by His ministry on the way to Jerusalem and in Jerusalem and its vicinity (10:1--14:42). It was concluded with His redeeming death, His life-imparting resurrection, His ascension for exaltation, and the continuation of His gospel service by His disciples' preaching to all the creation (14:43--16:20). The Apostle John, however, in his Gospel narrates events in Jerusalem and Judea before the time of Mark 10 that are not included in Mark's Gospel (see John 1:29-42; 2:13--3:36; 5:1-47; 7:10-11:57).

According to Mark 1:14, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God. The Slave-Savior's preaching was to announce God's glad tidings to the miserable people in bondage. His teaching (vv. 21-22) was to enlighten the ignorant ones in darkness with the divine light of the truth. His preaching implied teaching, and His teaching implied preaching (Matt. 4:23). This is the first thing He did in His ministry, and it was the all-embracing structure of His evangelical service (Mark 1:38-39; 3:14; 6:12; 14:9; 16:15, 20).

Developing the Skill to Teach the Gospel

The first item in the Slave-Savior's gospel service was to preach the gospel. We have pointed out that the Lord's preaching always implied teaching, and His teaching implied preaching. This indicates something important related to our gospel preaching today. Many saints are burdened for the preaching of the gospel. They earnestly desire to preach the gospel to their relatives, neighbors,

friends, classmates, and colleagues. However, many have had the experience of not knowing what to say when they try to preach the gospel. The reason for this is that they have not developed the skill to teach the gospel, although they have the burden to preach the gospel. If we do not know how to teach, we shall not be able to preach effectively. Gospel preaching depends on teaching.

I urge all the saints who are faithful to the Lord in His recovery to learn not just to preach the gospel, but also learn how to teach the gospel. For example, in speaking of God, some may say, "Friends, in the universe there is only one true God. Apart from Him, there are no other gods. Anything that claims to be God is false. The true God is the God we worship." This way of speaking concerning God is very limited. In this kind of preaching, there is no teaching of others concerning God. I use this as an example of the need to develop the skill both to teach and preach the gospel. Therefore, I would encourage the elders in the churches to spend much time and energy to get into the Word and to help the saints learn the various truths of the gospel and also learn how to present them to others. First, all the saints need to learn the truths themselves. Then they need to gain the skill of presenting these truths to others.

The meetings of the local church should be all-inclusive. Spiritually speaking, the church is a home, a restaurant, a hospital, a hotel, a gymnasium, and also a school. Regarding our need to develop the skill of teaching the gospel, certain meetings of the church should be like a class for instruction. In these meetings the saints may be helped to know the truth and present it.

Concerning this need, I would say a word to the elders. It is very difficult to be an elder in a local church because an elder must be able to do a number of different things. Since the church is a home, an elder must know how to raise spiritual children. Since the church is the restaurant, an elder must know how to prepare nourishing spiritual food for the saints. Since the church is a hospital, an elder must learn to care for the brothers and sisters as a spiritual doctor. Since the church is a hotel, an elder must

learn how to serve the saints, how to wait on them. Since the church is a gymnasium, an elder should know how to be a coach, training the members of the "team" in their spiritual exercise together. Since the church is also a school, an elder must know how to teach the saints. This teaching of the saints is on different levels: kindergarten, elementary, junior high, college, and even graduate school. An elder should be able to teach the saints in spiritual things on all these different levels. Although the responsibility of the eldership concerning all these matters is extremely heavy, by the Lord's mercy the elders need to learn to do these things.

The way of the Lord's recovery is narrow. Because this way is narrow, we should not expect that a large number will take this way. Nevertheless, if the present number of saints in the Lord's recovery are properly trained, all the saints will be able to present the truth in their daily living at school, at work, and in their neighborhoods. Wherever the saints may be, they will preach by teaching and teach by preaching. If we preach in this way, our preaching will be effective.

Much of our gospel preaching has not been effective or fruitful. The reason for this lack of effectiveness or fruitfulness is that the preaching of some saints is lacking in content. When we speak to others, we need to have something rich to present to them. For example, it is certainly not adequate to give someone a cup containing only a few drops of water. Instead, you should give him a cup that is filled to the brim. This is an illustration of our need to be filled with the divine riches so that whenever we speak to others we may supply these riches to them.

Suppose you meet someone who says that the local church is heretical or cultic. Instead of arguing and denying that we are heretical and cultic, you should take the opportunity to give this one a "diamond" of the truth. For instance, you may refer that person to the promise made by God in Genesis 3:15--the promise that the seed of woman would crush the head of the serpent. Then you may go on to point out that the Lord Jesus, as the seed of

woman, is the fulfillment of this promise and that on the cross He crushed the head of Satan, thereby destroying God's enemy. When you have another opportunity, you may share a different aspect of the truth with this person. It may be that after a period of time he will express the desire to attend a meeting with you. The right way to deal with those who accuse us of being heretical or cultic is to share with them the precious truths of the Word of God.

Although we have the riches, many of us do not know how to present these riches to others. We have no intention of selling these riches--we want to give them away. But we may not know how to give them to others. If you argue with someone, denying the false accusation that we are a cult, you may fail to give away any "diamonds." Instead of arguing with others, we should give them one diamond of the truth after another.

I realize that many of the saints love the trainings and enjoy the Life-study Messages. But the saints may have only a general idea of what is contained in these messages. The real content of the messages may not have been constituted into them. Let us use once again the example of the promise in Genesis 3:15. If we are constituted of this truth, we shall be able to present the truth concerning the seed of the woman to others in a brief conversation, perhaps during a five-minute break at work.

At present there are approximately seventy-five hundred saints in the Lord's recovery in the United States. Although this number is actually quite small, consider what the effect would be if all the saints were trained to report the truth day by day. I believe that after a number of years there would be a great impact upon the whole country. Therefore, although we are burdened to preach the gospel, we need the proper ability to teach the truth. In our preaching we must have teaching.

The Need for Both Preaching and Teaching

In the same principle, when we teach the truth, we should also preach. We should not teach in the way of dead letters. This means that our teaching should be living and

not the teaching of mere doctrine. For example, if we study the virgin birth of Christ only in a doctrinal way, such a study will have a killing effect, first on ourselves, then on others. In our teaching we should have a living preaching. Whenever we teach a verse of the Bible to others, we also preach to them. In our teaching the holy Word, the gospel should go out. This was the Lord's practice in the Gospel of Mark. Whenever the Lord preached, He taught, and whenever He taught, He preached. This combination of teaching and preaching is marvelous.

Fallen human beings need to hear both the preaching and the teaching of the gospel. What terrible ignorance there is among fallen people concerning God and the things of God! Even though our society may emphasize the importance of education, people are still ignorant of the divine truth. They do not know God, they do not know the meaning of human life, and they do not know where they came from or where they are going. Instead, in their ignorance, they care for the lusts of the flesh and the pleasures of the world. Therefore, people today need the proper teaching of the Word of God, the teaching that will enlighten them.

As a Slave serving God, the Lord Jesus preached the gospel and taught the truth to the people who were ignorant and were in darkness. The church, as the continuation of the Lord, His enlargement and increase, should do the same thing today. To the fallen people in darkness, the church should preach the gospel and teach the truth. I hope that all the saints in the Lord's recovery will become good preachers of the gospel and good teachers of the Bible.

If we all become good preachers and teachers, the Lord will have a way to hasten His coming back. Today's situation does not allow the Lord to come back, for nothing is ready for His coming. Therefore, we need to be faithful to follow the Lord's steps in the matters of preaching the gospel and teaching the truth. He was a good preacher and a good teacher, and we must learn of Him also to be good preachers and teachers. Concerning this matter, I am especially hopeful that the young people will be faithful to

the Lord in His recovery. Young people, there is a long way ahead of you. I urge you to be faithful in the Lord's recovery to preach the gospel and teach the truth.

THE GOSPEL AND THE KINGDOM

According to 1:14, the Lord preached the gospel of God. Certain manuscripts add "the kingdom of" and therefore speak of the gospel of the kingdom of God. The gospel of Jesus Christ (v. 1) is the gospel of God (Rom. 1:1) and the gospel of the kingdom of God (see Matt. 4:23). In 1:15 the Lord Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has drawn near. Repent and believe in the gospel!" The kingdom of God is the ruling, the reigning, of God with all its blessing and enjoyment. It is the goal of the gospel of God and of Jesus Christ (see notes 3^2 and 26^3 in chapter four). To enter into this kingdom people need to repent of their sins and believe in the gospel so that their sins may be forgiven and that they may be regenerated by God to have the divine life, which matches the divine nature of this kingdom (John 3:3, 5). All the believers in Christ can share the kingdom in the church age for their enjoyment of God in His righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). This kingdom will become the kingdom of Christ and of God for the overcoming believers to inherit and enjoy in the coming kingdom age (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5), that they may reign with Christ one thousand years (Rev. 20:4, 6). Then, as the eternal kingdom, it will be an eternal blessing of God's eternal life for all God's redeemed to enjoy in the new heaven and new earth for eternity (Rev. 21:1-4; 22:1-5, 14, 17). It was such a kingdom of God that had drawn near and that the gospel of the Slave-Savior would bring His believers into. For this kingdom, the Slave-Savior told people to repent and believe in the gospel. (See notes 3^3 in John 3, 28^1 in Hebrews 12, and 3^3 in Matthew 5.)

REPENT AND BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL

As used in Mark 1:15, the word "repent" literally

means to think differently afterward, that is, to have a change of mind. To repent is to have a change of mind with regret for the past and a turn for the future. To repent before God is, on the negative side, to repent not only of sins and wrongdoings, but also to repent of the world and its corruption that usurp and corrupt people whom God made for Himself, and to repent of our God-forsaking life in the past. On the positive side, to repent is to turn to God in every way and in everything for fulfilling His purpose in making mankind. This is a "repentance unto God"; it is to "repent and turn to God" (Acts 20:21; 26:20).

In His preaching the Lord told people to repent and believe in the gospel. To repent is mainly in the mind; to believe is mainly in the heart (Rom. 10:9). To believe in something is to believe into the thing which we believe. It is also to receive the things which we believe into us. To believe in the gospel is mainly to believe in the Slave-Savior (Acts 16:31), and to believe in Him is to believe into Him (John 3:15-16) and receive Him into us (John 1:12), so that we may be organically united with Him. Such a faith in Christ (Gal. 3:22) is given to us by God (Eph. 2:8) through our hearing the word of the truth of the gospel (Rom. 10:17; Eph. 1:13). This faith brings us into all the blessings of the gospel (Gal. 3:14). Hence, it is precious to us (2 Pet. 1:1). Such precious faith requires repentance to precede it.

To believe is to receive the Slave-Savior not only for forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43) but also for regeneration (1 Pet. 1:21, 23), that those who believe may become the children of God (John 1:12-13) and the members of Christ (Eph. 5:30) in an organic union with the Triune God (Matt. 28:19).

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST, THE GOSPEL OF GOD AND THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Specifically, in Mark 1:15 the Lord Jesus preached that we should believe in the gospel. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (v. 1), the gospel of God, and the gospel of the kingdom of God. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, with all the processes through which He has passed,

including incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, and all the redemptive work He accomplished, is the contents of the gospel (Rom. 1:2-4; Luke 2:10-11; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; 2 Tim. 2:8). Hence the gospel is of Him. The gospel was planned, promised, and accomplished by God (Eph. 1:8-9; Acts 2:23; Rom. 1:2; 2 Cor. 5:21; Acts 3:15), and it is the power of God unto salvation to all believers (Rom. 1:16), that they may be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:19) and regenerated by Him (1 Pet. 1:3) to be His children (John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:16) and enjoy all His riches and blessings as their inheritance (Eph. 1:14). Hence, it is the gospel of God. It brings the believers into the realm of the divine ruling that they may participate in the blessings of the divine life in the divine kingdom (1 Thes. 2:12). Hence, it is also the gospel of the kingdom of God. Therefore, its full contents are the same as that of the New Testament with all its bequests. When we believe in this gospel, we inherit the Triune God with His redemption, His salvation, and His divine life with its riches for our eternal portion.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE SIX

THE CONTENTS OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S GOSPEL SERVICE

(2)

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:14-45

The first two sections of the Gospel of Mark are concerned with the beginning of the gospel and the initiation of the Slave-Savior (1:1-13) and the ministry of the Slave-Savior for the spreading of the gospel (1:14--10:52). In the foregoing message we began to consider the contents of the gospel service as revealed in 1:14-45. We saw that this service includes five matters: preaching the gospel (vv. 14-20), teaching the truth (vv. 21-22), casting out demons (vv. 23-28), healing the sick (vv. 29-39), and cleansing the leper (vv. 40-45). Having considered in some detail the preaching of the gospel, we shall go on in this message to cover the teaching of the truth, the casting out of demons, the healing of the sick, and the cleansing of the leper.

TEACHING THE TRUTH

Mark 1:21-22 says, "And they go into Capernaum. And immediately on the Sabbath, entering into the synagogue, He taught. And they were astounded at His teaching, for He taught them as One having authority and not as the scribes." Verse 21 speaks of the synagogue. A synagogue is a meeting place where the Jews read and learn the Holy Scriptures (Luke 4:16-17; Acts 13:14-15).

In the synagogue, the Lord Jesus taught the people with authority. Man's fall into sin broke his fellowship with God. As a result, man became ignorant of the knowledge of God. Such ignorance issued first in darkness and then in death. The Slave-Savior, as the light of the

world (John 8:12; 9:5), came to Galilee, the land of darkness, where people were sitting in the shadow of death, and He came as a great light to shine upon them (Matt. 4:12-16). His teaching released the word of light to enlighten those in the darkness of death 80 that they might receive the light of life (John 1:4). We have already seen that the first thing the Slave-Savior did in His service was to preach the gospel. Now the second thing the Slave of God as the Slave-Savior to fallen men did in His service was to carry out such teaching (Mark 2:13; 4:1; 6:2, 6, 30, 34; 10:1; 11:17; 12:35; 14:49) to bring people out of satanic darkness into the divine light (Acts 26:18).

It was of God's sovereignty that the Lord Jesus was raised in the region of Galilee and also that He began His preaching and teaching not from Judea, but from Galilee. According to the biblical record, Galilee was not only a despised region, but was also a place of darkness. Concerning this, Matthew 4:15-16 says, "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, way of the sea beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations: The people sitting in darkness saw a great light, and to those sitting in a region and shadow of death, to them light sprang up." This indicates that when the Lord Jesus walked through Galilee, He was a great light shining in the darkness and shining upon the people sitting in the region and shadow of death. In particular, the teaching of the Slave-Savior was the shining of a great light. Every word that issued out of His mouth was an enlightening word. Therefore, while He was teaching the people, the light was shining upon them. In this way the people in darkness were enlightened by the Lord's teaching.

According to Mark 1:22, those in the synagogue were astounded at the Lord's teaching and said that He taught as One having authority and not as the scribes. The self-appointed scribes, teaching vain knowledge by themselves, had no authority and no power. But this God-authorized Slave, teaching realities by God Himself, had not only spiritual power to subdue people but also divine authority to subject them to the divine ruling.

CASTING OUT DEMONS

1:23-28 we have a case of the casting out of demons. A man with an unclean spirit cried out, and the Lord Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" (vv. 23-25). This unclean spirit was not a fallen angel; this spirit was a demon (vv. 32, 34, 39; Luke 4:33), one of the spirits of the living creatures who lived in the preadamic age and were judged by God when they joined Satan's rebellion (see Life-study of Genesis, Message 2). The fallen angels worked with Satan in the air (Eph. 2:2; 6:11-12), and these demons, the unclean spirits, move with him on the earth. Both act evilly upon man for the kingdom of Satan. The possession of people by demons signifies Satan's usurpation of man, whom God created for His purpose. The Slave-Savior came to destroy the works of Satan (1 John 3:8), and the third thing He did as a part of His service to God was to cast out these demons from the possessed people (Mark 1:34, 39; 3:15; 6:7, 13; 16:17) so that they might be delivered from Satan's bondage (Luke 13:16), out of Satan's authority of darkness (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13), into God's kingdom (Mark 1:15). Five cases are recorded in this Gospel to illustrate this (1:23-27; 5:2-20; 7:25-30; 9:17-27; 16:9).

Mark 1:27 says, "And they were all amazed, so that they discussed among themselves, saying, What is this? A new teaching! With authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." This verse speaks not of the Lord's power, but of His authority to cast out demons. For His gospel service, the Slave-Savior had divine authority not only to teach people (v. 22), but also to cast out demons.

Many years ago, a missionary named Dr. Nevius wrote a book describing many cases of demon possession in China. Throughout China there were instances of demon possession, and in his book Dr. Nevius gives the details of these cases. Today, in a highly cultured and civilized country like the United States, apparently there no longer are cases of demon possession. However, Satan is subtle, and he seeks to possess people in different ways. In his

subtlety, he has a way to possess people in highly civilized countries just as he has a way to possess the people in undeveloped countries. Therefore, even today, in the most highly cultured nation, Satan is able to use different means to possess people. For this reason, in our preaching of the gospel we should have not only the proper teaching, but also the casting out of demons, the casting out of those things used by Satan to possess people. In order to do this, we must learn how to pray to receive the power, even the authority, to cast out the possessing element. Once we receive this power and authority, then our preaching and teaching will come forth with the power to cast out the possessing element of the enemy.

We need the power to cast out the satanic element used by the enemy to possess people in today's modern countries. Satan, the subtle serpent, is very clever, and he knows how to possess people in modern ways. In an uncultured country, he may use an uncultured means to possess people. But in a modern, cultured country, he will use modern, cultured means to usurp people. For example, in the leading colleges and universities, Satan will possess people in an intellectual way. We cannot defeat the enemy's possession of mankind simply by ordinary preaching and teaching. In order to cast out today's demons, in our teaching and preaching we must have divine authority and power. This power and authority can be exercised only in the name of Jesus. Therefore, we need to call on the Lord's name and exercise divine authority in and through His name. If we do this, then in our preaching and teaching there will be power and authority to cast out the evil possessing element of the enemy. The casting out of demons, therefore, is the third item of the content of the gospel.

HEALING THE SICK

In 1:29-39 we have the Lord's healing of the sick. Verse 30 says, "And Simon's mother-in-law was lying down with a fever, and immediately they tell Him about her." This

fever may signify a person's unbridled temper, a temper that is abnormal.

According to verse 31, the Lord came to Simon's mother-in-law and raised her up, and the fever left her. According to verse 34, "He healed many who were ill with various diseases." Sickness is an issue of sin and a sign of man's abnormal condition before God because of sin. The fourth thing the Slave-Savior did to rescue sinners, as another part of His gospel service, was to heal their sick condition both physically and spiritually and restore them to normal so that they might serve Him (1:34; 3:10; 6:5, 13, 56). Nine cases are recorded in this Gospel to illustrate such healing (1:30-31, 40-45; 2:3-12; 3:1-5; 5:22-43; 7:32-37; 8:22-26; 10:46-52).

Today every fallen human being is sick. Many are sick physically, and all are sick spiritually. Because every fallen person is spiritually sick, we in the local churches must learn to preach the gospel and teach the truth like physicians. This means that in our teaching and preaching we should give people a heavenly prescription, a divine medicine for their healing. All the saints among us should learn how to preach the gospel and teach the truth in such a way that people are healed. As we are teaching and preaching, we should give others an injection of spiritual medicine that will heal them.

Among those in the Pentecostal movement today, a great deal of emphasis is placed on miraculous healing. This emphasis is on physical healing. However, we need to care more for spiritual healing than for physical healing. The church people should be so equipped that in their preaching and teaching spiritual medicine is supplied to people in order that they may be spiritually healed.

According to Mark 1:32, in the evening the Lord healed many who were ill. Then very early the next morning, "He went out and went away to a desolate place, and there He prayed." The Lord prayed in order to fellowship with God and to seek His will and pleasure for His gospel service (v. 38). The Slave-Savior did not do the evangelical service by Himself independent of God or according to His own will.

Rather, He carried out this service according to God's will and pleasure by being one with God to fulfill His purpose.

According to 1:37, Simon and those with him said to the Lord, "All are seeking You." The Lord said to them, "Let us go elsewhere into the nearby towns, that I might preach there also, for this purpose I came out." As the Slave of God to serve God in His gospel, the Slave-Savior did not do His own gospel service to fulfill either His own will or the proposal of others. Instead, He fulfilled the will of God who had sent Him (John 6:38; 4:34).

CLEANSING THE LEPER

In 1:40-45 we have the case of the cleansing of a leper. Verse 40 says, "And a leper comes to Him, entreating Him, and falling on his knees says to Him, If You are willing, You can cleanse me!" A leper portrays a typical sinner. Leprosy is the most contaminating and damaging disease, much more serious than fever (v. 30), isolating its victim both from God and from men. According to the law, a leper should be excluded from the people because of his uncleanness. No one could touch him (Lev. 13:45-46) According to the scriptural examples, leprosy comes from rebellion and disobedience. Miriam became leprous because of her rebellion against God's deputy authority (Num. 12:1-10). Naaman's leprosy was cleansed because of his obedience (2 Kings 5:1, 9-14). All fallen human beings have become leprous in the sight of God because of their rebellion. Because leprosy isolated its victim from both God and man, to cleanse the leper signifies to recover the sinner to fellowship with God and with men. This was the consummating part of the Slave-Savior's gospel service according to the record of this chapter.

Mark 1:41 and 42 say, "And moved with compassion, stretching out His hand, He touched him and said to him, I am willing; be cleansed! And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed." The Lord Jesus was moved with compassion. The Slave-Savior's compassion and willingness issuing from His love were dear and precious to the hopeless leper. The Lord stretched out His hand

and touched the leper. This showed His sympathy and intimacy with the miserable leper, whom no one dared to touch. According to verse 42, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed. This verse says that the leper was not only healed, but also cleansed. Leprosy not only requires healing as do other diseases; it also requires cleansing, like sin (1 John 1:7), because of its filthy and contaminating nature.

We all need to be deeply impressed with the five matters comprised in the Slave-Savior's gospel service: preaching (vv. 14-15, 38-39) to announce the glad tidings to the miserable people in bondage; teaching (vv. 21-22) to enlighten the ignorant ones in darkness with the divine light of the truth; casting out demons (vv. 25-26) to nullify Satan's usurpation of man; healing man's sick condition (vv. 30-31) that man may serve the Slave-Savior; and cleansing the leper (vv. 41-42) to recover sinners to the fellowship with God and with men. What a wonderful and excellent work!

In our gospel preaching we must also be exercised to preach, teach, cast out demons, heal, and cleanse. If our preaching is weak, some may be saved, but they may not be cleansed. They may be saved in the sense of receiving the forgiveness of sin, but they may not be cleansed from the contaminating nature of sin. Therefore, we need to seriously consider the fact that this picture of the Lord's gospel service concludes with the cleansing of the leper. The Lord preached, taught, cast out demons, healed the sick, and eventually cleansed the leper. This cleansing is the ultimate consummation of the contents of the Lord's gospel service.

After cleansing the leper, the Lord Jesus sternly charged him and said, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing the things which Moses commanded for a testimony to them." Such a charge throughout the record of the Slave-Savior's evangelical service is quite striking (5:43; 7:36; 9:9). It is similar to what was prophesied concerning His quiet character in Isaiah 42:2. He wanted

His work to be done within the limit of a move that was absolutely according to God's purpose, not promoted by man's excitement and propaganda. Throughout His ministry the Slave-Savior, as the Slave of God, did not like publicity.

According to 1:45, the cleansed one did not carry out the Lord's word. Instead, "Going out, he began to proclaim it much and spread abroad the matter, so that He could no longer enter openly into a city, but He was outside in desolate places; and they came to Him from everywhere." Here we see that man's activity according to the natural concept frustrates the Slave-Savior's service according to God's purpose.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE SEVEN

THE WAYS THE SLAVE-SAVIOR CARRIED OUT HIS GOSPEL SERVICE

(1)

Scripture Reading: Mark 2:1-12

A GROUP OF FIVE INCIDENTS

In 1:14-45 we have seen that the contents of the gospel service include five matters: preaching the gospel (vv. 14-20), teaching the truth (vv. 21-22), casting out demons (vv. 23-28), healing the sick (vv. 29-39), and cleansing the leper (vv. 40-45). Following this, in 2:1--3:6 we see the ways of carrying out the gospel service. In this section of the Gospel of Mark we have five incidents: forgiving the sins of the sick (2:1-12), feasting with sinners (2:13-17), causing His followers to be merry without fasting (2:18-22), caring for His followers' hunger rather than for the regulations of religion (2:23-28), and caring for the relief of the suffering one rather than for the ritual of religion (3:1-6). These five cases form a single group.

It is difficult to make an outline of the Gospel of Mark. In this Gospel one case follows another without any apparent order or arrangement. For this reason, we may read Mark a number of times and still not be able to make an outline of this book or divide it into sections. But by the Lord's mercy I believe that we have a useful outline, an outline that helps us get into all the sections of this Gospel. According to this outline, chapter one presents the complete contents of the gospel. Then in chapter two and in the first part of chapter three, we see the Lord's way of carrying out this rich gospel.

The five incidents recorded vividly in 2:1--3:6 form one particular group, showing how the Slave-Savior as the

Slave of God carried out His gospel service to care for the need of fallen people, who were captured by Satan from God and the enjoyment of God. The Lord cared for their need so that they might be rescued from their captivity and brought back to the God of enjoyment.

First, the Lord forgave the sins of the victim of sickness. He did this as God with divine authority so that He might release the sick one from Satan's oppression (Acts 10:38) and restore him to God. The scribes considered this to be against the theology of their religion (2:1-12).

Second, as a physician to the sick and miserable people, He feasted with the tax collectors, those who were disloyal and unfaithful to their race, and with sinners despised and isolated from society, that they might taste the mercy of God and be recovered to the enjoyment of God. This was condemned by the self-righteous yet merciless scribes of the Pharisees (2:13-17).

Third, He caused His followers to be merry and happy without fasting, as a bridegroom with the sons of the bridechamber. Thus, He annulled the practice of the disciples of John (the new religionists) and the Pharisees (the old religionists), so that His followers might be delivered from the practices of their religion into the enjoyment of God's Christ as their Bridegroom, with His righteousness as their outer clothing and His life as their inner wine in God's New Testament economy (2:18-22).

Fourth, He allowed His followers to pick the ears of grain in the grainfields on the Sabbath that they might satisfy their hunger. Thus, they apparently broke God's commandment concerning the Sabbath. But actually they pleased God, for the hunger of Christ's followers was satisfied through Him, as the hunger of David and his followers was satisfied with the bread of the presence in the temple. This indicates that in God's New Testament economy it is not a matter of keeping the regulation of religion, but of enjoying satisfaction in and through Christ as the real Sabbath rest (2:23-28).

Fifth, the Lord healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. He did not care for keeping the Sabbath, but

rather cared for the health of His sheep. Thus, He indicated that in God's New Testament economy it is not a matter of keeping regulations but of imparting life. For this, He was hated by the Pharisees--the religionists (3:1-6).

All the five merciful and living ways taken by the Slave-Savior to carry out His gospel service contradicted the formal and traditional religion and were thus abhorred by its fleshly and stubborn leaders, who were spiritually dead.

We need to be deeply impressed with the fact that chapter one of the Gospel of Mark is concerned with the gospel. This chapter tells us what the gospel is, when the gospel began, and what the contents of the gospel are. In this chapter we see the nature, substance, essence, element, contents, and reality of the gospel. I believe that the churches will carry out this rich gospel through their gospel service.

Having seen the contents of the gospel service in chapter one, we need to see the ways of carrying out the gospel service in 2:1--3:6. It is significant that in Mark the Lord Jesus does not teach us in words how to carry out the gospel service. Instead, in the Gospel of Mark He is portrayed as a working One, a serving One, not as a speaking One. Therefore, in Mark it is mainly by the Lord's acts, not by His words, that we learn how to carry out the gospel service.

In 2:1--3:6 the Lord does not tell us how to carry out the gospel service. Instead, He does certain things, and the five incidents recorded in this portion of the Gospel of Mark show us how the Lord carried out the gospel service. If we would know how to carry out this service, we need to consider what the Lord does in forgiving the sins of the sick, in feasting with sinners, in causing His followers to be merry without fasting, in caring for His followers' hunger rather than for religion's regulation, and in caring for the relief of the suffering one rather than for the ritual of religion.

Many readers of the Bible enjoy the stories in the Gospel of Mark. The five incidents recorded in 2:1--3:6 may

be taken merely as stories, stories used in children's meeting or for reading to children at bedtime. No doubt, these incidents are very good stories. The Bible is a sacred book, a holy writing, and therefore it contains the best stories. However, we should not be satisfied merely to know the stories in the Gospel of Mark.

Because I was not satisfied with such knowledge but was looking to the Lord for light concerning this Gospel, the Lord showed me that in Mark 1 the gospel is fully displayed in His gospel service. In no other chapter of the Scriptures do we have such a full display of the gospel as we have in chapter one of Mark. Not even in the writings of Paul can we find a single chapter that gives us such a detailed and full display of the gospel in its nature and contents. However, we need to be enlightened in order to see what is revealed in chapter one of Mark. Someone may memorize this chapter, yet still not have any light concerning it. Someone else may thoroughly study this chapter in Greek, knowing the meaning of every Greek word, and nevertheless not have any light concerning the gospel displayed in this chapter. I believe that, by the Lord's mercy, we have seen a clear view of the gospel displayed in chapter one of Mark. Now we also should have a clear view of the Lord's way to carry out the gospel service, that is, a clear view of what the Lord practices in His gospel service. Let us now go on to consider the first incident related to this, the incident of forgiving the sins of the sick (2:1-12).

FORGIVING THE SINS OF THE SICK

A Sinner Paralyzed by Sin

While the Lord was in a house at Capernaum, speaking the word to those who were gathered together, a paralytic carried by four men was brought to Him (2:1-3). This paralytic signifies a sinner paralyzed by sin, one who is unable to walk and move before God.

Mark 2:4 says, "And not being able to bring him to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof where He was; and having dug through, they lowered the bed on which

the paralytic was lying." Their zeal in seeking the Slave-Savior's healing compelled the seekers to break through the proper barrier--something which might be considered a wild deed. Then through the roof they lowered the bed, a small mattress or pad, on which the sick man was lying.

Verse 5 says, "And Jesus, seeing their faith, says to the paralytic, Child, your sins are forgiven!" This faith, issuing from hearing the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17), indicates that the seekers had heard of the Slave-Savior. Seeing their faith, the Lord called the paralytic a "child." This loving word of the Slave-Savior implies kindness. Here the Lord's human virtue was expressed.

The Lord said to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven!" Sins were the cause of his sickness. The Slave-Savior's word here touched the cause so that there might be a different effect. Once the sins were forgiven, the sickness was healed.

It is important and meaningful that the first incident in this section on the carrying out of the gospel service is a case of forgiving the sins of a sick person. This indicates that in carrying out the gospel the first thing that must be done is to help people have their sins forgiven.

Our Basic Problem

As fallen human beings, our basic problem is our sin. When God created man, man was pure, clean, and without sin. At the end of Genesis 1 God looked at His creation and said, "Very good." It is a great matter for God to utter such words as "very good." Man had been created in the image of God and according to the likeness of God. Furthermore, God breathed into man the breath of life, and man became a living soul (Gen. 2:7). This breath of life became the spirit of man within him. Therefore, man in God's creation has the image of God, the likeness of God, and a spirit within him. As a creature, he was clean, pure, and complete. However, according to Genesis 3, the evil one, the Devil, the enemy of God, came in to poison the man created by God. Man was "bitten" by the serpent, and sin was injected into man's being.

All the problems of mankind are the result of sin. Because of sin, the situation of fallen mankind is hopeless. Because of sin, everyone has been corrupted. Do you not believe that mankind, including you, has been corrupted? Do you not believe that your neighborhood, your city, and your country have been corrupted by sin? The whole world has been corrupted by sin. Therefore, in carrying out the gospel service, the first thing we must do is to show people how they may have their sins forgiven. Because all the problems of mankind are the result of sin, sin must be dealt with if people are to be restored to God.

Many of us can testify that in the past we tried our best to get a good education so that we might have a promising future. Nevertheless, the problem of sin remained unsolved and caused more and more corruption. But on the day we believed in the Lord Jesus and received Him, our sins were forgiven.

In 2:1 through 12 we have a case showing us that the first task done by the Lord as the Slave-Savior in carrying out His gospel service was to forgive sins. This was the reason the Lord said in 2:5, "Child, your sins are forgiven!" This word was probably a shock to the paralytic and to the four who had brought him to the Lord. They no doubt had never thought that the cause of his sickness was sin. But much to their surprise, the Lord told the paralytic that his sins were forgiven.

The Reasoning of the Scribes

According to verses 6 and 7, when the scribes heard this word, they were reasoning in their hearts: "But there were some of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, Why is this man speaking this way? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins except one--God?" Scribes and Pharisees, as the proponents of the old and dead religion, were motivated and used by Satan, the enemy of God, to oppose, resist, and frustrate the gospel service of the Slave of God throughout all His ministry (2:16, 24; 3:22; 7:5; 8:11; 9:14; 10:2; 11:27; 12:13, 28). They thought they worshipped God and were zealous for Him,

not knowing that the very God of their forefathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was immediately before them in the form of a slave to serve them. They were blinded by their traditional religion from seeing Him in God's economy, and they plotted to kill Him (3:6; 11:18; 14:1). Later they actually killed Him (8:31; 10:33; 14:43, 53; 15:1, 31).

The reasoning scribes, who considered themselves "scriptural" and "theological," acknowledged the Slave-Savior merely as a man, even a despised Nazarene (John 1:45-46). They did not realize that the One who forgave the sins of the paralytic was actually the forgiving God incarnated in the form of a lowly man. The scribes, assuming that they knew the Scriptures, thought that only God had authority to forgive sins, and that Jesus, who in their eyes was only a man, blasphemed God when He said, "Your sins are forgiven." This indicates that they did not realize that the Lord was God. By uttering such a word, they rejected Him. This was the first rejection by the leaders of the Jewish religion.

In their hearts the scribes accused the Lord of blaspheming God. They seemed to be saying, "Who is this claiming to forgive sins? Only God has the authority to do such a thing. We know that this man is a Nazarene. How can a despised Nazarene forgive someone's sins?"

The scribes did not realize that the Lord knew what they were reasoning in their hearts. Concerning this, verse 8 says, "And immediately Jesus, knowing in His spirit that they were reasoning this way among themselves, says to them, Why are you reasoning these things in your hearts?" Literally, the Greek word rendered "knowing" means fully knowing. The Slave-Savior knew the seekers' faith, the sick one's sins (v. 5), and the scribes' inward reasoning. This indicates that He was omniscient. Such omniscience, manifesting His divine attribute, unveils His deity as the omniscient God.

The scribes must have been shocked at the Lord's word. They may have said to themselves, "We didn't say anything. How does He know what we were reasoning in

our hearts?" The Lord knew their reasonings because He was not only a Nazarene--He was also the omniscient God.

A striking point in the Gospel of Mark is that this Gospel presents the Lord in the likeness of man and in the form of a slave. The scribes did not realize that within the humanity of this Slave there was deity. The Lord behaved Himself in such a way as to indicate that within His humanity there was deity. The Lord was a Nazarene in the form of a slave; yet He had omniscience. Because He was omniscient, He knew what the scribes were saying in their hearts. Instead of arguing with them, He simply spoke the facts.

The Authority to Forgive Sins

According to verse 9, the Lord went on to ask the scribes this question, "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, Your sins are forgiven, or to say, Rise, and pick up your bed and walk?" Here the Lord did not say, "Which is more difficult," because to Him nothing is difficult. For Him to say, "Your sins are forgiven," was easier than to say, "Rise, and pick up your bed and walk."

Verses 10 and 11 say, "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins--He says to the paralytic, To you I say, Rise, pick up your bed and go to your house." The Slave-Savior was the very God incarnated, not regarding equality with God a thing to be grasped. He was outwardly in the likeness and fashion of man, even in the form of a slave, but inwardly, He was God (Phil. 2:6-7). He was the Slave-Savior and the God-Savior as well. Hence, He had not only the ability to save the sinners, but also the authority to forgive their sins. In this incident He forgave people's sins as God, but asserted that He was the Son of Man. This indicates that He was the true God and a real Man, possessing deity and humanity. In Him men could see both His divine attribute and human virtue.

These verses indicate that in order to show that He had authority to forgive sins, the Lord said to the

paralytic, "Rise, pick up your bed and go to your house." This was the healing of the paralytic. The Lord's salvation not only forgives our sins, but also makes us "rise and walk." It is not rise and walk first, and then be forgiven of our sins; that would be by works. Instead, it is to be forgiven of our sins first, and then to rise and walk; this is by grace.

In verse 12 we have a concluding word concerning this incident: "And he rose, and immediately, having picked up the bed, he went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, We have never seen anything like this!" Here we have the fulfillment of the Slave-Savior's word, "Rise, pick up your bed." To say, "Your sins are forgiven," was easier than to say, "Rise, pick up your bed and walk." Since the latter was fulfilled, the former, the easier one, was surely also fulfilled. This is strong evidence that the Slave-Savior has authority to forgive sins on earth.

The paralytic rose, picked up his bed, and went out before all. The Lord enabled the paralytic not only to walk, but also to pick up his bed and walk. Formerly the bed bore him; now he bears it. This is the power of the Lord's salvation. Moreover, this paralytic was brought to the Lord by others, but he went home by himself. This indicates that it is not that the sinner can come *to* the Lord, but that the sinner can go forth *from* the Lord by the Lord's salvation.

The Humanity and Deity of the Slave-Savior

In this incident we see both the humanity and the deity of the Slave-Savior. When the Lord referred to the paralytic as a child, the Lord conducted Himself in a very human manner. The Lord addressed him in an intimate way, in a way full of human kindness. But when the Lord told the paralytic to rise, take up his bed, and go home, He manifested His deity. Therefore, the Lord's deity was manifested in His humanity. His humanity was full of virtue, and His deity was full of authority. The Lord's glory seen here was the expression of His authority. The Lord's word to the sick man to rise, pick up his bed, and go home

was not a word of teaching; it was a word of authority. This word was confirmed by the fact that the paralytic then received the ability, the energy to rise, pick up his bed, and walk. All those gathered there saw the Lord's authority, glory, and honor. Therefore, in this case we see the Lord's humanity displayed in its virtue and perfection and His deity manifested in its glory and honor.

When the paralytic picked up his bed and walked away, the mouths of the opposers, the scribes and the Pharisees, were shut. They were put to silence by the Lord's authority in His deity and also by His kindness in His humanity. Here we see a slave; yet in Him God is manifested. Because many saw the Lord's deity manifested in His humanity, they followed Him.

HELPING OTHERS HAVE THEIR SINS FORGIVEN

According to the incident in 2:1-12, the first thing we must learn in our preaching of the gospel is to help others have their sins forgiven. It is significant that the Lord did not say to the paralytic, "I am sorry that you are sick. But I want you to know that this sickness comes from sin. Because you are paralyzed, you must have sinned in some way. You know what sins you have committed." If the Lord had preached to the paralytic like this, he may have argued with Him, saying, "No, I have always been a good person. I have been kind to others. But suddenly I became paralyzed." We should learn of the Lord Jesus not to argue with others concerning their sins. That will only stir up their anger and cause them not to care for what we have to say. We should follow the Lord Jesus to tell people that their sins are forgiven. Of course, this does not mean that we should literally repeat the words, "Your sins are forgiven." My point is that we need to follow the principle seen here.

When we approach people for the preaching of the gospel, we need to be inwardly praying. However, we should not let them know that we are praying. Then the Lord may lead us to say something like this: "Dear friends, only the Lord Jesus, as the Son of God and our

Redeemer, has the authority, power, and ability to forgive our sins." Instead of saying "your sins," we should say "our sins." The Lord could speak of "your sins" because He was not a sinner. We, however, must include ourselves, for we know that we too are sinners. This means that we should not tell people that they are sinful. Instead, we should tell them that only the Lord has the ability to forgive us our sins. We may go on to say, "In our human life, all troubles and problems come from our sins. We need to have our sins forgiven, and only the Lord Jesus has the authority to do this."

If we present the gospel to others in the proper way, the Holy Spirit will honor our speaking. Then those who listen to us will be deeply impressed with the word that only the Lord Jesus can forgive our sins. The result is that this word concerning forgiveness will be sown into them as the seed of the gospel.

Another way to help people experience the forgiveness of sins is to read Mark 2:1-12 with them in a living way. We may take out a pocket version of the Gospel of Mark and read it in a prevailing way in order to impress others with the fact that only the Lord Jesus can forgive a person's sins. Then we may help them see that peace comes as the result of having our sins forgiven. According to the sequence of the cases in 2:1--3:6, the first way to carry out the preaching of the gospel is to help others have their sins forgiven.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE EIGHT

THE WAYS THE SLAVE-SAVIOR CARRIED OUT HIS GOSPEL SERVICE

(2)

Scripture Reading: Mark 2:13-17

In the foregoing message we pointed out that in 2:1--3:6 five incidents are recorded to show how the Slave-Savior as the Slave of God carried out His gospel service to care for the need of fallen people: forgiving the sins of the sick (2:1-12), feasting with sinners (2:13-17), causing His followers to be merry without fasting (2:18-22), caring for His followers' hunger rather than for religion's regulation (2:23-28), and caring for the relief of the suffering one rather than for the ritual of religion (3:1-6). We have already considered the first incident, that of forgiving the sins of the sick. In this message we shall go on to consider the incident of the Lord's feasting with sinners.

Mark 2:13 says, "And He went out again beside the sea; and all the crowd came to Him, and He taught them." We have seen that the Slave-Savior, as the light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5), came to Galilee, the land of darkness, where people were sitting in the shadow of death, and that He came as a great light to shine upon them (Matt. 4:12-16). His teaching released the word of light to enlighten those in the darkness of death so that they might receive the light of life (John 1:4) and be brought out of satanic darkness into the divine light (Acts 26:18).

FEASTING WITH SINNERS

The Calling of Matthew

Verse 14 says, "And passing by, He saw Levi the son of Alpheus, sitting at the tax office, and He says to him,

Follow Me! And rising up, he followed Him." The tax office was a toll house, where tax was collected for the

Roman government. Levi, also known as Matthew, was one of the tax collectors, probably one in a high position (Matt. 10:3). The tax collectors were condemned, despised, and abhorred by the Jews (Luke 18:11; Matt. 5:46). Most of these tax collectors abused their office by demanding more than they should by false accusation (Luke 3:12-13; 19:2, 8). To pay taxes to the Roman government was very bitter to the Jews. Those engaged in collecting these taxes were despised by the people and counted unworthy of any respect (Luke 18:9-10). Hence, they were classed with sinners (Mark 2:16). Even though Matthew was a tax collector, he was called by the Slave-Savior and later chosen and appointed as one of the twelve apostles (3:18). What mercy!

The record of the calling of Matthew is very simple. He was a tax collector, one who was considered a traitor by the Jews because he helped the Roman imperialists. In the New Testament these tax collectors were classified with prostitutes. Nevertheless, such a person as Matthew was called by the Slave-Savior. The Lord simply said to him, "Follow Me!" We are told that Matthew rose and followed Him. According to the record here, it seems that this was the first time the Lord met Matthew. There must have been some attracting power with the Lord, either in His word or appearance, that caused Matthew to follow Him.

To follow the Lord includes believing in Him. No one follows Him unless he believes in Him. To believe in the Lord is to be saved (Acts 16:31), and to follow Him is to enter the narrow gate and walk the constricted way (Matt. 7:13-14).

This is not the first case recorded in the Gospel of Mark of the Lord calling people to follow Him. In 1:16 He saw Simon and Andrew casting a net into the sea. Then He said to them, "Come after Me, and I will make you become fishers of men. And immediately, leaving the nets, they followed Him" (vv. 17-18). Soon afterward, the Lord called James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in a boat mending nets (v. 19). When He called them, they left their father with the hired servants and followed Him (v. 20). We have a similar situation in chapter two. The

Lord saw Levi, or Matthew, at the tax office and told him to follow Him, and Matthew simply rose up and followed Him. His action as an answer to the Slave-Savior's call implies his abandoning his unclean job and sinful life.

The Sick in Need of a Physician

Verse 15 indicates that Matthew not only followed the Lord, but also prepared a great feast for Him: "And it came about that He reclined at the table in his house, and many tax collectors and sinners were reclining at the table with Jesus and His disciples, for there were many, and they followed Him." Matthew invited many tax collectors and sinners to this feast. If we had been invited to such a feast, we probably would have declined the invitation, not wanting to feast with such people. However, the Lord Jesus attended that feast.

If we read the Gospel of Mark carefully, we shall realize that the scribes followed the Lord like spies wherever He went. Verse 16 says, "And the scribes of the Pharisees, seeing that He ate with sinners and tax collectors, said to His disciples, He is eating with tax collectors and sinners!" We have seen that these scribes, as the proponents of the old and dead religion, were motivated and used by Satan, the enemy of God, to oppose, resist, and frustrate the gospel service of the Slave of God throughout all His ministry (2:16, 24; 3:22; 7:5; 8:11; 9:14; 10:2; 11:27; 12:13, 28). In verse 16 the scribes were self-righteous in condemning the Slave-Savior for His feasting with tax collectors and sinners. The scribes' word to the Lord's disciples indicates that, in their self-righteousness, they did not know the grace of God. They assumed that God deals with man only according to righteousness. Here in verse 16 the scribes continued the opposition that began in 2:6-7.

Hearing what the scribes said to His disciples, the Lord said to the scribes, "Those who are strong have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (v. 17). This word indicates that the Slave-Savior considered Himself a Physician to the people who were sick with sins. In calling people to follow Him, the Lord ministered as a Physician, not as a

judge. The judgment of a judge is according to righteousness, whereas the healing of a physician is according to mercy and grace. The Lord came to minister as a Physician; that is, He came to heal, recover, enliven, and save people.

The Lord's word that the strong have no need of a physician implies that the self-righteous scribes did not realize their need of Him as a Physician. They considered themselves strong. Therefore, blinded by their self-righteousness, they did not know that they were sick.

In verse 17 the Lord said that He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners. This indicates that the Slave-Savior is the Savior of sinners. Actually, there is none righteous, not even one (Rom. 3:10). Those who think they are righteous are self-righteous. The Slave-Savior did not come to call these "righteous" ones; He came to call sinners.

In verse 17 the Lord seems to be saying to the scribes, "The strong do not need a physician. The sick ones, however, know that they need a physician. Are you scribes strong or weak? Are you sick or healthy? You are more sick than these tax collectors, but you are not willing to admit it. Because you will not admit your need, I cannot heal you. I have come as the Physician to heal you, but you will not admit that you are sick. Furthermore, I have not come to call the righteous ones--I have come to call sinners."

The Joy of Salvation

In the two cases recorded in 2:1-12 and 2:13-17--the incidents of forgiving the sins of the sick and feasting with sinners--we see the best way to carry out the gospel service. This is to help people have their sins forgiven so that they may enter into the enjoyment with God. To feast with the Lord Jesus is to enjoy God with Him.

All sinners have lost God and have also lost the enjoyment of God. Sinners have been taken captive away from God and from the enjoyment of God to be slaves of Satan. All sinners are slaves under the authority of Satan. Because they are such slaves, they have no enjoyment and no peace. In carrying out the service of the gospel, the Lord

Jesus first forgives our sins and then brings us into the enjoyment of God.

After you were saved, did you not experience an enjoyment that could be compared to a feast? If you were saved without having such a feast, this means that you did not have the joy of God's salvation. In this sense, your experience of salvation was not adequate, not complete. Complete salvation includes forgiveness of sins and a joy that is in God. This joy is the enjoyment of God, and this enjoyment is a feast.

I can still remember the joy I experienced when I was saved. Although I was born, raised, and educated in Christianity, I was not saved until the age of nineteen. Oh, what joy I had on the day I was saved! I was very happy, and it seemed that everything in heaven and on earth was pleasant to me. That was the enjoyment of God, the joy of salvation. The joy of salvation is a feast. When we have the joy of salvation, we are feasting with the Lord Jesus.

Many of us can testify that when we recall our experience of salvation, we can still taste the joy we experienced. After we were saved and knew that our sins had been forgiven, there was joy within us. We regarded the Lord Jesus as the most wonderful One, and we were joyful in Him, feasting with Him.

This joy of salvation, the enjoyment of God, is a strong proof that we have been brought back to God. The joy of salvation testifies that we are no longer far away from God, but have been brought back to Him. The proper way to carry out the gospel service is to help people experience the forgiveness of sins so that they may have the joy of salvation, the enjoyment of God.

THREE CASES OF SICKNESS

Thus far, we have covered three cases of sickness in

the Gospel of Mark. The first case was that of Peter's mother-in-law (1:30-31). Peter's mother-in-law was sick with a fever. We have pointed out that this fever may signify an abnormal, unbridled temper. Mark uses a woman to illustrate this condition. It is especially easy for women to come down with such a "fever," a fever that causes them to be very touchy. In order to help someone

who has a fever like this, we must first be calm ourselves. Then gradually the other party will calm down.

The second case of sickness in this Gospel is the case of a leper (1:40-45). This leper portrays a typical sinner. Leprosy, the most contaminating, contagious, and damaging disease, isolates a person from both God and man. Leprosy causes its victim to lose fellowship with both God and man. Hence, the cleansing of the leper in 1:40-45 signifies the recovering of a sinner to fellowship with God and with men. The leper needed not only healing but also cleansing. The case of the leper was much more serious than that of Peter's mother-in-law, for she did not need cleansing, but needed only healing.

The third case of sickness in Mark's Gospel is the case of the paralytic (2:1-12), the case of a man who was disabled as the result of being paralyzed. The cases of Peter's mother-in-law and the paralytic indicate that men are disabled by sin and that women have a fever because of sin. In other words, the same thing that disables men--sin--also causes women to be "set on fire" with a high fever. Therefore, we may say that women are sick of a fever and that men are sick of paralysis, disablement. Furthermore, both men and women are lepers in need of cleansing.

These three cases reveal that the Slave-Savior serves those who are sick with a fever, those who are paralyzed, and those who are lepers. The Lord serves us with His forgiving authority and His cleansing power. He forgives our sins, cleanses us, and brings us back to God. He restores our fellowship with God and man. Because of Him, our sins are gone, and we have God as everything to us. Now we are enjoying God as our life, our light, our everything. We are feasting with the Lord. This is the

gospel, and this is also the way to carry out the gospel service.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE NINE

THE WAYS THE SLAVE-SAVIOR CARRIED OUT HIS GOSPEL SERVICE

(3)

Scripture Reading: Mark 2:18--3:6

The Gospel of Mark is not a book of doctrine. As a biography, this Gospel was written according to the facts of history. The record of this Gospel, therefore, is according to historical sequence.

FIVE KEY WORDS

Forgiveness

We have seen that the five incidents recorded in 2:1--3:6 form a group. These five incidents are the forgiving of the sins of the sick (2:1-12), feasting with sinners (2:13-17), causing His followers to be merry without fasting (2:18-22), caring for His followers' hunger rather than for religion's regulation (2:23-28), and caring for the relief of the suffering one rather than for the ritual of religion (3:1-6). Each of these incidents can be summarized by a particular word. The word to summarize the first incident is forgiveness. In 2:1-12 we have a case of the forgiveness of sins by the Son of Man, who was the forgiving God incarnated in the form of a Slave. In 2:5 the Lord Jesus said to the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven!" When the scribes heard this they reasoned in their hearts, "He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins except one--God?" (v. 7). Eventually, the Lord said, "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins--He says to the paralytic, To you I say, Rise, pick up your bed and go to your house" (vv. 10-11). The Son of Man, even though He was in the form of a Slave, had the authority to

forgive sins. Here we have a strong indication that the forgiving God was present in the form of this Man, a man who was a Slave. Therefore, the first incident in this series of five incidents concerns forgiveness.

Enjoyment

The word to describe the second incident is enjoyment. In this incident, recorded in 2:13-17, the Slave-Savior as a Physician was feasting with sinners. Therefore, here we have the enjoyment of feasting with the Savior. Those who feasted with Him enjoyed the goodness of the Slave-Savior, who is the embodiment of God. Therefore, what they actually experienced was the enjoyment of God Himself. For this reason, the word "enjoyment" is a summary of this incident.

Joy

We may use a very simple word to describe the third incident--joy. Therefore, in the first three incidents we have forgiveness, enjoyment, and joy.

According to 2:18-22, certain basic factors must exist in order for us to be joyful. Without these factors, we cannot have joy. The first basic factor is the Bridegroom: "Jesus said to them, Can the sons of the bridechamber fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast" (v. 19). A bridegroom is the most pleasant person. Hence, in chapter two of Mark the basic factor of our joy is the Savior as the Bridegroom.

Two other factors of joy are the new cloth (v. 21) and the new wine (v. 22). The new cloth is for making a garment to cover us and beautify us. Unshrunk cloth is cloth that has not yet been treated or worked upon. This new cloth is for making a new garment. This new garment, which is actually Christ Himself, covers us and beautifies us. The new wine satisfies us and makes us joyful. Outwardly, we have the new cloth; inwardly, we have the new wine. Furthermore, we are with the Bridegroom. Now we have these basic factors for us to be joyful.

No philosopher could utter a word like what is spoken by the Lord Jesus in 2:18-22. In His wisdom the Lord uses ordinary things like cloth and wine to illustrate wonderful points. The Lord speaks of a bridegroom, new cloth, and new wine to show us how we may be joyful. We can be joyful because we are with the Bridegroom, because we have a new covering to beautify us, and because we have new wine to fill us, satisfy us, and cause us to be beside ourselves with joy. Therefore, in the third incident we have joy.

Satisfaction

The fourth incident, recorded in 2:23-28, is that of the Lord's caring for His followers' hunger rather than for religion's regulation. Mark 2:23 and 24 say, "And it came about that He passed through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way, picking the ears of grain. And the Pharisees said to Him, Look! Why are they doing on the Sabbath what is not lawful?" Here we see that the Slave-Savior cared for the hunger of His followers rather than for the regulation of religion. As those who follow the Savior we are not hungering. Instead, we are filled and satisfied. Because we are satisfied, we can testify, "We don't care to keep the regulations of religion and remain hungry. Religious regulations always leave us hungry. But as those who follow the Slave-Savior, we are not hungry any longer. Every day of the week, including the Sabbath, He gives us something to eat. Now we are satisfied. We don't care if others condemn us according to their religious regulations. Others may care for religious regulations, but we care to be satisfied in the Lord." This case, therefore, may be summarized by the word satisfaction.

Freedom

The word that best summarizes the fifth incident, that of the Slave-Savior's caring for the relief of the suffering one rather than for the ritual of religion (3:1-6), is the word freedom. In this incident we see that on the Sabbath

the Savior restored a man's withered hand. Here we see that He did not care for the ritual of religion; He cared for the relief of the suffering one. He wanted to release that one, to liberate him. Thus, in this incident we have the matter of freedom.

THE ACTUAL HISTORICAL SEQUENCE

Let us review the five words used to describe these five incidents: forgiveness, enjoyment, joy, satisfaction, and freedom. What a marvelous sequence we have here! Imagine how different it would be if forgiveness came last instead of first. According to the historical sequence recorded in Mark, first we have forgiveness and then enjoyment, joy, satisfaction, and freedom. The forgiveness of our sins by the Lord always issues in enjoyment, joy, satisfaction, and freedom. We can testify of this from our experience.

These incidents were not arranged by Mark in order to present a doctrine. On the contrary, these incidents are presented according to historical fact and sequence. In other words, they happened in the order in which Mark put them. These five events took place under the Lord's sovereignty according to the actual sequence of the enjoyment of His salvation. The first item in this sequence is the forgiveness of sins. We can testify from our experience of the Lord's salvation that when we have the forgiveness of sins we also have enjoyment and joy. This joy is followed by satisfaction and freedom. How wonderful!

As we consider the sequence of these five incidents in the Gospel of Mark, we realize once again that the Bible truly is the Word of God. Apart from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, no human being could compose such a writing as we have in the Gospel of Mark. I do not believe that Mark was highly educated or had a thorough knowledge of Greek. To be sure, the Greek in the Gospel of Mark is not as high as that in the Gospel of Luke or in the Epistles of Paul. But even though the language in the Gospel of Mark may not be especially polished, the five incidents in this section are arranged in a marvelous sequence, a sequence

that corresponds fully with our experience of the Lord's salvation. According to this sequence, we have forgiveness, enjoyment, joy, satisfaction, and freedom.

As we consider Mark's record, we need to worship the Lord that this indeed is part of His holy Word. This is not merely a composition written by a person with limited education. No, it is the breath of the sovereign God. All the Scripture, including the Gospel of Mark, is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16). This means that the narration in Mark 2:1--3:6 is God-breathed. As a reminder of the sequence here, I recommend that you write in the words forgiveness, enjoyment, joy, satisfaction, and freedom next to these sections in your Bible.

RELIGIOUS FASTING

Let us now go on to consider 2:18-22 in more detail. After the Lord told the scribes that He had come as a Physician to care for the sick, two groups of disciples--the disciples of John and of the Pharisees--came to Him: "And the disciples of John and the Pharisees were fasting. And they come and say to Him, Why do the disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" (2:18). Both groups of disciples practiced fasting. This indicates that if we are in religion, we need to fast. Those in religion are empty and hungry; they do not have anything to satisfy them. To be a disciple in any kind of religion is to have trouble, hunger, thirst, weariness, and anxiety. In pointing this out I am not criticizing anything; rather, I am simply speaking the truth. Those in religion certainly have reason to fast. Religion requires and demands. It tells us that we cannot do this and that we cannot do that. However, religion does not enable us to fulfill its requirements. Because those in a religion cannot fulfill the requirements of their religion, they need to fast. Therefore, both the disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees were fasting.

THE SONS OF THE BRIDECHAMBER

In contrast to the disciples of John and the Pharisees, could they fast when the Bridegroom, the most important

factor of their joy, was with them? In 2:19 the Lord said to the disciples of John and the Pharisees, "Can the sons of the bridechamber fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast." Here the Lord refers to His disciples as sons of the bridechamber. For them to fast when the Bridegroom is with them would be a shame to Him.

Suppose you are the best man at a wedding. While the wedding is taking place, you, the bridegroom's best man, are fasting. That would be an insult to the bridegroom. No bridegroom wants to see his best man fasting during his wedding. Instead, he wants to see him joyful, properly dressed in good clothing, and enjoying the food provided. This is an illustration of the Lord's word in 2:19. Here the Lord seems to be saying to the disciples of John and the Pharisees, "Why do you ask Me why My disciples are not fasting? I am the Bridegroom, and they are all the sons of the bridechamber, a corporate best man. Matthew the tax collector is one of the sons of the bridechamber. They cannot fast when I am with them."

Are you a disciple of John or of the Pharisees, or are you one of the sons of the bridechamber, part of the corporate "best man" of the Lord Jesus? We all should testify strongly that we are part of the Lord's corporate best man. All those who have had their sins forgiven by the Lord Jesus have become sons of the bridechamber. In the second chapter of the Gospel of Mark we see that even those who were tax collectors and sinners became sons of the bridechamber.

THE FORGIVING GOD AND THE PHYSICIAN

In 2:1-12 we see the forgiving God as a real Man in the form of a Slave. Deity was in humanity, and humanity contained deity. This One, the forgiving God as a real Man, is a wonderful Person. In Him we see the beauty of human virtue and the glory of the divine attributes, for in Him we see both humanity and divinity in one complete

Person. The incident recorded in 2:1-12 portrays this Person, the One who is the true God and a real Man. What a lovely portrait of the Lord in His human virtue and with His divine attribute!

In the second incident (2:13-17) we see the same One as a Physician taking care of those who are sick. His "patients" are portrayed here as feasting with Him. Verse 15 says, "And it came about that He reclined at the table in his house, and many tax collectors and sinners were reclining at the table with Jesus and His disciples, for there were many, and they followed Him." As they were reclining at the table with the Lord, they had a marvelous enjoyment with Him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that the Lord ate with sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, "He is eating with tax collectors and sinners!" (v. 16). When the Lord heard this, He said to the scribes, "Those who are strong have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (v. 17). Here the Lord seems to be saying to the scribes, "I am the great Physician taking care of My patients. They have been healed, and now they are happy enjoying a feast with Me."

NEW CLOTH, NEW WINE, AND FRESH WINESKINS

As we have pointed out, following the incident of the Lord's feasting with tax collectors and sinners, the disciples of John, the new-time religionists, and the disciples of the Pharisees, the old-time religionists, asked the Lord why His disciples did not fast. It seems that they wanted the Lord's disciples to join them in fasting. It was necessary for them to fast because, as far as they were concerned, the Messiah and the kingdom had not yet come. Since they were still waiting for the coming of the Messiah and the kingdom, they were fasting.

The Lord answered the disciples of John and the Pharisees not in a direct way but by using certain figures of speech. In His answer the Lord referred to Himself as the Bridegroom, and He also spoke of new cloth and new

wine. The Lord seemed to be saying, "Why should My disciples fast when they have everything they need to make them joyful? They have Me as the Bridegroom, and they have Me as their righteousness, their new cloth, and also as their life, their new wine. I am everything they need. I am God and Man; I am the Physician and the Bridegroom, the most pleasant person. It is ridiculous for My disciples to fast when they have Me. I am the garment that covers them and beautifies them, and My life is the real wine that fills them, stirs them, and satisfies them. Instead of fasting, they should be full of joy. You ask them to fast. But I tell you it is impossible for them to fast, because the Bridegroom is here with them, the new cloth is upon them, and the new wine is within them." How wise and how wonderful is the Lord's answer, His word concerning the Bridegroom, the cloth, and wine!

Perhaps we should have a gospel meeting and tell the people that Jesus Christ today is the Bridegroom, that He as our righteousness is the cloth to cover our nakedness and to beautify us, and that His divine life is the wine for us to drink for our satisfaction. This is the real gospel--a living Person with righteousness and life. Hallelujah, we have the Bridegroom, and we have Him as righteousness outwardly and as our life inwardly!

In 2:21 the Lord speaks of unshrunk cloth. The Greek word rendered "unshrunk" also means new, raw, unwrought. The Greek word is *agnaphos,* formed with *a-,* which means not, and *gnapto,* which means to card or comb wool; hence, to dress or full the cloth. Thus, the word means uncarded, unfulled, unfinished, unshrunk, untreated. This unshrunk cloth signifies Christ, from His incarnation to His crucifixion, as a piece of new cloth, untreated, unfinished. The new garment in Luke 5:36 signifies Christ, after being treated in His crucifixion, as a new robe. In Mark 2:21 the Greek word for new is *kainos.* First Christ was the unshrunk cloth for making a new garment, and then through His death and resurrection He was made a new garment to cover us as our righteousness before God so that we may be justified by God and

acceptable to Him (Luke 15:22; Gal. 3:27; 1 Cor. 1:30; Phil. 3:9).

The old garment here signifies man's good behavior, good deeds, and religious practices by his natural life, the life of the old creation. If a patch made of unshrunk cloth is sewn on an old garment, it will take away from it, the new from the old, and the tear will become worse. To imitate what the Lord Jesus did in His human life on earth can be compared to putting a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Some try to imitate the human deeds of the Lord Jesus in order to improve their behavior, instead of believing in the crucified Jesus as their Redeemer and the resurrected Christ as their righteousness so that they may be justified by God and acceptable to Him. We should take the crucified and resurrected Christ as our new garment to cover us as our righteousness before God. We should not try to improve our behavior by imitating the Lord's human deeds.

In 2:22 the Lord Jesus goes on to say, "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the wineskins, and the wine and the wineskins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins." The Greek word for new in this verse is *neos,* which means new in time, recent, young. The new wine here signifies Christ as the new life, full of vigor, stirring us to excitement. The Slave-Savior is not only the Bridegroom for our enjoyment; He is also our new garment to equip and qualify us outwardly for attending the wedding and also the new life to excite us inwardly for the enjoyment of Him as our Bridegroom. To enjoy Him as the Bridegroom, we need Him as the new garment outwardly and as the new wine inwardly.

The old wineskins in 2:22 signify religious practices, such as the fasting held by the Pharisees of the old religion and the disciples of John of the new religion. All religions are old wineskins. New wine put into old wineskins bursts the wineskins by its fermenting power. To put new wine into old wineskins is to put Christ as the exciting life into any kind of religion. Instead of trying to put Christ into

different religious rituals and formalities, we should put the new wine into fresh wineskins.

The Greek word for fresh here is *kainos,* which means new in nature, quality, or form; unaccustomed, unused; hence, fresh. The fresh wineskins signify the church life as the container of the new wine, which is Christ Himself as the exciting life. As those who believe in the Lord, we are regenerated persons constituting the Body of Christ to be the church (Rom. 12:5; Eph. 1:22-23). This Body of Christ as His fullness is also called "the Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12), the corporate Christ. The individual Christ is the new wine, the exciting life inwardly, and the corporate Christ is the fresh wineskin, the container to hold the new wine outwardly. What we have today is not fasting or other religious practices; instead, we have the church life with Christ as our content. We have Him, the living Person, as our Physician, Bridegroom, unshrunk cloth, and new wine. He is our full enjoyment so that we may be the fresh wineskin, His Body, the church, to contain Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE TEN

THE WAYS THE SLAVE-SAVIOR CARRIED OUT HIS GOSPEL SERVICE

(4)

Scripture Reading: Mark 2:23--3:6

In this message we shall continue to consider the ways the Slave-Savior carried out His gospel service. According to 2:23-28, He cared for His followers' hunger rather than for religion's regulation, and according to 3:1-6 He cared for the relief of the suffering one rather than for the ritual of religion.

CARING FOR HIS FOLLOWERS' HUNGER RATHER THAN FOR RELIGION'S REGULATION

Mark 2:23 says, "And it came about that He passed through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way, picking the ears of grain." I believe that the Lord Jesus purposely led His followers into the grainfields on the Sabbath. He certainly knew that it was a Sabbath day. As a rule, He should not have made a decision to pass through the grainfields on the Sabbath, for that was a breaking of the regulation concerning the keeping of the Sabbath. Nevertheless, He, as the Shepherd, led all of His followers, His sheep, into the grainfields, and those fields became their pasture. Verse 23 says that "His disciples began to make their way, picking the ears of grain." Here we see that the disciples were eating the fresh ears of grain. Through this kind of eating they were satisfied.

In verse 24 "the Pharisees said to Him, Look! Why are they doing on the Sabbath what is not lawful?" The Sabbath was for the Jews to remember God as the Creator

(Gen. 2:2), to keep the sign of God's covenant with them (Ezek. 20:12), and to remember God's redemption of them (Deut. 5:15). Hence, to profane the Sabbath was a serious matter in the eyes of the religious Pharisees. To them it was not lawful, not scriptural, for the Lord's disciples to pick ears of grain on the Sabbath. As we shall see, the Pharisees did not have adequate knowledge of the Scriptures. According to their meager knowledge, they cared for the ritual of keeping the Sabbath, not for the hunger of the people. What folly to observe a vain ritual!

The Real David

In Mark 2:25-26 we see the Lord's reply to the Pharisees: "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and was hungry, he and those with him? How he entered into the house of God when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the presence, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he gave also to those who were with him?" The Pharisees said that it was not lawful for the Lord's disciples to pick the ears in the grainfields and eat. The Pharisees condemned them for acting contrary to Scripture. But the Lord asked them, "Have you not read?" He pointed out to them another aspect of the truth in the Scriptures that justified Him and His disciples. This condemned the Pharisees for lacking adequate knowledge of the Scriptures.

The Lord's answer in these verses indicates that He must have had an excellent way of studying the Bible. Here the Lord seemed to be telling the Pharisees, "Have you never read what David did? You religionists respect the Bible to the uttermost. Have you not read how David entered into the house of God, ate the bread of the presence, and also gave it to those who were with him? Don't you know that David led his followers to do this? Would you say that he misled them in this matter?" How excellent is the Lord's way of studying the Bible! We all need to learn of Him.

In the eyes of the Jews, the Lord was unlearned. They marveled and said concerning Him, "How does this man

know letters, having never learned?" (John 7:15). This One, who apparently was unlearned in the Scriptures, questioned the scribes, ancient scholars of the Bible, concerning their knowledge of the Scriptures. Although they were regarded as Bible scholars, they knew the Scriptures only in a superficial way and in the way of doctrine in dead letters. The Lord exposed their inadequate knowledge of the Scriptures when He asked them if they had never read what David did when he and those with him were in need and were hungry.

The Lord's word to the Pharisees is very wise and rich in its implications. The Lord's word here implies that He is the real David. In the ancient time, David and his followers, when rejected, entered into the house of God and ate the showbread, seemingly breaking the Levitical law. Now the real David and His followers were also rejected and took action to eat, seemingly against the sabbatical regulation. Just as David and his followers were not held guilty, neither should Christ and His disciples be condemned.

Furthermore, the Lord's word here implies a dispensational change from the priesthood to the kingship. In the ancient time, the coming of David changed the dispensation from the age of the priests to the age of the kings, to the age in which the kings were above the priests. In the age of the priests, the leader of the people should listen to the priest (Num. 27:21-22). But in the age of the kings, the priest should submit to the king (1 Sam. 2:35-36). Hence, what King David with his followers did was not illegal. Now by the coming of Christ the dispensation was also changed, this time from the age of the law to the age of grace, the age in which Christ is above the law. Whatever He does is right.

We have seen that the Lord's word to the Pharisees implies that He is the real David. Matthew the tax collector was one of the followers of this David, the One who was fighting for God's kingdom. When David led his company to the house of God, He was fighting for the kingdom. Likewise, as the real David, Christ and His followers were also fighting for the coming of the kingdom.

Moreover, with the coming of the Lord there was a change of dispensation.

In 2:27 the Lord went on to say to the Pharisees, "The Sabbath came into being for man's sake, and not man for the Sabbath's sake." Man was not created for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath was ordained for man so that man might enjoy it with God (Gen. 2:2-3).

Lord of the Sabbath

In verse 28 we have a strong display of who the Lord is: "So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." This indicates the Slave-Savior's deity in His humanity. He, the Son of Man, was the very God who ordained the Sabbath, and He had the right to change what He had ordained concerning the Sabbath. As the Lord of the Sabbath, He had the right to change the regulations concerning the Sabbath.

The Lord Jesus indicated to the condemning Pharisees that He was the real David, the King of the coming kingdom of God, and also the Lord of the Sabbath. Therefore, He could do whatever He liked on the Sabbath, and whatever He did was justified by who He is. He was above all rituals and regulations. Because He was present, no one should pay any attention to rituals and regulations

I would call your attention to the word "even" in 2:28. Here the Lord says that the Son of Man is the Lord *even* of the Sabbath. His use of the word "even" here implies that He is not merely the Lord of one thing, but the Lord of everything, including the Sabbath.

The Lord's word implies and indicates that He is the almighty God, the very One who ordained the Sabbath in Genesis 2. As the One who had the authority to ordain the Sabbath, He also has the right to change it. Therefore, the Lord could have said to the Pharisees, "Why do you trouble Me? I am the Lord who ordained the Sabbath, and I have the full position and right to change it. Whether I ordain the Sabbath or change it, I do it for the sake of man. The Sabbath came into being for man's sake; man did not come into being for the sake of the Sabbath. You Pharisees

would even let people die by the way you keep the Sabbath. But on the Sabbath I care for feeding My followers. In Genesis 2 I ordained the Sabbath because I wanted man to have rest. Therefore, the Sabbath came into being for the sake of man. But now that I am here, I want to cancel the Sabbath in order to feed My followers. As the Lord of the Sabbath, I certainly have the right to do this."

How wonderful was the Lord's handling of the situation in 2:23-28! He certainly is the best attorney, a heavenly attorney. Whatever He says is right. In arguing with Him, the Pharisees did not have a case, for He is the almighty Lord.

CARING FOR THE RELIEF OF THE SUFFERING ONE RATHER THAN FOR THE RITUAL OF RELIGION

In 3:1-6 we see that the Lord carried out His gospel service by caring for the relief of the suffering one instead of caring for the ritual of religion. Here we have the last incident of the five recorded in 2:1--3:6, the case of the healing of a man with a withered hand. This healing also took place on the Sabbath (3:2).

The Lord's Move on Two Sabbaths

Mark 2:23--3:6 records the Lord's move on two Sabbaths (Luke 6:1, 6). What He did on the first Sabbath indicates that He was acting as the Head of the Body. As the Head, He is the real David and the Lord of the Sabbath. What He did on the second Sabbath signifies that He cared for His members. On this Sabbath He healed a man's withered hand. The hand is a member of the body. The Lord would do anything for the healing of His members. Sabbath or no Sabbath, the Lord is interested in healing the members of His Body who are in need, even healing the members who are dead. Regulations do not matter, but the healing of the members of His Body means everything to Him.

In these two portions we have two cases of the breaking of the Sabbath. The first instance of breaking the Sabbath

took place in the grainfields; the second took place in a synagogue (3:1). The first breaking of the Sabbath was related to satisfaction, and the second was related to liberation. We may be satisfied, but we may not yet be liberated. We may not be free. We need not only satisfaction but also liberation. Have you been liberated? Have you been emancipated? Are you fully free? You may be quite satisfied because you have learned to feed on the Lord Jesus. However, you may not have the assurance to say that you have been liberated. Actually, we need liberation even more than satisfaction.

According to the sequence in the Gospel of Mark, liberation follows satisfaction. If we have not been satisfied, we shall not sense the need for liberation. Our immediate need is to have our hunger satisfied. First, the Lord satisfies our hunger, and then, as the divine Surgeon, He operates on us. Once we are satisfied, He brings us into the "operating room" where He heals us and we are liberated. In 3:1-6 the operating room was the synagogue. It was in the synagogue that the man with a withered hand experienced the restoring of his hand (v. 5).

In verse 4 the Lord said to those in the synagogue, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" This word implies that the Slave-Savior was the Emancipator, who set the suffering one free from the bondage of religious ritual.

Our Need to Be Fully Liberated

In 2:1-12 we have the case of a paralytic, the case of someone fully paralyzed. But in 3:1-6 we have the case of someone with a withered hand. This is the case of a person who is partially free, but is not wholly free. Are you fully free? You may find this question difficult to answer and say, "On the one hand, I cannot say that I am wholly free. On the other hand, it would not be true to say that I am not free at all. I must answer by saying that I am partially free." Like the man with the withered hand, we need to be fully liberated. This man was not dying. He could move about and do things with one of his hands. Yet the other

hand was withered. This indicates that he needed to be set free.

It is significant that the case of the man with the withered hand is the last of the five cases in 2:1--3:6. In the first incident (2:1-12) we have the forgiveness of sins; in the second (2:13-17), the entering into the enjoyment of God; in the third (2:18-22), joy through the living Christ as the Bridegroom, the One who has a garment with which to cover and beautify us and who has the divine life with which to fill us; and in the fourth (2:23-28), satisfaction through the Lord's feeding. Now in the fifth incident we have complete freedom. Here we see a person who is wholly free.

If we put these five incidents together, we shall see a complete picture of a fully saved person, the picture of someone enjoying salvation in the fullest way. According to this picture, the Lord's salvation includes forgiveness, enjoyment, joy, satisfaction, and freedom. May we all experience these five aspects of the Lord's salvation.

Deity Expressed in Humanity

Mark 3:5 says, "And looking around at them with anger, being greatly grieved at the hardness of their heart, He says to the man, Stretch out your hand! And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored." Toward the opposers the Savior's anger was exercised, and He was greatly grieved at their hardness of heart. But toward the sick His compassion was exercised, and He restored the withered member. His anger and grief may be considered the expression of the genuineness of His humanity, whereas His compassion and healing were a merging of His human virtue with His divine power. Thus His deity was again expressed in His humanity. The restoration of the withered hand displayed the power of the Slave-Savior's deity.

The Lord gave the man the word, "Stretch out your hand!" In the Lord's word was the enlivening life. By stretching out his hand, the man took the Lord's life-giving

word, and his withered hand was restored by the life in His word.

The Opposition of the Religionists

In 3:6 we have the conclusion of this incident: "And going out, the Pharisees immediately took counsel with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him." In the eyes of the religious Pharisees, for the Lord to break the Sabbath was to destroy the covenant of God with the nation of Israel, that is, to destroy the relationship between God and Israel. Hence, the Pharisees took counsel with the Herodians concerning how they might destroy the Lord Jesus. The breaking of the Sabbath caused the Jewish religionists to reject the Slave-Savior. As the religionists of the old and lifeless religion, the Pharisees were motivated by Satan and used by him to oppose, resist, and frustrate the gospel service of the Slave-Savior throughout His ministry. Blinded by their traditional religion from seeing Him in God's economy, they plotted to kill Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE ELEVEN

THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S AUXILIARY ACTS FOR THE GOSPEL SERVICE

(1)

Scripture Reading: Mark 3:7-35

We have seen that in chapter one of the Gospel of Mark there are five matters that are the contents of the Slave-Savior's gospel service: preaching the gospel (1:14-20), teaching the truth (vv. 21-22), casting out demons (vv. 23-28), healing the sick (vv. 29-39), and cleansing the leper (vv. 40-45). We have also seen in 2:1--3:6 five ways in which the Slave-Savior carried out this gospel service: forgiving the sins of the sick (2:1-12), feasting with sinners (2:13-17), causing His followers to be merry without fasting (2:18-22), caring for His followers' hunger rather than for religion's regulation (2:23-28), and caring for the relief of the suffering one rather than for the ritual of religion (3:1-6). In 3:7-35 we have another group of five items. This group includes the auxiliary acts for the gospel service: averting the crowd's pressing (vv. 7-12), appointing the apostles to preach (vv. 13-19), not eating because of the urgent need (vv. 20-21), binding Satan and plundering his house by the Holy Spirit (vv. 22-30), and not remaining in the relationship of the natural life but in that of the spiritual life (vv. 31-35). In all the items in each of these three groups we see the excellency of the Lord Jesus. In this message and in the message following we shall consider these auxiliary acts for the Slave-Savior's gospel service.

AVERTING THE CROWD'S PRESSING

In carrying out a ministry which God has commissioned to us, we shall face problems, opposition,

and frustration. Certain problems are caused by something that is done in a natural way with the intention of helping us. The Lord faced this kind of frustration in His ministry. As He was carrying out the ministry of His gospel service, He met problems.

In 3:7-12 we have the problem of the crowd pressing upon the Lord. Verse 7 says that a great multitude followed Him and His disciples, and in verse 8 we see that "a great multitude, hearing what great things He was doing, came to Him." The multitude gathered around Him because they heard what He was doing. This crowd was a frustration to the Lord's ministry.

Many of today's preachers and evangelists like to have a large crowd. However, the crowd is not a help to the real ministry of life. On the contrary, a crowd, a multitude, for the most part may help us to have a movement, but it does not help the ministry in life.

Pressing and Touching

In 3:7-12 two significant words are used with respect to the crowd: press (vv. 9-10) and touch (v. 10). Verse 9 says, "And He told His disciples that a little boat should stand ready near Him because of the crowd, that they might not press upon Him." The Lord wanted to get into a boat in order to avert the pressing of the crowd. The crowd's pressing hindered the way for the sincere ones to come to the Lord and touch Him directly. If we are among those who merely press upon the Lord, we shall not receive anything from Him. In order to receive from Him, we need to touch Him. Therefore, in this portion of the Gospel of Mark the word "press" is used in a negative sense, whereas the word "touch" has a positive meaning.

According to the record of the Gospels, a number of times people pressed upon the Lord. But only those who touched Him received any benefit. It is through a direct touch with the Lord that life is imparted from Him to us. This impartation of life we call transmission or infusion. Another term is dispensing. When we contact the Lord directly, we receive the divine dispensing. But pressing

upon the Lord does not accomplish anything as far as the divine dispensing is concerned. We experience the divine dispensing only by directly touching the Lord. Because the Lord realized this, He wanted to separate Himself from the crowd. For this reason He withdrew with His disciples to the sea.

A Little Boat

Although the Lord left the crowd, the crowd continued to follow Him. Because of this, even when He was at the seashore the crowd was seeking to press upon Him. Hence, He told His disciples that a little boat should stand ready near Him. He did not want the crowd to press upon Him. The boat was a means for the Lord Jesus to be separated from the crowd.

In figure, the little boat that the Lord wanted to stand ready near Him signifies the church. In Matthew 13 the boat has this significance. The church is different from the nation of Israel, which is signified by the land. The church is also different from the Gentile world, which is signified by water. The church is something that is separated from the land and is on the water. Therefore, the church is neither on the land nor in the water. Although the church "boat" is on the water, it is not in the water, and the water is not in the boat. Therefore, the land signifies the nation of Israel, the sea signifies the Gentile world, and the boat, which is separated from both the land and the sea, signifies the church. By this we see that the church is separated both from the nation of Israel and from the Gentile world. This understanding is according to Paul's word in 1 Corinthians 10:32 concerning the Jews, the Greeks (the Gentiles), and the church of God.

Today the Lord is ministering His life to those in the church; He is also ministering from within the church to others. This is the significance of the boat. If we see the significance of the figure of the boat, we shall realize that if we are out of the church and try to minister to people, we may suffer the pressing of the crowd. Today many ministries are being rendered to a crowd without a boat.

However, the proper ministry is a ministry in the boat, a ministry that imparts the life supply not to those who press the Lord, but to those who sincerely desire to touch Him.

What the Lord did concerning the crowd should be an example to us, and we should follow in His steps. However, most preachers and evangelists today appreciate a crowd. The greater the crowd, the happier they are. But the facts of history indicate that a great crowd causes a loss, not a benefit, to the genuine ministry of life.

Here we see that the Lord's way is different from man's way. Instead of treasuring the crowd, He sought to avoid the crowd. When the crowd followed Him, He asked that a little boat be made ready in order that He might go away from the crowd that pressed upon Him.

Receiving the Ministry of Life

Although the Lord sought to avoid the crowd, He wanted the sincere ones to be able to touch Him. If we are simply part of the crowd, we shall not receive anything from the Lord. We need to single ourselves out from among the crowd and touch Him directly and honestly. If we do this, we shall receive the ministry of life.

The first of the auxiliary acts for the Slave-Savior's gospel service was averting the pressing of the crowd. Concerning this, we need to learn of the Lord. Often preachers are deceived by a crowd. When a crowd surrounds us, this may be deceiving; it also may be frustrating. Hence, we need to avoid the crowd. But this does not mean that we should give up the people. No, as we avoid the crowd, we need to allow others to contact us, to touch us, directly in order to receive the genuine ministry of life.

The Unclean Spirits

Mark 3:11 and 12 say, "And the unclean spirits, when they beheld Him, fell before Him and cried out, saying, You are the Son of God! And He warned them many times that they should not make Him manifest." The crying out

of the demons concerning the Slave-Savior was also a frustration to His gospel service. Therefore, He warned them and forbade them.

APPOINTING THE APOSTLES TO PREACH

We have seen that the Slave-Savior first needed the sea and then a little boat to avert the pressing of the crowd. This indicates that the crowd pressing upon Him was a frustration to His gospel service. In order to get away from the crowd, the Lord went to the sea. Later, He went from the sea to a mountain.

The Lord's actions here are very interesting. In order to avoid the pressing of the crowd, He went to the sea, where He ministered to the sincere ones who touched Him directly. Eventually, after these received His ministry of life, He went up to the mountain.

Mark 3:13-15 tells why the Lord went up to the mountain: "And He goes up into the mountain, and calls to Himself whom He wanted, and they went to Him. And He appointed twelve, whom He also named apostles, that they might be with Him, and that He might send them to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons." Here we see that the Lord's purpose in going up into the mountain was to call certain ones and to make them His apostles. His appointing them to be apostles was for the spreading of His gospel service.

According to verses 14 and 15, the twelve appointed by Him were to preach and cast out demons. To preach the gospel is to minister God to people; to cast out demons is to keep Satan away from people. These comprise the main purpose of the Slave-Savior's gospel service.

According to the Father's Will

The Gospel of Luke indicates that the Lord Jesus prayed before He appointed the twelve to be apostles: "And it came about in these days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when it became day, He called His disciples to Him; and He chose from them twelve, whom He also

named apostles" (Luke 6:12-13). Many had received the ministry of life from the Lord. This means that He had rendered much life to the sincere ones who touched Him directly. They received the life supply from Him. Then He was burdened to select certain ones of them and appoint them to help Him in His ministry of the gospel. For this reason, He went to the mountain and prayed. The Gospel of Luke indicates that He prayed the whole night. The Lord must have prayed concerning the choosing of the twelve apostles. He prayed concerning the choosing of the twelve from among the many who had received His ministry of life.

We know that one of the twelve selected by the Lord was Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him (Mark 3:19). To be sure, the Lord Jesus knew that Judas would betray Him. I believe that before making His selection, the Lord consulted with the Father in prayer. His appointing of the twelve was actually not the carrying out of His own will. Rather, it was the carrying out of the will of God the Father. I believe that the Father charged Him to select certain ones, including Judas. The Lord made His selection according to the Father's will.

Learning to Raise Up Others

We need to learn of the Lord not to carry out our ministry by ourselves. Not even the Lord Jesus always carried out His ministry by Himself. First He selected the twelve and later, the seventy. From this we see that both in the ministry and in the church life we need to learn to be diligent and faithful ourselves and also learn how to raise up certain ones to help us.

It is not very difficult to carry out our ministry by ourselves. In fact, there is the tendency for teachers and preachers to do everything by themselves. Among Christians today there is not the common practice of sharing the ministry with others, the practice of teaching, appointing, and perfecting others to fulfill the same ministry. But according to Paul's word in Ephesians 4, the ministry of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers is to perfect the saints so that the

saints may carry on the work of the ministry. The Lord's ministry was to perfect the apostles, and the apostles' ministry was to perfect the saints. By this we see that God's move on earth is not with an individual; His move is with groups of people.

In the Gospels we first have a group of twelve and later a group of seventy. The Lord's appointing the apostles to preach certainly is a significant auxiliary act for His gospel service. We all need to follow the Lord in this matter. The elders in a local church need to learn how to raise up others. After a period of time, the elders should no longer be alone caring for the church; they should raise up others to join them in this responsibility.

Not the Natural View but the View according to Spiritual Insight

The Lord made the selection of the twelve in the early part of His ministry. The ones He chose certainly were not very mature. Two of them, James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, were given the name Boanerges, which means sons of thunder. The Greek word "Boanerges" comes from Aramaic. This name was added to James and John by the Lord because of their impetuosity (see Luke 9:54-55; Mark 9:38). In chapter nine of Mark we have an example of John's "thundering." But by the time he wrote his Gospel, Epistles, and Revelation this thunder had lost its roar.

Another one of the twelve selected by the Lord Jesus was Simon the Cananaean (Mark 3:18). The word "Cananaean" comes from the Hebrew *kanná,* zealous. This refers to a Galilean sect known as the Zealots; it does not refer to the land of Canaan (Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). The Zealots were extremely patriotic and loved the Jewish traditions and practices. The Lord chose one of these Zealots to be an apostle.

One of the twelve, Matthew, was formerly a tax collector. In his list of the twelve apostles Matthew specifically designates himself as the tax collector (Matt. 10:3). This may indicate that he remembered his salvation

with gratitude. Even a despised and sinful tax collector could become an apostle of the Slave-Savior.

The last of the twelve mentioned by Mark is Judas Iscariot. The word "Iscariot," a Greek word, probably comes from Hebrew and means a man of Kerioth. Kerioth was in Judah (Josh. 15:25). Thus, Judas was the only apostle from Judea; all the rest were Galileans.

As we consider what brothers may bear the eldership in a local church, it may seem to us that no one is qualified. For example, we may say, "This brother seems quite good, and he loves the Lord very much. But what about his background?" If the Lord Jesus had considered the twelve in this way, who could have been chosen? Matthew would certainly have been excluded. How could the Lord have chosen a tax collector to be one of the twelve apostles? We may think that the Lord should have chosen a scribe. But one of those He selected was in fact a tax collector.

We need to learn from the Lord that the natural view is different from the view that is according to spiritual insight. The Lord made His choice according to His spiritual insight, not according to man's natural view. James and John had a terrible temper, a temper that could thunder. We would never have chosen them to be apostles, but the Lord did. From the natural point of view, no one would be qualified to be an apostle of the Lord Jesus. James and John, Simon the Zealot, Matthew the tax collector--none would be qualified. Praise the Lord that He did not make His choice according to the natural point of view!

If we have a natural view of the saints in the church life, we may feel that we are the only ones qualified to do certain things. For example, there may be just one elder in a particular locality. This elder may say that there is a need for at least two more elders. However, this brother may go on to say, "Yes, this one is good in certain ways. Yet he is not that good." Eventually, according to the natural view, only this one brother himself is qualified. Years may go by, and he remains the only one who seems suitable to bear the responsibility of the eldership. There

are not the "twelve," much less the "seventy," to help him. He is the only one in his local church qualified to be an elder.

The Lord Jesus, on the contrary, chose the unqualified ones to be His apostles. The twelve were not qualified, and we are not qualified either. Nevertheless, in the Lord's move there is the need for helpers. Hence, one of the Lord's auxiliary acts in carrying out His ministry was to select certain unqualified ones to be His apostles.

Eventually, Peter was confirmed by what happened on the day of Pentecost. I do not believe that Peter had a high degree of education. Nevertheless, not long after the Lord Jesus was crucified and resurrected, Peter could stand up on the day of Pentecost as a leading apostle. The Roman Church regards Peter as the first pope. But this "pope" was a fisherman who was selected by the Lord and then confirmed on the day of Pentecost.

It is very important for us to learn not to view the Lord's ministry or the church according to the natural concept. The Lord did not choose Nicodemus to be one of the twelve. The Lord did not choose any learned ones. Instead, the ones He chose seem rather peculiar. We have seen that to James and John He even gave the name "sons of thunder." Often when they spoke they were thundering. If we had been there, our attitude might have been, "Put these two aside until they stop thundering. Once they have changed and their thunder has lost its war, then we can use them in the ministry." This is our concept, the natural concept. But it is not the view of the Lord Jesus. In your locality are you able to use the sons of thunder in the service of the church? We must learn of the Lord to use even such ones in the gospel service.

We have seen that the Lord Jesus turned from the crowd and then asked for a little boat to be made ready for Him. His action was not natural. Everything he did was in the spirit. Likewise, His appointing of the twelve was not natural, but was altogether in the spirit. Although He knew that Judas would betray Him, He still appointed him to be one of the twelve. Naturally speaking, no one would

appoint such a one as Judas. But, acting according to the spirit, the Lord Jesus chose even him.

NOT EATING BECAUSE OF THE URGENT NEED

Mark 3:20 and 21 say, "And He comes into a house; and a crowd comes together again, so that they could not even eat bread. And hearing it, His relatives went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, He is beside Himself." This indicates the busyness, diligence, and faithfulness of the Slave-Savior as the Slave of God in His evangelical service.

It is not easy to analyze or systematize the Lord's actions. There seems to be a contradiction between the Lord's behavior in averting the crowd in 3:7-12 and His behavior in 3:20-21. First He avoided the crowd. But when He was in the house and the crowd came together, He did not try to get away from the crowd. According to what He did in 3:7-12, we would expect Him to stay away from the crowd in order to finish eating. We would expect Him to say, "I am eating now, and I don't have time to be with you." However, He acted in a different way. He stopped eating and took care of the urgent need of those in the crowd.

When the Lord's relatives heard of the situation, they went out to lay hold of Him, saying that He was beside Himself. This exclamation expressed natural concern on the part of the Slave-Savior's relatives regarding Him. As we shall see in the next message, this opened the way for the scribes to blaspheme Him (v. 22).

The Lord's relatives, perhaps His brothers in the flesh, thought that He was beside Himself. They were concerned because He cared only for the crowd and not for His eating.

We should not try to analyze in a natural way what seemed to be the contradictory behavior of the Lord. When the crowd pressed upon Him, the Lord sought to avoid the crowd. But when the crowd afforded Him opportunities to minister life to people, He would not care for His eating.

We need to differentiate these two matters--the pressing of the crowd and the opportunity to minister life.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE TWELVE

THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S AUXILIARY ACTS FOR THE GOSPEL SERVICE

(2)

Scripture Reading: Mark 3:22-35

In 3:7-35 we see five auxiliary acts for the Slave-Savior's gospel service: averting the crowd's pressing (vv. 7-12), appointing the apostles to preach (vv. 13-19), not eating because of the urgent need (vv. 20-21), binding Satan and plundering his house by the Holy Spirit (vv. 22-30), and not remaining in the relationship of the natural life but in that of the spiritual life (vv. 31-35). In the foregoing message we covered the first three of these auxiliary acts. In this message we shall consider the last two--the binding of Satan and the Lord's not remaining in the relationship of the natural life.

BINDING SATAN AND PLUNDERING HIS HOUSE BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

According to 3:21, the Lord's "relatives went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, He is beside Himself." This exclamation expressing natural concern on the part of the Slave-Savior's relatives regarding Him opened the way for the scribes to blaspheme Him. Verse 22 says, "And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, He has Beelzebub, and by the ruler of the demons He casts out the demons." This was a word of blasphemy ushered in by the expression of natural concern in verse 21.

Because the Lord's relatives could not understand Him, they said that He was beside Himself. This saying opened the door for the scribes, the opposers, to defame the Lord. The scribes could have said, "You see, even his relatives

say that he is beside himself. Do you know why he is beside himself? He is beside himself because he has a demon, and this demon is Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons." The Slave-Savior cast out demons, the evil workers for the dark kingdom of Satan; yet the opposers said that He did it by the ruler of the demons. What subtlety of the evil one, who motivated these evil opposers to say this! They were his co-workers and were even one with him.

Beelzebub means the lord of flies, the name of a god of the Ekronites (2 Kings 1:2). It was changed in contempt by the Jews to Baalzebel, which means lord of the dunghill, and was used for the ruler of the demons (Matt. 12:24; Luke 11:15, 18-19). The scribes reviled the Slave-Savior by saying that He cast out demons by the ruler of demons. This most blasphemous name expressed their strongest objection and rejection.

No doubt, the name Beelzebub refers to the Devil. The Devil is lord of flies and lord of the dunghill. The scribes could not have chosen a worse term with which to defame the Lord Jesus. They said not only that He had a demon, but that He was under Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons. This blasphemy was so serious that the Lord later indicated that it was unforgivable, being a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:28-30).

We need to remember that the door for such a defamation was opened by the word of the Lord's relatives, their word that He was beside Himself. They accused the Lord of being abnormal, and this gave opportunity for the scribes to defame Him. The scribes could have said, "He certainly is abnormal, for he has a demon, Beelzebub." From this we see that it is possible for our relatives' natural love for us to open the door for Satan to come in.

Mark 3:23-25 says, "And calling them to Himself, He said to them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom is not able to stand; and if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand." The Lord's word here indicates that Satan has not only a house but also a kingdom. His house is a house of sin (1 John 3:8, 10), and

his kingdom is a kingdom of darkness (Col. 1:13). Sinners belong both to Satan's house and to his kingdom. The demons belong to his kingdom and possess people for his kingdom. Satan is the ruler of this world (John 12:31) and the ruler of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2). He has his authority (Acts 26:18) and his angels (Matt. 25:41), who are his subordinates as principalities, powers, and rulers of the darkness of this world (Eph. 6:12). Hence, Satan has his kingdom, the authority of darkness (Col. 1:13).

We have seen that Satan has both a house and a kingdom. Satan's kingdom is against God's kingdom, and Satan's house is against God's house.

In Mark 3:26 the Lord points out that if "Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he is not able to stand, but has an end." Then He continues in verse 27, "But no one can enter into the house of the strong one to plunder his goods unless he first bind the strong one, and then he will plunder his house." The "goods" here are sinners kept in Satan's house for his kingdom. The Slave-Savior bound Satan, the strong one, and entered into his house to plunder his goods so that the sinners might be brought into the house of God (Eph. 2:19) through regeneration for the kingdom of God (John 3:5). While the Slave-Savior was doing the gospel service, He was binding the strong one, Satan. The gospel service is a warfare to destroy Satan and his kingdom of darkness.

The Lord's word in verse 27 indicates that while He was preaching the gospel, He was binding the strong one in order to destroy his kingdom by plundering his house. In other words, the Lord's preaching was a plundering. Satan has captured all sinners and has placed them into his house, which is a prison. Hence, all sinners have become Satan's captives. But the Lord Jesus, who has the power of the Spirit, has come to preach the gospel. He has come to plunder Satan's house and to release his captives.

If we did not have the Lord's word recorded in verse 27, we would not realize that when we preach the gospel we should plunder Satan's house. We may think that gospel preaching is simply a matter of soul winning, a matter of saving lost sinners. The Lord, however, has a different

concept concerning the preaching of the gospel. His concept is that the preaching of the gospel to save sinners is the plundering of Satan's house to release his captives. To be sure, this plundering destroys Satan's kingdom.

The word in 3:27 corresponds to the Lord's word to Paul in Acts 26:18: "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God." When Paul was called by God to preach the gospel, he was told to turn people from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God. The authority of Satan is simply the kingdom of Satan. Today when we preach the gospel to sinners, we also should turn them, Satan's captives, from the authority of darkness unto God and His kingdom.

In Mark 3:28 and 29 the Lord went on to say to the scribes, "Truly I say to you, that all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and blasphemies, whatever they may blaspheme; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit has no forgiveness forever, but is guilty of an everlasting sin." The Lord's word here concerning the Holy Spirit indicates that the Slave-Savior's gospel service, especially in the casting out of demons to destroy the dark kingdom of Satan, was by the Holy Spirit. The Lord had been anointed by the Spirit and He was continually led by the Spirit in His move (Luke 4:18, 1; Mark 1:12).

As He was preaching the gospel, the Lord was destroying the kingdom of Satan by the power of the Holy Spirit. At the time of His baptism He denied Himself, having Himself buried in the waters of death. The Lord would not do anything by His own power, strength, or energy. On the contrary, He did everything by the Holy Spirit. In particular, by the Holy Spirit He preached the gospel in order to plunder Satan's house and destroy his kingdom.

Matthew 12:28 indicates that when the Lord Jesus was destroying Satan's kingdom by preaching the gospel, He was bringing in the kingdom of God: "But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then the kingdom of God is come upon you." The Spirit of God is the power of the kingdom

of God. Where the Spirit of God is in power, there the kingdom of God is, and there the demons have no ground.

How wonderful is the auxiliary act for the Slave-Savior's gospel service described in Mark 3:22-30! From what is portrayed here we learn that when we preach the gospel we need to pray to contact God as our source so that we may receive more of the Holy Spirit and be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Then as we preach the gospel we shall plunder Satan's house and destroy his kingdom. This is a great matter, and it is very important that we all see it.

The gospel service is not only a matter of preaching; the gospel service also involves fighting and plundering. Sinners are the "goods" captured by Satan and kept in the stronghold of his house. Hence, not only do unbelievers need to be convinced and subdued, but also Satan's house needs to be plundered so that they may be released from their captivity. In order to release those held captive by Satan in his prison, we need power and authority. The Holy Spirit is our authority and power. From the Lord's auxiliary act here we realize our need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit in order to preach the gospel.

In 3:28 and 29 the Lord says that all sins will be forgiven the sons of men and all blasphemies. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit "has no forgiveness forever, but is guilty of an everlasting sin," a sin that will not be forgiven forever. The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit differs from insulting the Spirit (Heb. 10:29). To insult the Spirit is to disobey Him willfully. Many believers do this. If they confess this sin, they will be forgiven and cleansed by the Lord's blood (1 John 1:7, 9). But to blaspheme the Holy Spirit is to slander Him, as the scribes did in Mark 3:22. It was by the Holy Spirit that the Lord cast out a demon. But the scribes seeing it said that He cast out demons by Beelzebub, ruler of the demons. This was blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

In the economy of the Triune God, the Father conceived the plan of redemption (Eph. 1:5, 9), the Son accomplished redemption according to the Father's plan (1 Pet. 2:24; Gal. 1:4), and the Spirit reaches sinners to apply the redemption accomplished by the Son (1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Pet.

1:2). If a sinner blasphemes the Son as Saul of Tarsus did, the Spirit still has the ground to work upon him and cause him to repent and believe in the Son that he may be forgiven (see 1 Tim. 1:13-16). But if a sinner blasphemes the Spirit, the Spirit will have no ground to work upon him, and there will be none left to cause him to repent and believe. Hence, it is impossible for such a person to be forgiven. This is not only logical, according to reason, but governmental according to God's administrative principle, as revealed here by the Lord's word.

NOT REMAINING IN THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE NATURAL LIFE BUT IN THAT OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

In 3:31-35 we see the fifth auxiliary act for the Slave-Savior's gospel service: not remaining in the relationship of the natural life but in that of the spiritual life. Mark 3:31 and 32 say, "And His mother and His brothers came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him. And a crowd sat around Him, and they said to Him, Behold, your mother and your brothers and your sisters are outside seeking you." After the opposers' blasphemy, instigated by Satan, the relatives of the Slave-Savior came again to trouble Him by their natural concern for Him. Undoubtedly, this also was motivated by the evil one.

According to verses 33 through 35, the Lord said, "Who is My mother and My brothers? And looking around at those sitting in a circle around Him, He says, Behold, My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, this is My brother and sister and mother." The Lord's word here indicates His rejection of His relatives' natural concern. In order to defeat the evil one's schemes and fulfill His gospel service, He would not remain in the relationship of the natural life. This displayed His absoluteness for God in His humanity.

Looking at those sitting in a circle around Him, the Lord declared, "Behold, My mother and My brothers!" Then He went on to say that whoever does the will of God is His brother, sister, and mother. Here we see that the Lord's relationship with His followers is not in the flesh but in the spirit. Whoever does the will of His Father is

His brother for helping, His sister for sympathizing, and His mother for tenderly loving.

Through His gospel service the Slave-Savior was making the believing sinners His spiritual relatives, those who became His many brothers (Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:11) in the house of God (Heb. 3:5) and His many members for the building up of His mystical Body (Eph. 5:30; 1 Cor. 12:12) to do the will of God.

Today the Roman Catholic Church considers Mary the mother of God. But here the Lord Jesus denied His natural relationship with His mother and said that the one who does the will of God is His mother. This indicates that a sister who does God's will may have the boldness to declare that she is a mother to the Lord Jesus. Furthermore, it is not presumptuous for all of us to say with boldness that we are the Lord's brothers.

In 3:31-35 we see that the Slave-Savior did not remain in the relationship of the natural life. Instead, His relationship with His followers was of the spiritual life. From this auxiliary act we see that in order to be powerful in God's ministry we need to deny the natural relationships. The greatest entanglement to God's ministry is the natural relationship with father or mother, husband or wife, children or relatives. By denying the natural relationship the Lord Jesus avoided this entanglement.

In these five auxiliary acts for the Slave-Savior's gospel service we see that there is no ground for the natural concept, the natural understanding, or the natural relationship. In these auxiliary acts everything is spiritual, holy, and divine, altogether contrary to the human concept. If we would follow the Lord to have these auxiliary acts today, we should not give ground to natural concepts or relationships. In order to follow the Lord in these matters, everything must be spiritual, divine, holy, and according to God. Then we shall have the standing and the boldness to carry out God's work.

I hope that we all, especially the young ones, will be helped and impressed by these auxiliary acts for the Lord's gospel service. In particular, we need to be impressed

never to consider the Lord's recovery, the Lord's ministry, and the Lord's move in a natural way. We should not measure the things of the recovery according to the natural understanding.

All the events recorded in the Gospel of Mark took place under the Lord's sovereignty. First, in 1:14-45 we have five matters that form the contents of the Slave-Savior's gospel service. Then in 2:1--3:6 we have five incidents that show us the ways of carrying out the gospel service. As we have seen, we also have the five auxiliary acts in 3:7-35. These five cases, five incidents, and five acts, happened according to God's sovereignty in an excellent sequence. If we see these matters, we shall know how to carry out God's ministry. If we see the contents, the ways, and the acts, we shall know what the Lord's gospel service is, we shall know how to carry out this service, and we shall know how to have the ground, the position, for doing God's work.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE THIRTEEN

THE PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

(1)

Scripture Reading: Mark 4:1-34

In this message we come to chapter four of the Gospel of Mark, a crucial chapter concerning the kingdom of God.

Once again I would call your attention to the sequence of the narration of the Gospel of Mark. In 1:14-45 we have the contents of the gospel service: preaching the gospel, teaching the truth, casting out demons, healing the sick, and cleansing the leper. Then in 2:1--3:6 we see the ways of carrying out the gospel service: forgiving the sins of the sick, feasting with sinners, causing His followers to be merry without fasting, caring for His followers' hunger rather than for religion's regulation, and caring for the relief of the suffering one rather than for the ritual of religion. Following this, in 3:7-35 we have five auxiliary acts for the gospel service: averting the crowd's pressing, appointing the apostles to preach, not eating because of the urgent need, binding Satan and plundering his house by the Holy Spirit, and not remaining in the relationship of the natural life but in that of the spiritual life.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Although we see in these three sections a complete view concerning the gospel, we do not see the intrinsic essence of the gospel. Neither do we see in these sections of Mark the purpose of the gospel and its issue. We do not yet see what the gospel is for. This is the reason that in chapter four the record of this Gospel comes to the matter of the kingdom of God.

In 1:15 we have the first utterance of the Lord Jesus in

His gospel preaching: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has drawn near. Repent and believe in the gospel!" This verse indicates clearly that the gospel is for the kingdom, and this kingdom is neither the kingdom of man nor the kingdom of Israel, but the kingdom of God.

What is the kingdom of God? It is not easy to define the kingdom. In order to understand what the kingdom of God is, we need to consider the entire Old Testament, for in the Old Testament we have a clear view of the kingdom.

We may say that a kingdom is a sphere, or a realm, where a person accomplishes something. Sometimes we say that a certain person has his own kingdom. This means that he has a realm, a sphere, where he can work to reach his goal or fulfill his plan. Hence, a kingdom is a realm where a person does what he wants to do. According to the Old Testament, there is a realm called the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is a sphere, a realm, for God to work out His eternal purpose and accomplish His goal.

After creating the heavens, the earth, and billions of items, God created man. According to the book of Genesis, God created man for a twofold purpose. On the positive side, God created man in His image so that man may express Him. On the negative side, God gave man His dominion over all created things. Dominion means authority in a particular realm or sphere. Dominion, therefore, is related to God's kingdom. In Genesis 1 we see that with man we have God's image and God's dominion. God's image is for His expression, and God's dominion is for His kingdom.

God in His creation wanted man to express Him. In order to have such an expression, God needs a sphere, and this sphere is a kingdom, a realm where God can exercise His authority. God gave His authority to man and established man as the head of all created things. By this we see that immediately after the creation of man, God set up a kingdom on earth. The kingdom of God, therefore, can be seen in the first chapter of Genesis.

Eventually, after the fall of man, God called Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The book of Genesis records the experiences of these patriarchs and of the children of

Israel and their sojourn in Egypt. According to the record in Exodus, God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt. Exodus 19:6 reveals God's purpose in bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt: "Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation." The Lord brought the children of Israel out of Egypt in order to make them a kingdom of priests, a kingdom in which everyone would be a priest, one who serves God. Hence, God's goal was to have a priestly kingdom.

From Exodus 19 until the end of the Old Testament we have the record of the history of a kingdom. We should not regard this kingdom merely as the kingdom of Israel. Rather, this was the kingdom of God expressed in the kingdom of Israel.

As we study the Old Testament, we see that God was not able to accomplish His purpose with Adam, Noah, or the nation of Israel. Although the kingdom of God was expressed in the kingdom of Israel, God was not able to reach His goal through the children of Israel. Therefore, eventually God Himself came through the way of incarnation.

Not being able to fulfill His purpose through the first Adam and his descendants, God came through incarnation as the last Adam. As God incarnate, the Lord Jesus came to establish the kingdom of God, to establish a realm in which God can carry out His purpose through the exercise of His authority. This was the reason the Lord taught His disciples to pray for the coming of the kingdom (Matt. 6:10). This was also the reason the Lord Jesus in His preaching of the gospel told people to repent for the kingdom of God. The Lord declared that the kingdom of God had drawn near and that people must repent in order to enter into the kingdom. Those who repent because the kingdom of God has drawn near will be able to participate in the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose.

THE GOAL AND ISSUE OF THE GOSPEL

In the preaching of the gospel, the kingdom of God is

often neglected. Much of today's gospel preaching gives people the impression that the gospel is only for soul winning, for transferring people out of hell into heaven, for helping people have peace, joy, and eternal blessing. In the New Testament, however, we have a different impression concerning the gospel. When the Lord Jesus preached the gospel, He spoke concerning the kingdom of God, and He told them to repent for the kingdom.

One day, in His training of His disciples, the Lord brought them to Caesarea Philippi, which is in the northern part of the Holy Land, close to the border, at the foot of Mount Hermon. Then the Lord began to ask His disciples concerning Himself: "Who do men say that the Son of Man is?...But you, who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:13, 15). Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). Peter recognized the Lord as the Christ, the Son of the living God. This means that the Son of the living God was appointed to be God's anointed One, the Christ. After Peter received this revelation concerning the Lord, the Lord went on to say, "On this rock I will build My church.... I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens..." (vv. 18-19). In these verses the words "church" and "kingdom" are used interchangeably. First the Lord said, "I will build My church," and then, "I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens." This indicates that in order for the church to be built, the kingdom needs to be opened. In other words, opening the kingdom is the way to begin the building of the church.

We need to see the crucial matter that the intrinsic essence of the gospel is the kingdom. The gospel is preached for the kingdom, and the kingdom is a divine sphere for God to work out His plan, a realm where God can exercise His authority to accomplish what He intends. The only way for God to reach His goal is through the kingdom. Therefore, there is a section in the gospel of Mark revealing the purpose of the gospel. The purpose of the gospel is to have the kingdom. The kingdom of God is the goal of the gospel.

The kingdom of God is not only the goal of the gospel, but also the issue of the gospel. When the gospel is preached, what will be the outcome? What will be the issue of the gospel? This outcome, this issue, is the kingdom. The preaching of the gospel is to bring forth the kingdom.

It is only in the Gospel of Matthew that the Lord speaks of the church. There is no mention of the church in Mark, Luke, or John. We need to realize, however, that in the Lord's mind the church and the kingdom are one matter. The church is the kingdom and the kingdom is the church.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD NOT SUSPENDED

Certain Bible teachers do not have an accurate understanding of the kingdom of God. They say that Christ came with the kingdom and presented the kingdom to the Jews. But the Jews rejected the Lord Jesus. According to these teachers, when the Lord was rejected, the kingdom He brought with Him was also rejected. These teachers go on to say that after the Lord and the kingdom were rejected, the Lord suspended the kingdom and began to build the church. Furthermore, they claim that this present dispensation, the dispensation of grace, is the dispensation of the church. In this dispensation of grace, they say, the Lord is building His church. Then, after the church age, at the time of His coming back, the Lord will bring in the kingdom, which they say has been suspended, and establish the kingdom on earth during the millennium, the kingdom age. According to this view, the present age is the church age, and the coming age is the kingdom age.

There is a sense in which this understanding of the kingdom has an element of truth. But this understanding is not altogether accurate. Actually, the Lord Jesus has not suspended the kingdom. In the Life-study of Matthew we pointed out that at the end of Matthew 13 the rejection of the Lord Jesus by the Jews was complete. Nevertheless, the Lord did not suspend the kingdom, for in Matthew 16 He went on to speak of the building up of the church and also of the keys of the kingdom. This indicates clearly and definitely that the kingdom has not been suspended.

In the book of Acts we have further indications that the Lord has not suspended the kingdom. Acts 1:3 says that to His apostles the Lord "showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Here we see that during the forty days between His resurrection and ascension, the Lord spoke to His disciples concerning the kingdom. In Acts 8:12 we are told that Philip was "bringing the good news concerning the kingdom of God." In Acts 14:22 Paul spoke to the believers about entering into the kingdom of God, saying that "through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God." Acts 19:8 tells us that Paul "entering into the synagogue, he spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them concerning the kingdom of God." From Acts 20:25 we see that among those in Ephesus Paul preached the kingdom of God. Furthermore, Acts 28:23 and 31 say that Paul "expounded and solemnly testified the kingdom of God" and was "proclaiming the kingdom of God." By these verses we see that Paul was teaching and preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God.

Romans 14:17 speaks of the relationship of the kingdom of God and the church life: "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." This verse is a strong proof that the church in the church age is the kingdom of God, because the context here is dealing with the church life in the present age.

In this chapter Paul writes concerning the receiving of the weaker ones. We should not reject the weaker ones regarding the matter of eating, because the kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink. Rather, the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. According to this verse, the church life today is the kingdom. To practice the church life is to practice the kingdom. Therefore, the church life in the Lord's recovery is the practice of the kingdom of God.

In 1 Corinthians, Galatians, and Ephesians Paul also speaks concerning the kingdom of God. In 1 Corinthians

6:9 and 10 Paul names certain categories of people who will not inherit the kingdom of God. In Galatians 5:21 Paul says that those who practice the works of the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God. In Ephesians 5:5 Paul again speaks of those who have "no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." The context of all these verses concerning the kingdom of God is the church life.

In Revelation 1:9 John testified that he and the other saints were in the kingdom of God: "I John, your brother and joint partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus." How could John have been in the kingdom if the kingdom had been suspended? The fact that John was in the kingdom again proves that the kingdom has not been suspended.

THE DIVINE LIFE AND THE DIVINE KINGDOM

In the third chapter of the Gospel of John we see that we cannot enter into the kingdom of God unless we are regenerated: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Here we see that regeneration is not for going to heaven; regeneration is for us to enter into the kingdom of God. "Going to heaven" would be a matter in the future, whereas entering into the kingdom of God is a matter for the present. When we believed in the Lord Jesus, we were regenerated. Our regeneration was our entrance into the kingdom of God.

The only way to enter into any kind of kingdom is to be born into that kingdom. For example, an animal enters into the animal kingdom by being born into this kingdom. If an animal could enter into the human kingdom, it would need to be born with a human life. By these examples we see that birth is the entrance into a particular kingdom. We were born into the human kingdom. In the same principle, we are reborn, born of God, to be in the kingdom of God.

How did we enter into the kingdom of man, the human kingdom? We entered into this kingdom by human birth. Through this birth we received human life, and now by

this life we know the things of the human kingdom. In a similar way, in order to enter into the kingdom of God, we must be born of God. To be in the divine kingdom we must have the divine life. We need the life of God to understand the things in the kingdom of God. Apart from the divine life, we are not able to understand the divine kingdom.

Because we have been born of God and have received the life of God, we are in the kingdom of God. Praise the Lord that we have been regenerated and are now in the divine kingdom! Because we have been regenerated, we are in the kingdom of God. According to Romans 14, by practicing the church life we are now practicing the kingdom life.

THE KINGDOM LIFE

In the Lord's recovery we are accustomed to using the words "the church life." We often tell others that we are in the church life. I would recommend that from now on we say not only that we are in the church life, but also that we are in the kingdom life. Sometimes it may even be better to speak of the kingdom life rather than of the church life. If we use the phrase "kingdom life" along with "church life," this may remind us that today we are in the kingdom life. To be in the church life is to be in the kingdom, for the church today is the kingdom, and the kingdom is the reality of the church life.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FOURTEEN

THE PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

(2)

Scripture Reading: Mark 4:1-34

The word "kingdom," no doubt, denotes some kind of ruling. To say that we are practicing the kingdom life means that we are under God's ruling. In this message, however, we shall consider the kingdom of God from a very different point of view.

THE SEED OF THE GOSPEL

Let us begin our consideration of the kingdom by asking the following question: What is the gospel? We may say that the gospel is a wonderful Person, a wonderful God-man. The gospel tells us that one day the very God became incarnate. This wonderful One, God incarnate, was the God-man. When He reached the age of thirty, He came forth to preach the gospel. As we pointed out in a previous message, the gospel is the replacement of the entire Old Testament, for it is the fulfillment of the promises, prophecies, and types and it is also the removal of the law. With the coming of the God-man, Jesus Christ, the Old Testament was over. This One is Himself the gospel. The gospel, therefore, is this wonderful God-man.

According to the record of chapter four of the Gospel of Mark, we may say that the gospel is the wonderful God-man coming to sow Himself as a seed of life. This seed of life is conveyed in the Lord's word. Concerning this, 4:2 and 3 say, "And He taught them many things in parables, and said to them in His teaching: Listen! Behold, the sower went out to sow." In Greek the word "taught" is in the imperfect tense, indicating repeated action in the past.

The word "sower" indicates that the Slave-Savior, who was the Son of God, came to sow Himself as the seed of life in His word (v. 14) into men's hearts so that He might grow in them, live in them, and be expressed from within them. The seed sown here is the word that proceeded out of the mouth of the Slave-Savior. Hence, His word is the seed, and in this seed is the divine life. Actually, this seed of the divine life is the Lord Himself.

The seed sown in chapter four of Mark is the seed of the gospel. Just as a carnation seed is actually the carnation itself, so the seed of the gospel is the gospel itself. As the God-man, Jesus Christ is the seed of the gospel. When we speak of the seed of the gospel, we mean that this seed is the gospel, just as a carnation seed is a carnation.

In Mark 4 we have the seed of the gospel, or the gospel as a seed. According to 4:3, as the Lord was teaching He was sowing. This sowing was the Slave-Savior's preaching of the gospel of God that brought in the kingdom of God (1:14-15). It was, as in 4:26, the sowing of this seed of life in the word spoken by the Slave-Savior. This indicates that His gospel service was to sow the divine life into the people whom He served. The growth of this life depends upon the condition of the ones served by Him, with its issue differing according to their various conditions, as portrayed in the parable of the sower (4:1-20).

The Lord Jesus sowed the seed into the human heart. In Mark 4 and Matthew 13 the human heart is likened to soil. Our heart is the field, the soil, into which the Lord Jesus has sown Himself as the seed of life, which is the seed of the gospel. In the parable of the sower, the Lord Jesus is both the Sower and the seed sown. As the Sower, the Lord sows Himself as the seed of life through His word.

In the parable of the sower itself there is no mention of the kingdom of God. For example, in 4:3 the Lord does not say anything about the kingdom; instead, He tells us that the sower went out to sow. Why is there no mention of the kingdom in 4:1-8? The reason is that, although the kingdom of God had drawn near, it had not yet come. But

in 4:26 we see that the kingdom had come. This was the reason the Lord could say, "So is the kingdom of God...." Then in 4:30 the Lord went on to ask, "How shall we liken the kingdom of God?" In the parable of the seed (vv. 26-29) and in the parable of the mustard seed (vv. 30-34) the kingdom of God was there. But in the first parable, the parable of the sower, the kingdom of God had not yet come. As we have seen, in this parable the seed of the kingdom is sown.

When the Lord sowed the seed of the kingdom of God, He sowed Himself into His disciples. Then this seed of the kingdom passed through a process of development within the disciples for three and a half years. As a result, when the day of Pentecost came, the kingdom of God was present with the disciples. The time from the Lord's coming forth to preach the gospel until the day of Pentecost was less than four years. That was a period of time for the seed sown into the "earth" to grow. The seed continued to grow and develop until the day of Pentecost, when the kingdom was clearly present with Peter and the one hundred twenty.

It is easy to speak concerning the outward aspect of the kingdom. But it is difficult to talk about the kingdom of God in the inner way of life. We need to be impressed with the fact that the kingdom of God is very different from the kingdom of man. The kingdom of man is a matter of organization. The kingdom of God is not a matter of organization; rather, the kingdom of God is absolutely a matter of life.

What is the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God is actually the God-man, Jesus Christ, sown as a seed into His believers. After this seed has been sown into them, it will grow in them and eventually develop into a kingdom.

Jesus Christ is the seed of the kingdom of God, and this seed has been sown into those who believe in Him. Now this seed is growing and developing within the believers. Eventually, this growth and development will have an issue, and the issue will be the kingdom. Then this issue, the kingdom, will bring all the Lord's believers to reach the goal. This goal also is the kingdom. Chapter four of the

Gospel of Mark serves the particular purpose of revealing the kingdom to us in this way.

THE INTRINSIC ELEMENT OF THE GOSPEL

In this message I am not concerned with a verse-by-verse study of 4:1-34, nor even with a study of the different parables. My burden is that we may see what the kingdom of God is. It is crucial for us to see that the gospel is the gospel of the kingdom of God. This gospel is actually the God-man, Jesus Christ, sown into us as a life seed, a seed which is the seed of the kingdom. This seed is now growing and developing in us. Eventually, a kingdom will issue from the growth and development of this seed.

If we say that in the Lord's recovery we are practicing the kingdom life, we need to realize that this kingdom is not something of organization. No, this kingdom is something of the inner life, a life which is actually the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He has been sown into our being as a seed, and now He is growing and developing within us. Praise the Lord that this seed is in each one of us and is now growing and developing in us! The growth and development of this seed will issue in the kingdom. Furthermore, this kingdom will bring us to the destination so that God's goal may be reached. Do you know what this goal is? This goal is the full development of the kingdom of God.

We have pointed out that the Gospel of Mark records the Lord's activities. In the first three chapters we see the contents of the gospel service (1:14-45), the ways of carrying out the gospel service (2:1--3:6), and the auxiliary acts for the gospel service (3:7-35). Now in chapter four we see what the gospel is. According to this chapter, the gospel is the seed of life sown into those who believe in the Lord Jesus so that this seed might grow, develop, and issue in the kingdom. Apparently, the gospel is a matter of preaching, teaching, casting out demons, healing the sick, and cleansing the lepers. Actually, the intrinsic element of the gospel is the divine seed, the God-man, the incarnated

God, sown into our being. This intrinsic element of the gospel has been neglected by many of today's Christians.

Within the gospel there is an inner seed, and this seed, the intrinsic element of the gospel, is the God-man. Whenever we preach the gospel, we need to minister Christ to those who listen to us and receive our word, for within the gospel there is an intrinsic element. Whenever a person receives the gospel, he receives God incarnate as the intrinsic element, the seed, of the gospel. This means that as long as a person receives the gospel, he receives the seed of the gospel. Through the gospel the incarnated God is sown into his being.

THE TRIUNE GOD DWELLING IN US

There has been a theological argument among Christians concerning the dwelling of Christ within the believers. This argument concerns the question of whether or not Christ is actually in us. Some say that Christ is too great and that we are too small to contain Him. According to those who hold this concept, Christ can be in the heavens, but He cannot be in us. Therefore, according to this view, only the Holy Spirit as the representative of Christ is in us.

Some may admit that Christ the Son is in us, but they may deny that the Father is in us. They may go on to say that the Son and the Father are two separate Persons. In the Godhead, they claim, there are three separate Persons, and these separate Persons are the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Those who claim that the Son is in us but not the Father say that whereas the Son lives in us, the Father is on the throne in the heavens. Regarding the matter of the Father dwelling in us, we need to consider Paul's word in Ephesians 4:6: "One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." According to this verse, the Father is over us, through us, and in us. How can we say, then, that the Father is not in us?

Both from the New Testament and our experience we know that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are in us. We have seen that Ephesians 4:6 indicates that the Father

is in us. Colossians 1:27 and 2 Corinthians 13:5 prove strongly that Christ the Son is in us. John 14:17 and Romans 8:9 reveal that the Spirit dwells in us. Moreover, in John 14:23 the Lord Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him." Here we see that when the Son comes, the Father comes with Him. It is not the case that the Father remains in heaven and the Son comes to be in us. No, the Father and the Son together come to make an abode with the one who loves the Lord Jesus.

The Triune God is in us. The Triune God who dwells in us is the very seed of the gospel. We have seen that this seed is the God-man. Hence, the seed of the gospel is the Triune God in humanity.

In the case of the forgiving of the sins of the paralytic recorded in Mark 2, we see the Triune God in humanity. Here we see both the deity and the humanity of the Slave-Savior. The Slave-Savior knew the seekers' faith, the sick one's sins, and the scribes' inward reasonings. This indicates that He was omniscient. Such omniscience, manifesting His divine attribute, unveiled His deity. However, the Slave-Savior went on in 2:10 to speak of Himself as the Son of Man. The Slave-Savior was the very God incarnated. As God incarnate, He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. He was outwardly in the likeness and fashion of man, even in the form of a slave, but inwardly He was God (Phil. 2:6-7). He was both the Slave-Savior and the God-Savior. Hence, He had not only the ability to save sinners, but also the authority to forgive their sins. In the incident recorded in 2:1-12, He forgave a man's sins as God, but asserted that He was the Son of Man. This indicates that He was the true God and a real man. In Him we see both deity and humanity. According to chapter four, this wonderful One, the God-man, is the seed of the kingdom. This is exactly what this chapter teaches us.

Chapter four of the Gospel of Mark enables us to see that the gospel announced by John the Baptist and preached by the Lord Jesus Himself is a matter of the

Triune God in humanity as a seed of life sown into our hearts. If we would know what the kingdom of God is, we need to see this very important matter.

THE KINGDOM GENE

In order to make this matter clear, I would like to borrow a term from biology. This term is the word "gene." The Triune God in humanity sown into our being is the gene of the kingdom. We know that without human genes it is impossible to have human life. Our birth, our being, and our existence all came from a gene. Now we must see that the Triune God in humanity has been sown into us to be the gene of the kingdom. Praise the Lord that this gene is within us! Eventually, the kingdom will issue from this gene.

First, the kingdom is the issue of the gospel, and then it is the goal of the gospel. Between the issue and the goal we have the church. Do you know what the church is? The church is the continuation of the issue of the gene of the kingdom.

This understanding of the kingdom is certainly different from the superficial understanding of many Christians today. We have seen that one day the Triune God became a man named Jesus Christ, the God-man. In forgiving the paralytic in Mark 2, both the deity and the humanity of the Lord Jesus were manifested. Now this One, through the preaching of the gospel, has been sown into us. In order for us to contact Him today, there is no need for anyone to break through the roof as the zealous ones did in Mark 2. The Lord has been sown into our heart! The One who has been sown into us is the gene of the kingdom, the Triune God in humanity. This wonderful One is our God, Lord, Savior, Redeemer, Master, and life.

Because the God-man as the gene of the kingdom has been sown into us, we spontaneously love one another and enjoy marvelous fellowship. We may say that the church in the Lord's recovery is the real melting pot of the different races, nationalities, and cultures. Actually, we are not only melted together--we are blended and mingled together. Do

you know why we love one another? We love one another because of the gene that is within us. This gene contains the element with which we love one another.

Day by day the seed of the kingdom is growing and developing within us. I am burdened that we all be impressed with the fact that this seed, this gene, has been sown into us and that this is the Triune God incarnate, the very God in humanity. The One who forgave the paralytic is now in us as the seed of the kingdom.

Oh, may we all be burdened to tell others this good news! We may forget many things, but we should all remember the gene that is within us. The Triune God in humanity has been sown into us as a seed of life to grow, develop, and issue in the kingdom. The kingdom, then, is the issue of the gospel and will be the goal of the gospel. Between the issue and goal we have the church life as the continuation of the issue of the marvelous gene that is within us.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FIFTEEN

THE PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

(3)

Scripture Reading: Mark 4:1-34

The Gospel of Mark gives us a record of the activities of the Slave-Savior. As we have pointed out, it is not the intention of this Gospel to give us a record of the Slave-Savior's words or teaching. Of course, this Gospel does tell us that the Lord Jesus taught. However, Mark does not emphasize the Lord's words.

Chapter four, which may be regarded as an insertion, differs from the rest of the Gospel of Mark in that it gives us a record of four of the Lord's parables. In 4:1-34 we do not have a description of the activity or move of the Slave-Savior. Rather, in this chapter we have an account of the Slave-Savior's teaching concerning the kingdom of God. This chapter, a chapter of teaching, is crucial.

If we compare chapter four of Mark with chapter thirteen of Matthew, we shall see that Mark 4 is much shorter than Matthew 13. In Matthew 13 we have seven parables, but in Mark 4 we have only four: the parable of the sower (vv. 1-20), the parable of the lamp (vv. 21-25), the parable of the seed (vv. 26-29), and the parable of the mustard seed (vv. 30-34). Of these four parables, only the parable of the lamp is not included in Matthew 13.

THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SEED OF THE KINGDOM

The crucial matter revealed in chapter four of the Gospel of Mark is the kingdom seed or kingdom gene. The kingdom of God is not produced by activity or organization.

The kingdom of God is actually God Himself sown into human beings and developing in them into a kingdom.

We need to be impressed with the fact that the kingdom of God is not a matter of teaching, activity, or organization. On the contrary, the kingdom of God is the Triune God in His incarnation sown into His chosen people to grow and develop in them into a kingdom.

In this brief definition of the kingdom we have a statement of the intrinsic element of the entire teaching of the New Testament. What does the New Testament teach us? The New Testament teaches us that the Triune God has been incarnated in order to be sown into His chosen people and then develop within them into a kingdom. This is the intrinsic element of the New Testament teaching.

If we read the New Testament in this light, we shall see that the Triune God became a man. When this man, Jesus Christ, began to preach the gospel and teach the truth, He was sowing Himself into others. This means that His preaching of the gospel and His teaching of the truth were actually a sowing of Himself into those who heard Him. While He was preaching and teaching, He was sowing His word into His hearers. His word conveyed Himself into them. Hence, through His word He Himself as the God-man, the Triune God in humanity, was sown into His chosen people. Preaching and teaching were His way of sowing Himself as the seed of the kingdom. When God's chosen people heard the word of this God-man and received it, they were actually receiving a wonderful Person, the One who is both the Triune God and a real man. This is what is recorded in the four Gospels.

The four Gospels reveal the Triune God incarnated. This God-man eventually came forth to sow Himself into God's chosen people by preaching and teaching. When those who had been chosen by God heard His word and received it, they received the seed, the gene, of the kingdom. This seed, this gene, is the incarnated God, the Triune God in humanity. In the Gospels we have the sowing of this seed of the kingdom.

In the Acts we have the propagation and spreading

of this sowing. In the Gospels we do have some spreading, first from one Sower to twelve sowers and then from twelve sowers to seventy sowers. But in Acts hundreds and even thousands of sowers were raised up. All these sowers were those who received the seed, the gene. By receiving the seed they became those who could then sow it into others. In this way we have the propagation of the sowing and of the seed.

In the Epistles we see the growing of the seed, the gene of the kingdom. We see this growth, in particular, in chapter three of 1 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 3:9b Paul says, "You are God's farm." Elsewhere in the same chapter Paul says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God made to grow" (v. 6). Here in this chapter we have the growth, the development, of the seed.

Further development of the kingdom gene is seen in chapter one of 2 Peter. According to 2 Peter 1:3, God's "divine power has granted to us all things which relate to life and godliness." All things pertaining to the divine life have been given to us for the purpose of development. We have a description of this development in 2 Peter 1:5-7: "Supply bountifully in your faith virtue, and in virtue knowledge, and in knowledge self-control, and in self-control endurance, and in endurance godliness, and in godliness brotherly love, and in brotherly love love." Here we have the steps of the development of the seed unto maturity. Peter indicates that if we have this development, "So shall be richly and bountifully supplied to you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (v. 11). Hence, we clearly have in the Epistles the development of the seed of the kingdom.

The harvest of this seed is found in the last book of the New Testament, the book of Revelation. According to Revelation 14, we first have the firstfruit and then the harvest. Revelation 14:4 speaks of those who "were purchased from among men as firstfruit to God and to the Lamb." Then in verse 15 we see that the "harvest of the earth is ripe."

Those who are the firstfruit spoken of in Revelation 14

will be among those who will be co-kings with Christ in the millennium. The millennium, the thousand years, will be the full development of the gene of the kingdom. During the millennium many of those who have received the kingdom gene will be co-kings with Christ. At that time our Father might boast to His enemy, "Little Satan, where are you? You are in the abyss. I ask you, Satan, to look at My kingdom. I especially ask you to look at all those who are now co-kings with Christ. Many who have believed in My Son and received the gene of the kingdom have become co-kings with Him. My Son is the King, and all the overcoming believers are His co-kings. Satan, look at the King and the co-kings. What a wonderful kingdom this is!"

Our God is the everlasting God, the eternal One, and with Him there is no element of time. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. 3:8). From God's point of view, the thousand years of the millennium will simply be one day for Him to display His wonderful kingdom. But for Satan that display of the kingdom will last a thousand years. During that time Satan will be bound in the abyss.

At the end of the millennium, Satan will be released and allowed to rebel again. Concerning this, Revelation 20:7 and 8 say, "And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog." Although Satan will instigate rebellion among the nations, he will not be able to touch the co-kings, for they will have been transformed by the kingdom gene. All the rebellious element that is in the fallen humanity of these co-kings will have been swallowed up by the kingdom gene. Therefore, it will be impossible for Satan, the evil one, to instigate the "kingdom-gene people" to rebel against God. However, a large number of those in the restored nations will follow him. Revelation 20:9 tells us the outcome of this last rebellion: "And they went up over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city; and fire came down out of heaven and devoured

them." Those of the restored nations who do not join in the rebellion will be transferred into the new earth.

In the new heaven and the new earth God will have an eternal kingdom with the New Jerusalem as the capital. The New Jerusalem will be a composition of kings, and these kings will rule over the fully restored nations. Then God will have an eternal kingdom as the full development of the gene sown in the Gospels by Jesus the Nazarene, who was the Triune God in humanity.

How wonderful is the kingdom gene that was sown in the Gospels! Eventually this gene will develop into the millennial kingdom spoken of in Revelation 20 and into God's eternal kingdom in Revelation 21 and 22. Praise the Lord for this picture of the kingdom gene and its development!

GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION IN THE CHURCH LIFE

Where does the church stand in this picture of the kingdom gene and its development and consummation? The churches are in the period of the development of the gene. This development takes place by growth and transformation. In the church life we are growing and being transformed.

In 1 and 2 Corinthians Paul speaks of the growth and transformation we are experiencing today in the church life. In 1 Corinthians 3 we have the growth in life, and in 2 Corinthians 3 we have the transformation of life. In 1 Corinthians 3:7 Paul speaks of "the One who makes to grow, God." Here we have the growth in life. Then in 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul says, "And we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit." Here we have the transformation of life. Therefore, in 1 and 2 Corinthians we have one chapter concerned with the growth in life and another chapter concerned with the transformation of life. Now in the church life we are experiencing this growth in life and transformation of life.

We have pointed out that the church is the

continuation of the issue of the kingdom gene. This continuation eventually will reach the full development of the gene. Then the kingdom will be manifested during the millennium. All those who throughout the centuries have received the gene will become kings through the development of the gene within them. The totality of all these kings will be God's eternal kingdom. Therefore, the eternal kingdom of God is the full development of the gene sown by the God-man, Jesus the Nazarene.

In the church life today we are experiencing the development of the gene of the kingdom through the growth in life and transformation of life. Eventually, this growth and transformation will reach its ultimate consummation. Then we shall all be co-kings with Christ, those who have experienced the full development of the kingdom gene.

At present, we are undergoing the process of development. But it is certain that one day we shall all be co-kings. When that day comes, we may look at one another and say, "Brother, do you remember those meetings in which we heard about the gene of the kingdom? When we were in the church life, we were undergoing the development of the gene. Now we are all here as co-kings of Christ. Now we can see the full development of the kingdom gene." That full development of the kingdom gene will be an exhibition to the nations, to the angels, and to the Devil, Satan.

We need to read chapter four of the Gospel of Mark in the light of what we have seen concerning the gene of the kingdom. If we read this chapter in this light, we shall realize that in Mark 4 we have the intrinsic element of the gospel.

THE MYSTERY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In 4:1-8 the Lord tells the parable of the sower. In 4:11 He goes on to say to His disciples, "To you the mystery of the kingdom of God has been given, but to those outside, all things are in parables." God's economy concerning His kingdom was a hidden mystery, which has been unveiled to the disciples of the Slave-Savior. Yet, since the nature and character of the kingdom of God are wholly divine,

and the elements through which it is brought forth are the divine life and the divine light, the kingdom of God, especially in its reality as the genuine church in this age (Rom. 14:17), is still all a mystery to the natural man.

THE PARABLE OF THE LAMP

In 4:21-25 we have the parable of the lamp. In verses 21 and 22 the Lord says, "Does the lamp come that it should be placed under the bushel or under the bed? Is it not that it should be placed on the lampstand? For nothing is hidden except that it may be manifested, nor has become concealed but that it should become manifest." The lamp which shines light indicates that the Slave-Savior's gospel service not only sows life into the people that He serves, but also brings light to them. Hence, such a divine service issues in the believers as luminaries (Phil. 2:15) and the churches as lampstands (Rev. 1:20), shining in this dark age as His testimony and consummating in the New Jerusalem with the outstanding characteristics of life and light (Rev. 22:1-2; 21:11, 23-24).

Mark 4:24 and 25 say, "And He said to them, Take heed what you hear. With what measure you measure, it will be measured to you, and it will be added to you. For he who has, it will be given to him; and he who has not, even what he has will be taken away from him." In Matthew 7:2 and Luke 6:38 the Lord's word about measuring is applied to the way we treat others. Here in Mark 4:24 it is applied to the way we hear the word of the Lord. How much can be given to us by the Lord depends upon the measure with which we hear. Likewise, the Lord's word in verse 25 is also concerned with how we hear the word of the Lord. The same is true in Matthew 13:10-13 and Luke 8:18.

THE PARABLE OF THE SEED

In Mark 4:26-29 we have the parable of the seed. Verse 26 says, "And He said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed on the earth." The kingdom of God is the reality of the church brought forth by the resurrection

life of Christ through the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15). Regeneration is its entrance (John 3:5), and the growth of the divine life within the believers is its development (2 Pet. 1:3-11).

The man in Mark 4:26 is the Slave-Savior as the Sower. The man in verse 26 is the sower in verse 3. This sower is the Slave-Savior, who was the Son of God coming to sow Himself as the seed of life in His word (v. 14) into men's hearts so that He might grow and live in them and be expressed from within them.

The seed in verse 26 is the seed of the divine life (1 John 3:9; 1 Pet. 1:23) sown into the believers of the Slave-Savior. The casting of the seed here indicates that the kingdom of God, which is the issue and goal of the Slave-Savior's gospel, and of the church in this age (Rom. 14:17), are a matter of life, the life of God, which sprouts, grows, bears fruit, matures, and produces a harvest. They are not a matter of lifeless organization through man's wisdom and ability. The apostles' words in 1 Corinthians 3:6-9 and Revelation 14:4, 15-16 confirm this.

Mark 4:27 goes on to say, "And sleep and rise night and day, and the seed sprouts and lengthens--how, he does not know." The words "sleep and rise night and day" and "how, he does not know," should not be applied to the Slave-Savior. This verse illustrates the spontaneity of the growth of the seed (v. 28). The word "lengthens" here indicates growth.

Verse 28 says, "The earth bears fruit by itself: first the blade, then an ear, then full grain in the ear." The earth here is the good earth (v. 8) and signifies the good heart created by God (Gen. 1:31) for His divine life to grow in man. Such a good heart works together with the seed of the divine life sown into us to grow and bear fruit spontaneously for the expression of God. The word here enables us to have faith in this spontaneity. Thus, tares are not mentioned here, on the negative side, as in Matthew 13:24-30. The words "by itself" mean that the growth is spontaneous.

Verse 29 concludes, "But when the fruit permits, immediately he sends forth the sickle, because the harvest

has come." The sickle signified the angels sent by the Lord to reap the harvest (Rev. 14:16; Matt. 13:39).

THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

In 4:30-34 we have the parable of the mustard seed. In verses 30 through 32 the Lord says, "How shall we liken the kingdom of God, or in what parable shall we put it? It is as a grain of mustard, which when it is sown on the earth is smaller than all the seeds on the earth, and when it is sown, it comes up and becomes greater than all the herbs, and produces great branches, so that the birds of heaven can roost under its shade." The significance of the seed in verses 3 and 26 and the lamp in verse 21 is that it discloses the nature and inward reality of the kingdom of God. However, the significance of the mustard seed becoming great not after its kind, and the birds roosting under its shade, is that they speak of the corruption and outward appearance of the kingdom of God.

In Matthew 13:31 and 32 we see that the grain of mustard seed not only becomes greater than all the herbs, but eventually becomes a tree. The church, which is the embodiment of the kingdom, should be like an herb to produce food. But it became a tree, a lodge for birds, having its nature and function changed. (This is against the law of God's creation that every plant must be after its kind--Gen. 1:11-12.) This happened when Constantine the Great mixed the church with the world in the first part of the fourth century. He brought thousands of false believers into Christianity, making it Christendom, no longer the church. Hence, the parable of the mustard seed corresponds to the third of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, the church in Pergamos (Rev. 2:12-17). The mustard is an annual herb, whereas the tree lives on year after year. The church, according to its heavenly and spiritual nature, should be like the mustard, sojourning on the earth. But with its nature changed, the church became deeply rooted and settled in the earth as a tree, flourishing with its enterprises as the branches to lodge many evil persons and things. This has formed the outward

organization of the outward appearance of the kingdom of God.

In the parable of the sower, "the birds came and devoured" the seed that fell beside the way (Mark 4:4). According to verse 15, this indicates that Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown into certain ones. Since the birds in this parable signify the evil one, Satan, the "birds of heaven" in the parable of the mustard seed must refer to Satan's evil spirits with the evil persons and things motivated by them. They lodge in the branches of the great tree, that is, in the enterprises of Christendom.

In 4:33 and 34 we have the conclusion of this section in the Gospel of Mark on the parables of the kingdom of God: "And in many such parables He spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear; and without a parable He did not speak to them, but privately to His own disciples He explained all things." These parables displayed the Slave-Savior's divine wisdom and knowledge (Matt. 13:34-35).

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE SIXTEEN

THE CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM

Scripture Reading: Mark 4:26-29; Matt. 16:16-19; 1 Cor. 3:9b; Rev. 14:4, 14-16

In the foregoing messages we have covered the kingdom of God as revealed in chapter four of the Gospel of Mark. In particular, we have paid attention to the seed of the kingdom as the intrinsic element of the kingdom. Now we shall go on to consider the relationship between the church and the kingdom.

The church and the kingdom are among the greatest subjects in the Bible. If we read the New Testament carefully and properly, we shall see the importance of the church and the kingdom.

In Matthew 3, very near the beginning of the New Testament, we have a word concerning the kingdom. John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (Matt. 3:2). John the Baptist's preaching was the initiation of God's New Testament economy. Repentance in the preaching of John the Baptist, as the opening of God's New Testament economy, was to have a turn for the kingdom of the heavens. This indicates that God's New Testament economy is focused on His kingdom.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH

In Matthew 16 the Lord Jesus brought His disciples into the district of Caesarea Philippi and there asked them, "Who do men say that the Son of Man is?" (Matt. 16:13). After they responded, the Lord went on to ask, "But you, who do you say that I am?" (v. 15). Receiving a revelation from the Father, Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16).

According to Ephesians 5:32, there is a great mystery of two parts, Christ and the church. Because the Father's revelation concerning Christ is only the first half of this great mystery, the Lord went on to speak concerning the church: "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church" (v. 18). This indicates strongly that the church must be something of Christ and for Christ. First, Christ was recognized, known, and even possessed. Then the Lord said that on "this rock" He would build His church. This rock refers not only to Christ, but also to the revelation of Christ, which Peter received from the Father. The church is built on this revelation concerning Christ. Hence, the "rock" here is not merely Christ Himself; it is also the realization, knowledge, experience, and possession of Christ.

Today many claim to recognize that Christ is the foundation of the church. However, they have not seen that the real foundation for the building of the church is the realization of Christ. If we do not realize Christ in our experience, we shall not have the foundation for the building of the church. Therefore, we must know Christ. Then our knowing, experiencing, enjoying, and possessing of Christ will be the foundation upon which He will build the church.

THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

In Matthew 16:19, immediately after speaking concerning the church, the Lord goes on to speak concerning the kingdom: "I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens, and whatever you bind on the earth shall be what has been bound in the heavens, and whatever you loose on the earth shall be what has been loosed in the heavens." Here "the kingdom of the heavens" is used interchangeably for "church" in the previous verse. I would not say that these terms are synonymous; however, in verses 18 and 19 they are used interchangeably. This is strong proof that the genuine church is the kingdom in this age. This is confirmed by Romans 14:17, a verse that refers to the proper church life.

The Lord's word to Peter in Matthew 16:19 regarding the keys of the kingdom of the heavens was fulfilled in the

book of Acts. We have the first aspect of this fulfillment in Acts 2 and the second aspect in Acts 10. In these two instances Peter used two keys. In Matthew 16:19 the Lord spoke of keys, not of one key. On the day of Pentecost, as recorded in chapter two of Acts, Peter used one of the keys to open the door for the Jewish people to come into the kingdom. Then in the house of Cornelius, as recorded in chapter ten of Acts, Peter used the second key to open the door for the Gentiles to come in. This is the reason that in Ephesians 2 we see that both Jews and Gentiles are built up together into the one church: "So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow-citizens of the saints and members of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone" (vv. 19-20).

We need to be impressed with the fact that in Matthew 16:18 we have the church and then in the following verse we have the kingdom. This indicates that when the church is first mentioned in the New Testament, it is mentioned in relation to the kingdom. Furthermore, as we have seen, in these verses the church and the kingdom are interchangeable terms.

THE REALITY OF THE KINGDOM IN THE CHURCH

Although the church is clearly mentioned in Matthew 16, nothing is said concerning the church in the Gospel of Mark. In chapter four, in particular, the Lord speaks concerning the kingdom of God. In 4:26-29 we have the parable of the seed. "And He said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed on the earth" (v. 26). This parable reveals that the kingdom is a matter of life, which sprouts, grows, bears fruit, matures, and produces a harvest. In verses 27 and 28 we see the spontaneous growth of the seed. Then in verse 29 we have the harvest. This parable is a brief illustration of the kingdom.

Is the church included in any way in this parable of the seed? Of course, the church is not mentioned directly. Nevertheless, the church must be included here in some way. In this parable we have the sower, the seed sown, the field, the development of the seed, and the harvest. This is a full picture of the kingdom. But where in this picture do

we have the church? This matter deserves our consideration.

As a help in answering the question concerning where the church is in 4:26-29, we may consider Paul's word about God's farm. In 1 Corinthians 3:9b, a word addressed to the church in Corinth, Paul says, "You are God's farm." Literally, the Greek word translated "farm" means cultivated land. The church is God's farm, His field, His cultivated land. If we consider Paul's word in 1 Corinthians 3:9 along with the parable of the seed in Mark 4:26-29, we shall see that Paul's word helps us understand the relationship between the church and the kingdom.

We may use gardening as an illustration of the relationship between the church and the kingdom. In the yard of my home there is a little garden that we may call a kingdom--the kingdom of plants. This kingdom of plants illustrates the kingdom that was sown as a seed in the Gospels. In the Epistles this seed grows and develops, and, eventually, in the book of Revelation, there will be a harvest. Revelation 14 speaks of the firstfruit (v. 4) and then of the reaping of the harvest (vv. 14-16). That harvest will be the full development of the kingdom, and, according to 1 Corinthians 3:9, the field in which the harvest is growing is the church. Hence, using the illustration of my garden, we may say that the garden itself portrays the church, and the plants growing in the garden portray the kingdom. This illustration helps us to see how the kingdom is in the church. The Gospel of Matthew especially reveals that in the church today we have the reality of the kingdom.

Suppose in my yard there was only the bare ground, the soil, without any plants growing. Would that bare ground be a garden? No, instead of being a garden, it would simply be a yard with soil. How, then, could such a yard become a garden? It becomes a garden only by having

plants growing in it. The more plants grow in the yard, the more the yard becomes a garden. In a similar way, the more the seed of the kingdom grows in the tilled ground, the farm, of the church, the more the church is the reality of the kingdom.

In the church life today, many "plants" are growing. If we had not been regenerated but were merely worldly people, we would simply be a yard of bare ground. But because we have been regenerated, we all are plants growing on God's farm. Hence, we are God's field, His garden. Then what is the kingdom? The kingdom is actually the reality of the many plants growing on God's farm. The more we grow in life, the more the reality of the kingdom is present with us.

The New Testament speaks of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the heavens. This does not mean, however, that there are two kingdoms. There is only one kingdom, the unique kingdom of God, and the kingdom of the heavens is part of this unique kingdom.

We may compare the kingdom of God to a nation such as the United States of America and the kingdom of the heavens to its capital, Washington, D.C., the district where the headquarters for the federal government are located. The United States and Washington, D.C. are not two nations. No, Washington, D.C. is a special district, a governing district, within the nation of the United States. We may say that the kingdom of the heavens is a spiritual Washington, D.C., the ruling district of the kingdom of God. Therefore, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the heavens are not two kingdoms. Rather, the kingdom of God is the unique kingdom, and the kingdom of the heavens is a part of this kingdom.

At this point I would ask you to consult the chart of the kingdom printed with this message. According to the chart, two circles make up the kingdom of the heavens--one circle for the dispensation of grace and another circle for the dispensation of the kingdom. In the dispensation of grace we have the church, and within the church, as indicated by the dotted circle, we have the overcoming

believers, those who are in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens.

In the illustration of the garden in the yard by my house, the reality of the kingdom of the heavens is portrayed by the growing of the plants. The more the plants in my garden grow, the more there is the reality of the garden in the yard. Suppose all the trees and plants in my garden died. In such a situation, the garden would not have any reality.

We need to consider how much reality there is among us in the church life. The amount of reality depends on the amount of the growth in life. If you visit my garden and see healthy, beautiful plants and trees, you may exclaim, "What a lovely garden!" You would behold a garden full of reality. This is an illustration of what we mean by the reality of the kingdom in the church.

ABSOLUTELY A MATTER OF LIFE

The church is a garden, and the kingdom is the growing of the saints as the plants in this garden. When the saints, the plants, reach maturity, they will be qualified to be kings with Christ in the kingdom of God. When the Lord comes back, all those who have grown to maturity will be qualified to be kings with Him in the manifestation of the kingdom during the millennium. As the chart indicates, the manifestation of the kingdom will be in the coming age.

The New Testament does not present the kingdom of God merely as an objective doctrine or prophecy. No, the New Testament teaches the truth of the kingdom as a reality of life. The kingdom of God is altogether a matter of the divine life.

The book of 1 Corinthians indicates that the kingdom of God is a matter of the life of God. In 1 Corinthians 1:2 we have the church, for this Epistle is addressed to "the church of God which is in Corinth." In this Epistle Paul refers again and again to the church or to the churches (4:17; 6:4; 7:17; 10:32; 11:16, 18, 22; 12:28; 14:4, 5, 12, 19, 23, 28, 33, 34, 35; 15:9; 16:1, 19).

We have emphasized the fact that in 1 Corinthians 3:9 we see that the church is God's farm. In chapter six, verses 9 through 11, Paul goes on to speak concerning the kingdom of God, pointing out that sinful believers will not be qualified to inherit the kingdom of God. Therefore, in chapter one we have the church; in chapter three, the farm; and in chapter six, the kingdom. In chapter fifteen of 1 Corinthians Paul again speaks regarding the kingdom of God (vv. 24, 50).

In the New Testament we have the thought that the kingdom is absolutely a matter of life. The seed of this life is the all-inclusive Christ. This One has been sown into us as a seed, and this seed is now growing and developing in us until it reaches maturity. As this seed grows within us, Christ replaces us with Himself. When we reach maturity, we shall have Christ as our full replacement, and He will be everything to us. That will also be the time of the harvest and the time when we shall be qualified to rule with Christ. In this age we have the reality of the growing of the divine life, and in the next age we shall have the manifestation of the kingdom when Christ and the co-kings rule over the entire world.

We all need to see that the kingdom is a matter of life. The kingdom of God has been initiated by the sowing of the seed of life into us. This seed is the all-inclusive Christ as the essence of life to grow in us, develop in us, and mature in us. In relation to this seed, we have Christ, the church, and the kingdom. Christ is the seed, the church is the farm or garden, and the kingdom is the reality.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE SEVENTEEN

THE MOVE OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S GOSPEL SERVICE

(1)

Scripture Reading: Mark 4:35--5:43

With this message we shall begin to consider another long section of the Gospel of Mark, a section concerned with the move of the Slave-Savior's gospel service (4:35--10:52). In this message we shall consider 4:35--5:43. In this portion of the Gospel of Mark we have three matters: the silencing of the wind and the stilling of the sea for the voyage (4:35-41), the casting out of a legion of demons (5:1-20), and the healing of a woman with a flow of blood and the raising up of a dead girl (5:21-43).

THE SUBDUING OF REBELLION

Chapter four of Mark is a wonderful chapter concerned with the seed, the gene, of the kingdom and its full development. It may be surprising that at the end of this chapter we have the record of a storm on the sea. Perhaps you are wondering how the last part of chapter four fits in with 4:1-34, in which we have the parables of the kingdom.

First, chapter four of Mark speaks concerning the kingdom of God. Then immediately after the record of the kingdom, there is a record of rebellion. Mark 4:37 says that a great windstorm came, and the waves beat into the boat. This is a picture of rebellion. By this we see that, at the end of this chapter on the kingdom of God, rebellion is still present.

It is not sufficient to use a single word as the topic for chapter four. In this chapter we first have the kingdom and then the subduing of rebellion. From God's point of view, the kingdom is the development of God Himself as

the seed of life. But from the point of view of God's enemy, the kingdom is the subduing of rebellion.

Immediately after the Slave-Savior spoke a strong word on the kingdom of God, He said to His disciples, "Let us pass over to the other side. And leaving the crowd, they take Him along, as He was, in the boat, and the other boats were with Him" (vv. 35-36). The rebel, Satan, then used his angels in the air and his demons in the water to stir up rebellion. Because of this "a great windstorm came, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already filling" (v. 37). This storm made it very difficult for the boat carrying the Lord and His disciples to cross the sea.

The Lord Sleeping in the Boat

Verse 38 says, "And He was in the stern, sleeping on the cushion. And they awake Him and say to Him, Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" The Slave-Savior was sleeping and resting in the boat beaten by the windstorm, but at the same time the disciples were threatened by the storm. This indicates that He was above the threatening windstorm and was not bothered by it. As long as the disciples had Him with them in their boat they should, by faith in Him (v. 40), share His rest and enjoy His peace.

The Lord was resting peacefully, but the disciples were frightened. Because of their fear, they awakened the sleeping Slave-Savior and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

Verse 39 says, "And being awakened, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, Be silent! Be still! And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." While the disciples were following Him, the Slave-Savior, as a Man with divine authority, controlled the storm that threatened them.

Why did the Lord rebuke the wind and speak to the sea? A rebuke is not given to things without life, but to things with personality. The Slave-Savior rebuked the wind and commanded the sea to be still because in the

wind were the fallen angels of Satan (Eph. 6:12), and in the sea were the demons (Matt. 8:32). The fallen angels in the air and the demons in the water collaborated to frustrate the Slave-Savior from going to the other side of the sea because they knew that He would cast out the demons there (Mark 5:1-20).

The Lord Rebuking the Wind

The Lord rebuked the wind and commanded the sea to be silent because of the rebellious angels and demons that were behind the scene. The Lord knew that the storm was instigated by these angels and demons in order to frustrate Him from going to the other side of the sea to cast out the legion of demons. When the Lord cast out those demons, that was the coming of the kingdom.

Now we can see that in chapter four the Lord spoke concerning the kingdom, and in chapter five He carried out the kingdom through the casting out of demons. Between the word concerning the kingdom and the carrying out of the kingdom, there is the incident of the stormy sea. After the Lord rebuked the wind and spoke to the sea, the wind ceased and there was a great calm, for the rebellion of the evil angels in the air and the demons in the water was subdued. Therefore, in 4:35-41 we see the kingdom as the power to subdue rebellion.

The sequence in this chapter is significant. Immediately after the unveiling of the kingdom, we have the subduing of rebellion. This is for the carrying out of the kingdom of God.

Mark 4:41 says that the disciples "feared greatly and said to one another, Who then is this, that both the wind and the sea obey Him?" The Lord's rebuking of the wind and the sea not only displayed the Slave-Savior's divine authority, but also testified that He was the very Creator of the universe (Gen. 1:9; Job 38:8-11).

CASTING OUT DEMONS AND CLEARING UP THE UNCLEAN INDUSTRY

Because the rebellion was subdued, the Slave-Savior

and His disciples "came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes" (5:1). The record in 5:1-20 is much more detailed than that in Matthew 8:28-34. This is strong evidence that Mark's Gospel, as a biography of the Slave of God, emphasizes His work instead of His word and gives more details than the other Gospels.

Mark 5:2 says, "And when He came out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit." Concerning this man, verse 7 says, "And crying out with a loud voice, he says, What do I have to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure You by God, do not torment me!" This indicates that the possessed man was usurped by the possessing spirit to such an extent that he was used by the evil spirit to be as that spirit himself.

As soon as the Lord Jesus came into the country of the Gerasenes, the situation there was exposed to Him and His disciples. There was a man possessed by a legion of demons, and the people in that country were in the business of raising hogs (vv. 11-14). What a terrible industry!

In His wisdom, the Slave-Savior took care of two problems at the same time. He cast out the demons from the possessed man, and He cleared up the unclean industry of hog raising. Before He went to the country of the Gerasenes, that place was full of demons and hogs. Would you like to make a home for your family in such a place? To be sure, no normal person would want to settle down in such a country. Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus went there for the purpose of casting out demons and of clearing up the unclean industry. The disciples did not know the Lord's purpose for telling them to pass over to the other side (4:35). The Lord, of course, knew why He wanted to go to the country of the Gerasenes.

God's people should not be in the business of raising hogs. Instead, they should raise sheep. By raising sheep, they would then have the proper sacrifices to offer to God. However, those in the country of the Gerasenes were in the unclean business of raising hogs. The principle is the same among unbelievers today as it was with those in the

land of the Gerasenes. Whenever human beings are occupied by demons, they will be engaged in some form of unclean business or industry. They need the Lord Jesus to come to cast out the demons and clear up all their unclean activities.

Mark 5:13 says, "And having come out, the unclean spirits entered into the hogs, and the herd rushed down the steep slope into the sea, about two thousand, and were choked in the sea." Here we see that there were about two thousand hogs. Surely, there must have been a large number of demons to drive these hogs into the sea. If there had been only twenty demons, each demon would have had to cause a hundred hogs to rush down the slope into the sea. The important point here is the relationship between the demons and the unclean industry. The reason that the unbelievers today are involved in unclean activities and sinful forms of entertainment is that they are under the influence of demons.

HEALING A WOMAN WITH A FLOW OF BLOOD AND RAISING UP A DEAD GIRL

In 5:21-43 we have the record of the healing of a woman with a flow of blood and the raising up of a dead girl. In this record also of the miraculous deeds of the Slave of God in His gospel service, Mark gives us more details than Matthew. It is a vivid presentation, portraying especially the sufferings of the sick, and the Slave-Savior's tenderness and kindness in His saving service toward them. This detailed presentation also indicates that Peter was present at that time.

Mark 5:22 and 23 say, "And one of the synagogue rulers comes, Jairus by name; and seeing Him, he falls at His feet, and entreats Him much, saying, My little daughter is at the point of death; come and lay your hands on her, that she may be healed, and live." The synagogue ruler did not have much faith. This was the reason he begged the Lord Jesus to come to his home. The Lord agreed, and He went with him.

The Merging of Two Cases

According to verse 24, "a great crowd followed Him and pressed upon Him." In verses 25 through 34 we see that a woman who had had a flow of blood twelve years came in the crowd behind the Lord, touched His garment, and was healed. Since this woman's case is merged with the case of the ruler's daughter, and since the twelve years of her sickness are the age of the girl, and both are females, one older, one younger, these cases may be considered a complete case of one person. In this view, the girl was born, so to speak, in the woman's death-sickness and twelve years later died of it. When the woman's death-sickness was healed by the Savior, the girl rose up from death. This signifies that every fallen person is born in the death-sickness of sin and is dead in it (Eph. 2:1). When his death-sickness of sin is dealt with by the Savior's redeeming death (1 Pet. 2:24), he rises up out of death into life (John 5:24-25).

Touched by the Seeking One

Mark 5:28 and 29 say, "For she said, If I may touch even His garments, I shall be healed. And immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she knew in her body that she was cured from the plague." The Greek word translated "healed" in verse 28 may also be rendered "made whole." Literally, the word means saved. Sickness is an oppression exercised by the Devil over the sick. Hence, the Slave-Savior's healing was a saving service rendered to the suffering victim, so that she might enjoy relief and release from the evil one's oppression (Acts 10:38).

Because a crowd was pressing upon the Slave-Savior, it was difficult for the genuine seekers to touch Him. Nevertheless, this woman found a way to touch Him, and when she did so, she was healed. "And immediately, Jesus realizing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, Who touched My garments?" (v. 30). The Lord had the inner sense that His virtue, His power, had gone out of Him and had been

transfused into someone else. This was the reason He asked who it was that had touched His garments. The disciples, being natural and seeing the crowd pressing upon Him, said, "You see the crowd pressing upon You, and You say, Who touched Me?" (v. 31). The pressing crowd received nothing from the Savior, but the woman who touched Him was healed.

The Slave-Savior was God incarnated to be a man (John 1:1, 14). His garments signify His perfect behavior in His humanity, His human virtuous perfection. To touch His garments was actually to touch the Lord Himself in His humanity, in whom God was embodied (Col. 2:9). By such a touch His divine power was transfused into the touching one through the perfection of His humanity and became her healing. God, who dwells in unapproachable light, became touchable in Him through His humanity for her salvation and enjoyment. This was the service of the Slave-Savior as the Slave of God to the sick sinner.

In verse 34 the Lord said to the woman, "Daughter, your faith has healed you; go in peace and be well from your plague." The Slave-Savior's power expressed His deity in healing (v. 30). His word with love and kindness expressed His humanity in sympathy. In this case His deity and His humanity were again merged for His expression.

The Significance of the Woman's Disease

What does this woman's disease signify? Her disease signifies the leaking out of life. The flow of blood signifies the leaking out of the life essence. From the time of man's fall, every descendant of Adam has been sick in this way. As fallen sinners, we all are plagued by the leaking out of our life essence. Because of this plague, every descendant of Adam, every fallen sinner, is dying day by day. As soon as a human being is born, he begins to die. What does it mean to die? To die is to experience the leaking out of the essence of life. If you consider today's society, you will realize that with every sinful person there is the illness of the leaking out of the life essence.

A PORTRAIT OF HUMAN SOCIETY

In 4:35--5:43 we have three things: the subduing of rebellion, the casting out of the demons and the clearing up of the unclean industry of hog raising, and the healing of the woman with the flow of blood. These three matters portray the situation of human society. First, among human beings there is the "stormy sea" of rebellion. In society there is not a peaceful environment. Instead, there is one storm after another. Furthermore, in society the real situation is one of demon possession and "hog raising." In every country people are engaged in some form of unclean industry for the purpose of making a living. The whole world is involved in the industry of hog raising because the world is under the control of legions of possessing demons. In addition, all fallen people are dying; that is, they are suffering from the leaking out of the life essence. These certainly are characteristics of today's human society: rebellion, demon possession with hog raising, and the leaking out of life. This is the reason that we are burdened to go out to preach the gospel. We need the Lord Jesus to come in to subdue the rebellion, to cast out the demons and clear away the hog-raising industry, and to heal the plague of the leaking out of life.

We have seen that the record in 5:21-43 merges the case of the woman with the flow of blood with that of the ruler's daughter. This indicates that these two cases portray the situation of one person. We may say that the girl was born in the woman's death-sickness. This is also the situation of every human being. We all were born in a death-sickness; we all were born to die. According to the record here, when this death-sickness reaches its peak, we die, just as the girl died. The girl was born in the woman's sickness and died in that sickness. But the Slave-Savior came to heal that death-sickness. When the sickness was healed, the girl was revived. This indicates that the woman's healing was the girl's reviving.

The healing of the woman and the raising up of the girl are a picture of our experience in receiving the gospel. When the gospel came to us, we heard it, we received it,

and we were healed of the disease of the leaking out of the life essence. Then after we were healed, we were revived and enlivened. We were born in a death-sickness, but through receiving the gospel we have been healed and made alive.

A DEMONSTRATION OF THE KINGDOM

In 4:35--5:43 we have a demonstration of the kingdom. In this demonstration of the kingdom we see the subduing of rebellion, the casting out of the legion of demons, the clearing up of the unclean industry, the healing of the death-sickness, and the enlivening of the dead one. This means that in 4:35--5:43 rebellion is subdued, demons are cast out, the hog-raising industry is cleared up, the death--sickness is healed, and the dead person is revived. This is the kingdom of God. Where this kingdom is, there cannot be rebellion, demons, hog raising, or death-sickness. Instead, both the old and the young are healed and made alive. This is the kingdom, this is the gospel, and this is also our experience in the church life.

Every human being has the problems of rebellion, demons, hog-raising industry, sickness, and death. These things are found in human society and in every individual. But when the Lord Jesus comes as the seed of the kingdom, all these problems are solved. Then the kingdom of God is here.

We are glad to testify that the Lord Jesus has dealt with the rebellion, with the "stormy sea," in our environment. Now we have a free course to go on with Him. Moreover, once we were possessed by demons and involved with unclean industry. But the demons have been cast out and the hog-raising industry has been cleared up. We can also testify that we have been healed and enlivened, and now we are in the church life, in the kingdom. How we enjoy the gospel service of our Slave-Savior!

LIFE-STUDY Of MARK

MESSAGE EIGHTEEN

THE MOVE OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S GOSPEL SERVICE

(2)

Scripture Reading: Mark 6:1-44

We come in this message to 6:1-44. In this section of the Gospel of Mark we have four matters: the Slave-Savior being despised by the Nazarenes (vv. 1-6), the sending forth of the twelve to preach (vv. 7-13), the martyrdom of the forerunner of the gospel (6:14-29), and the feeding of the five thousand (vv. 30-44).

As we read 6:1-44, it may appear that this section is not impressive concerning the matter of life. It may seem to us that the four incidents recorded here are merely stories. However, we believe that this record is part of the holy Scriptures breathed out by God. Of course, this chapter was written by Mark. Nevertheless, it is an inspired portion of the Word of God. Therefore, we need to look to the Lord for insight in order that we may get into the depths of such a record.

A PICTURE OF REJECTION

First, in 6:1-6 the Lord was despised and rejected by the Nazarenes. Actually, this rejection did not disturb Him or disappoint Him. Even though He left them because of their rejection of Him, this does not mean that He was disappointed or that He gave them up. The Slave-Savior wanted to do something for the Nazarenes, but they would not open to Him. Mark 6:5 says, "And He could not do any work of power there, except to lay His hands upon a few sick people and heal them." The unbelief of the Nazarenes kept the Lord from doing many works of power among them.

Instead of being discouraged and disappointed by the rejection of the Nazarenes, the Lord was encouraged. This is proved by the fact that in 6:7-13 He sent out the twelve to do the same thing He was doing. In particular, "He gave them authority over the unclean spirits" (v. 7). The Lord appointed the twelve to do what He was doing.

In 6:14-29 we have the martyrdom of the forerunner of the gospel, John the Baptist. Humanly speaking, this must have been very disappointing. Actually, the Lord Jesus was not disappointed even by the martyrdom of John the Baptist. Following John's martyrdom, we have the case of the Lord's feeding and satisfying the five thousand. The rejection of the Jews in His country did not disappoint Him; rather, that rejection encouraged Him to send out His disciples. Likewise, the martyrdom of His forerunner did not disappoint Him; instead, it encouraged Him to feed more people.

In 4:35--5:43 we saw how the kingdom of God meets the need of the human condition. As we pointed out, the situation of human society is portrayed in this section of the Gospel of Mark. Human society, and every individual human being as well, is full of "storms" of rebellion, demons, unclean industry (hog raising), death-sickness, and death. This is the actual situation of mankind. But the Slave-Savior has brought the kingdom to us, and the kingdom is the answer to the condition of fallen man. The kingdom subdues rebellion, the kingdom casts out demons, the kingdom clears up the unclean industry, the kingdom heals the sick, and the kingdom raises the dead. In 4:35--5:43 we see a demonstration of the kingdom of God meeting the needs of human society. What a wonderful picture this is!

In 6:1-44 Mark presents a different picture. In this picture we see rejection, hatred, and martyrdom. No matter how much blessing is brought in by the kingdom and the preaching of the gospel, the world still hates and rejects the Slave-Savior and those who work together with

Him. In 6:1-44, therefore, we see the attitude of the worldly people toward the gospel. What shall we do in the face of such an attitude? What should we do when we are despised, rejected, and hated, and when some are even killed? Should we be disappointed? Should we stop preaching the glad tidings and cease from our work for the kingdom? Certainly not! Instead of being disappointed, we should be encouraged by the negative attitude shown by the worldly people toward the gospel.

DESPISED BY THE NAZARENES

Immediately after the Lord did the wonderful work of bringing in the blessings of the kingdom, He came to His own country. Mark 6:1 says, "And He went out from there and came into His own country, and His disciples followed Him." Verses 2 and 3 indicate that He was despised and rejected by the Nazarenes: "And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue; and many hearing were astounded, saying, Where did this man get these things? And what wisdom is given to this man! And such works of power take place through His hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us? And they were stumbled in Him." Here we see that the Nazarenes knew the Slave-Savior according to the flesh, not according to the Spirit (2 Cor. 5:16). They were blinded by their natural knowledge.

The Lord Jesus then said to them, "A prophet is not dishonored except in his own country and among his relatives and in his own house" (v. 4). This word indicates that probably even some of the Lord's own household joined in with the others to despise and reject Him.

A Fulfillment of Prophecy

The word of the blind despisers here may be considered a fulfillment of the prophecy concerning the Slave-Savior in Isaiah 53:2 and 3: "As a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him,

there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men." This was to know Him according to the flesh in His humanity, not according to the Spirit in His deity (Rom. 1:4). In His humanity He was a root out of dry ground, a shoot out of the stump of Jesse, and a Branch out of his roots (Isa. 11:1), a Branch unto David (Jer. 23:5; 33:15), the Branch who was a Man and the Servant of Jehovah (Zech. 3:8; 6:12), out of the seed of David according to the flesh (Rom. 1:3). In His deity He was the Branch of Jehovah for beauty and glory (Isa. 4:2), the Son of God marked out in power according to the Spirit (Rom. 1:4).

A Person of Low Status

Only in the Gospel of Mark is the Lord Jesus called a carpenter. Those who rejected Him asked, "Is not this the carpenter?" They used the word "carpenter" in a despising manner. They were astounded by His teaching, by His wisdom, and by His works of power. But they regarded Him as a person of low status. In today's terms, they might have wondered what qualifications He had, what kind of degree He had.

The word "stumbled" in 6:3 indicates that the Nazarenes rejected the Slave-Savior. Why were they stumbled in Him? They were stumbled in Him because, on the one hand, they heard wonderful words out of His mouth and saw some of His marvelous deeds, and yet, on the other hand, they considered that He did not have a high status or degree. They saw Him as one who was merely a carpenter. Therefore, they were stumbled in Him, and they despised Him.

The principle is the same today. Many Christians care about status or the degrees of others and are eager to look into such things. Some years ago I had a talk with a certain preacher who was promoting himself very much. He asked me how many among us have a doctoral degree. I did not say anything in answer to this question. My silence was an indication that we are not concerned about how many of the church members have a doctoral degree.

This man went on to boast of the number of people in his group who had a Ph.D. This is an illustration of the concern of today's Christians for status and degrees.

Many of those who have a doctoral degree in theology do not have much experience of the living Christ. Neither do they have much of the riches of Christ or the knowledge of the depths of the truths in the Word of God. Their understanding of the Bible, on the contrary, may be very superficial.

The Riches of Christ and the Depths of the Truth

In chapter six of the Gospel of Mark we see the Lord Jesus as a carpenter. He did not have a degree or a high status. But He certainly had the riches of the Triune God, and He also knew the depths of the truth in the Scriptures. His hearers were greatly surprised at His knowledge of the Bible.

The record in chapter six should cause us to ask ourselves what we want and what we value. Do we want an advanced degree or a high social status? In the Lord's recovery we want Jesus, and we want the riches of Christ. Instead of the mere superficial doctrines in the Bible, we want the depths of the divine truths in the Word of God. We would like to follow the Lord Jesus in ministering the riches of the Triune God to people and in presenting to them the depths of the divine truth in the holy Scriptures. This is what we want, and this is what we desire to do.

We should not think that if we have the riches of Christ and the depths of the truth, we shall be welcomed. No, this is not the age when the Lord's truth is welcomed on earth. On the contrary, this is an age when the Lord and His disciples are despised and rejected.

No one can compare with the Lord Jesus. He had the riches of the Triune God, and He had the depths of the truth. But no matter how rich He was or how much He knew the truth in the holy Scriptures, He was despised and rejected instead of welcomed.

Although the Lord has shown us something of the depths of the divine truth in the Word, we in the Lord's

recovery are not welcomed. Often those who have only a superficial knowledge of biblical truth take the lead to reject us and oppose what we are presenting. Some have gone so far as to make false accusations against us. One of these false accusations is that we are pantheistic, that we believe that everything in the universe is God. Others have accused us of being cultic or heretical. But even though we are falsely accused, despised, and rejected, I am not disappointed. Rather, I am encouraged. When the Lord Jesus was rejected, He sent out the twelve. We believe that the more we are rejected, the more the saints in the Lord's recovery will go forth to preach the gospel, present the truth, and minister life.

THE SENDING OUT OF THE TWELVE TO PREACH

In 6:7-13 we have the sending out of the twelve to preach. According to verse 7, the Lord called the twelve to Him and sent them out two by two. Verses 12 and 13 say, "And they went forth and preached that men should repent; and they cast out many demons, and anointed many sick with oil and healed them." Here we see that the twelve were sent out to do three things: preach, cast out demons, and anoint the sick and heal them.

Casting Out Demons by Presenting the Truth

As we consider the three things the twelve were sent forth to do, we shall realize that they correspond to the three matters of preaching the gospel, presenting the truth, and ministering life. The first item--preaching the gospel--is clearly the same and does not require further comment here. However, we need to see the connection between the casting out of demons and the presenting of the truth.

Suppose you say to a person, "You are possessed by demons, and I have come to cast out these demons." If you talk like this, no one will listen to you. In principle, the best way to cast out demons today is to present the truth from the Word of God. If you are talking with an unbeliever, you may present the truth concerning the

Person and work of Christ. If you are speaking with a Christian, you may present to him a particular truth concerning the Christian life. For example, you may present the truth of transformation. In presenting this truth, you may say, "Let us read together 2 Corinthians 3:18." Then read this verse: "We all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit." After reading this verse, you may share a brief word in which you present the truth of transformation. Surely a genuine, seeking Christian will be attracted by the presentation of such a truth.

To present the truth is to cast out demons. Today's society is filled with demons. These demons can be compared to germs. We need to present the truth as the medication to stop the spread of the "germs" of the demons. We need to present the truth not only of the growth in life and of transformation by life, but even the truth of initial salvation.

I realize that in certain Christian books there is some amount of divine riches. But for the most part these riches have been buried or concealed. Rarely have they been touched by believers. The result is that the general situation among Christians today is spiritual poverty. For instance, many genuine Christians do not know what it means to be transformed. They have never heard the truth concerning transformation. Likewise, many do not know the real significance of sanctification. They have not heard that genuine sanctification has two aspects: the positional aspect and the dispositional aspect. These believers may have only a general understanding of sanctification. They actually do not know what it means to be sanctified.

One example of the poverty with respect to the divine truth is the statement, made by a certain theologian, that Christ is not actually in the believers, but is represented in them by the Holy Spirit. According to this man's concept, the Holy Spirit is Christ's representative in the believers. This kind of teaching is far away from the truth of the Scriptures. This is an illustration of how today's "demons"

are prevailing, possessing peoples' minds and covering their understanding.

What shall we do about such a situation? We need to spread as a medication all the truths the Lord has shown us in His recovery and present these truths as an "antidote" to the demonic germs. We can testify that every truth that the Lord has shown us from the Word is a useful medicine to kill these germs. Now in a proper way we need to go forth to present these biblical truths to others.

As we present the truth to others, we need to be wise. We should not say, "You have many germs, and we have come with the medicine that will kill these germs." If you speak to others like this, no doubt they will rise up against you.

It may not always be wise for a medical doctor to tell his patient the full diagnosis. Instead of telling others that they have germs, we should simply present the medicine of the truth to them in the form of nourishing spiritual food that they will receive and enjoy. As they take in this healthy food, they will receive the medicine they need to deal with the germs within them.

Let us use the truth concerning sanctification as an illustration. You may say to a fellow believer, "Do you realize that according to the New Testament sanctification has two aspects? In the Bible we have positional sanctification and dispositional sanctification." If you present the truth concerning sanctification properly, others will be receptive. They may say, "Yes, what you are telling me is true. When I believed in the Lord Jesus, I was sanctified positionally. Now I see that dispositionally I have not been sanctified very much. As far as my disposition is concerned, I am not yet holy; instead, in many aspects I am common."

Let us all learn to be good "waiters," those who serve others with the nourishing food of the truth. Let us learn to be skillful in presenting the biblical truths. In today's situation, the way to cast out demons is to present the truth.

Anointing the Sick by Ministering Life

We have seen that all those in the Lord's recovery should go forth to preach the gospel, present the truth, and minister life. We have seen that to present the truth is to cast out demons. Now we need to go on to see that to minister life to others is equal to anointing the sick with oil and healing them.

Many of our fellow Christians are spiritually sick because of the lack of nourishment. How can we nourish them? The best way to nourish them is to give them a testimony of our experience of Christ. A genuine testimony of our spiritual experience will be the best food.

Our testifying to others is also our anointing of them. The real need today is not the outward laying on of hands, as practiced among many in the charismatic or Pentecostal movement. The need is for us to testify of our experience of Christ. You may testify how you have been saved and captured by the Lord, how the Lord satisfies you, and how you experience and enjoy Him day by day. Through this kind of testimony others will receive a rich anointing. Through this anointing they will be nourished and healed in a spiritual way. Therefore, to minister life to others is to nourish them and anoint them with our testimony.

The Triune God Becoming Our Daily Enjoyment

We all need more experience of the enjoyment of the Lord. Then we need to testify to others of our enjoyment.

To many Christians, the thought of enjoying the Lord may sound strange. Many have never heard that it is possible for the Lord to be enjoyed by us. They may say, "What do you mean that you enjoy the Lord? God is great and mighty. How can we presume to enjoy Him?" Instead of arguing about this, simply give others a testimony of how the Triune God has become your daily enjoyment. Such a testimony will anoint them, nourish them, and feed them.

We all should follow the Lord and the twelve to preach the gospel, cast out demons, and heal the sick. I hope that we all shall go forth to preach, cast out demons by presenting the truth, and anoint and heal others by giving

them our testimony. In this way, we shall feed others, anoint them, and minister life to them.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE NINETEEN

THE MOVE OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S GOSPEL SERVICE

(3)

Scripture Reading: Mark 6:1-56

In the foregoing message we saw that in 6:1-6 the Slave-Savior was despised by the Nazarenes, and that in 6:7-13 He sent out the twelve to preach. We pointed out that just as the twelve preached, cast out demons, and anointed the sick, we today need to preach the gospel, present the truth in order to cast out demons, and minister life to others by anointing them with our testimonies of the experience of Christ. In this message we shall go on to consider 6:14-56, a portion of the Gospel of Mark that covers four matters: the martyrdom of the forerunner of the gospel (vv. 14-29), the feeding of the five thousand (vv. 30-44), the Lord's walking on the sea (vv. 45-52), and the Slave-Savior's healing everywhere (vv. 53-56).

THE MARTYRDOM OF THE FORERUNNER OF THE GOSPEL

We should not think that if we preach the gospel, present the truth, and minister life, we shall be welcomed. No, like John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus, and the disciples, we should expect to be rejected also.

After the Lord was rejected by the Nazarenes, He sent out the twelve. Then after the sending out of the twelve, John the Baptist, the forerunner of the gospel, was martyred. The martyrdom of John the Baptist indicates Satan's hatred, expressed by the darkness and injustice of the worldly people in power, toward the faithful forerunner of the Slave-Savior.

How did it come to pass that John the Baptist was executed? This execution was carried out at the request of

Herodias. Mark 6:17-19 tells us that Herod "had sent and seized John and bound him in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of Philip his brother, because he had married her. For John had said to Herod, It is not lawful for you to have the wife of your brother. And Herodias had it in for him and wanted to kill him, and could not." John was murdered by the darkness of politics, by the darkness of those who were in power. With Herod there was no justice. Herod had committed fornication with Herodias, the wife of his brother, and this woman hated John the Baptist.

Herod knew that John was a righteous and holy man, and to a certain extent he had regard for him. "Herod feared John, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man, and kept him safe. And hearing him he was much perplexed, and heard him gladly" (v. 20). It certainly was unjust for this righteous and holy man to be bound in prison.

Verse 21 says that "an opportune day came, when Herod on his birthday made a banquet for his great men and the captains and leading men of Galilee." During this banquet, the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, pleasing Herod and his guests. Drugged and deceived by her dancing, Herod said to her, "Ask of me whatever you want, and I will give it to you" (v. 22). Following the instructions of her mother, Herodias, she asked for the head of John the Baptist. Therefore, as a result of hatred, darkness, and the indulgence in lust, the righteous and holy forerunner of the gospel was put to death. This is a vivid picture of the rejection by the world of the gospel.

In 4:35--5:43 we have a picture of today's human society. According to this picture, society is full of rebellion, demons, unclean industry, disease, and death.

In 6:1-29 we see another kind of picture, a picture of rejection, injustice, and hatred toward the gospel and toward those who are handling the gospel. Since this is the situation, we should not expect to be welcomed by the

world. We should never expect to be honored or highly regarded. There can be no such thing for those who serve the Lord in the gospel. If we are faithful to the Lord in His ministry, we shall be despised, and we shall suffer rejection, injustice, hatred, and perhaps even martyrdom. However, we should not be disappointed by the world's rejection and hatred. On the contrary, we should be encouraged by it.

FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND

After the forerunner of the gospel was martyred, the Slave-Savior said to His disciples, "Come you yourselves privately to a place in the wilderness and rest a while" (v. 31). In order to rest, "they went away in the boat to a place in the wilderness privately." Nevertheless, a great crowd followed them. On the one hand, in this chapter we have rejection, hatred, and injustice. On the other hand, the crowd was still following the Lord.

Mark 6:34 says, "And coming out from the boat, He saw a great crowd and had compassion on them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things." His expression of compassion exhibited the Slave-Savior's virtue in His humanity, which was carried out by the power of His deity.

When the disciples suggested to the Lord that He send the crowd away, He answered, "You give them something to eat" (vv. 35-37). The Slave-Savior had compassion on the people and wanted to feed them.

Five Loaves and Two Fishes

We all know that the Lord used five loaves and two fishes to feed the five thousand (vv. 38-42). John 6:9 tells us that these five loaves were barley loaves. In figure, barley typifies the resurrected Christ (Lev. 23:10). Thus the barley loaves signify Christ in resurrection as food to us. The loaves are of the vegetable life, signifying the generating aspect of Christ's life, but the fishes are of the animal life, signifying the redeeming aspect of Christ's life. To satisfy our spiritual hunger, we need Christ's

generating life as well as His redeeming life. Both of these aspects are signified by small items--loaves and fishes.

Offering What We Have

The five loaves and two fishes also indicate that whatever we have of the Lord we need to bring to Him so that it may become a great blessing to many others. The Lord often uses what we offer to Him to provide for the need of others.

We should not look down on our experience and say, "We don't have much of the Lord. We have not experienced much of Him." Look at what the Lord can do with five loaves and two fishes. The Lord does not require more than we have. If we give Him what we have, He will bless it. When we present what we have to Him, He will pour out the blessing, bestowing His unlimited blessing on what we present to Him.

Verse 43 says, "And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish." Here we see the result of the Lord's blessing. This not only displayed the Slave-Savior's power of deity as the Creator, who calls the things not being as being (Rom. 4:17), but also signified the bountiful and inexhaustible supply of His divine life (Eph. 3:8; Phil. 1:19).

I am burdened that we would be impressed with the pictures in 4:35--5:43 and 6:1-44. We should not be bothered or disappointed by the fact that the number of those in the Lord's recovery in this country is still rather small. It is our destiny to be despised and rejected. We may even say that God has predestinated us for this. Even the God-man was despised and rejected. If He was rejected, then we should not expect anything different. Furthermore, the Lord's forerunner, John the Baptist, who was a landmark in history, was imprisoned and martyred. If such a thing could happen to John the Baptist, then we should not expect something better.

We should not be frightened by the fact that it is our destiny to be rejected, hated, imprisoned, and even martyred. Instead of discouraging us from taking the

Lord's way in His recovery, this should encourage us to present what we have to the Lord. We may have only five loaves and two fishes, but we can give this to Him for His blessing. If we give the Lord what we have, He will bestow His blessing on what we offer to Him. The result will be that others will be fed and satisfied, and there will be twelve baskets left over.

No matter how much rejection, hatred, and injustice there may be, we nevertheless have the kingdom life today. In this kingdom life people are healed, nourished, fed, and satisfied, and there is an abundance left over. This is an accurate picture of today's church life.

A PORTRAIT OF THE CHURCH LIFE

The church life is portrayed by the pictures in 4:35--5:43 and 6:1-44. In the first picture we have storms, demons, hogs, disease, and death. Nevertheless, into such a deplorable situation the Slave-Savior comes to subdue the rebellion, cast out the demons, clear up the unclean industry, heal the sickness, and raise the dead. As a result, we all are healed, enlivened, and revived.

According to the second picture, we shall be despised and experience rejection, hatred, injustice, and martyrdom. Nevertheless, even in such a situation the crowd is satisfied. Everyone is fed and made happy. We offer everything we have to the Lord, and then we receive from Him much more than we offered. This is the kingdom life, the church life. We are very much blessed to be in the kingdom life today. Although we seem to lose everything, actually in the Lord we gain everything.

In chapter four of the Gospel of Mark we have the seed of the kingdom. In a previous message we considered the history of the growth and development of this seed. We saw that from God's point of view the kingdom is the development of Himself as the seed sown into us. But from Satan's point of view the kingdom is the subduing of rebellion. This is the significance of the record of the subduing of the storm in chapter four coming immediately after the Lord's teaching concerning the kingdom of God.

Then in chapter five we have the demonstration of the kingdom in the Slave-Savior's casting out demons, clearing up the unclean industry, and healing the death-sickness. By the coming of one Person, Jesus Christ, God incarnate, five categories of negative things are dealt with: rebellion, demons, unclean industry, disease, and death. Praise the Lord for this wonderful picture of the kingdom of God!

A second picture of the kingdom is portrayed in 6:1-44. In this picture we see the attitude of the world toward the Slave-Savior. Valuing those with a high status, the worldly people despise and reject the gospel. In the account of the execution of John the Baptist, we see the darkness and injustice of worldly politics. This is truly a picture of today's world.

The world despises the gospel and rejects it. However, the Lord Jesus is not disappointed by this. Instead, as the rejected One, He sent out the twelve. Then after the martyrdom of the forerunner of the gospel, the Lord gained the five thousand, fed them, and satisfied them.

After the enemy kills one, the Lord produces five thousand. This has been the history in the Lord's move throughout the centuries, and I believe this will continue to be repeated among us.

WALKING ON THE SEA

In 6:45-52 we have the record of the Slave-Savior's walking on the sea. Mark 6:45 and 46 say, "And immediately He constrained His disciples to get into the boat and go before to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He dismissed the crowd. And having said farewell to them, He went away to the mountain to pray." The Lord prayed in order to fellowship with God, seeking His will and pleasure for His gospel service. The Slave-Savior did not do this gospel service by Himself as one independent of God and according to His own will. Rather, He carried out the gospel service according to God's will and pleasure by being one with God to fulfill His purpose.

Verse 48 says, "And seeing them distressed in rowing, for the wind was contrary to them, He comes toward them about the fourth watch of the night, walking on the sea;

and He would have passed by them." In 4:38 the Slave-Savior was sleeping in a boat beaten by a windstorm that threatened His followers. Here He is walking on the sea at the same time that His followers are distressed in rowing by the waves of the sea. These incidents indicate that the Slave-Savior, as the Creator and Ruler of the universe (Job 9:8), was not bothered by any circumstances and that He would care for the troubles of His followers in their journey following Him.

When the disciples saw the Lord walking on the sea, they cried out and were troubled. But He said to them, "Take courage, it is I; do not fear! And He went up to them into the boat, and the wind ceased" (v. 50-51). This miracle not only testifies that the Lord is the Creator and Ruler of the heavens and the earth, but also indicates that He cares for the hardships of His followers while they follow Him in the way. When we have the Lord in our boat, the wind ceases. The record of the two miracles recorded in this chapter implies that at the time Christ was being rejected, He and His followers were in the wilderness and on the stormy sea. Nevertheless, He was able to provide for their need and carry them through hardships.

HEALING EVERYWHERE

In 6:53-56 we have a brief record of the Slave-Savior's healing everywhere. He and His disciples crossed over the sea and came to Gennesaret. Immediately the people recognized Him and began to bring to Him those who were ill. Verse 56 says, "And wherever He entered into villages, or into cities, or into the fields, they laid those who were sick in the market places, and entreated Him that they might touch if even the fringe of His garment; and as many as touched Him were healed." Christ's garment signifies His righteous deeds, and the fringe signifies the heavenly ruling (Num. 15:38-39). Out of Christ's heavenly-ruled deeds is the virtue that becomes the healing power. As many as touched Him in this way were healed.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE TWENTY

THE MOVE OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S GOSPEL SERVICE

(4)

Scripture Reading: Mark 7:1-23

The Gospel of Mark was written in a progressive way. In Mark we have a record that is according to the sequence of events that took place in the life of the Lord Jesus. We believe that it was according to God's sovereignty that everything that happened in the Lord's life took place in a particular order and in a progressive way.

PHARISEES AND SCRIBES QUESTIONING THE LORD

In 6:45-52 we have a record of the Lord's walking on the sea. Then in 6:53-56 we have an account of the Lord's healing everywhere. The situation at that time was wonderful. The Lord and His disciples had crossed over the stormy sea, and people everywhere were enjoying His healing.

Then, all of a sudden, certain religious "spies," certain Pharisees and scribes, "gathered together to Him when they had come from Jerusalem" (7:1). These learned ones, leaders in the Jewish religion, came to the Lord purposely to spy Him out. Jerusalem was far to the south, and the Lord Jesus was in the north, in Galilee. Nevertheless, the Pharisees and scribes came all this way in order to observe what the Lord Jesus was doing.

Mark 7:2 says that the Pharisees and scribes who came to spy on the Lord Jesus saw "some of His disciples eating bread with unclean hands, that is, unwashed." Verses 3 and 4 explain that the Pharisees, holding the tradition of the elders, do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands. When they come from the market places, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves.

According to verse 5, the Pharisees and scribes questioned the Lord Jesus: "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unclean hands?" The word "elders" here, as in verse 3, refers to the ancients, to people of previous generations. The Pharisees and scribes thought that they had ground to criticize the Lord, because His disciples were practicing something that was contrary to the tradition the Jews had received from their forefathers.

MAN'S INWARD CONDITION

As we read this Gospel, it may seem that what is recorded in 6:45--7:23 is merely a story. In this portion we are told how the Lord Jesus passed through the stormy sea, how He healed many people, and how He was questioned by the Pharisees and scribes. However, if we look to the Lord for His enlightenment concerning this section of Mark, we shall realize that, by the time of chapter seven, there was the need for the Lord to deal with man's inward condition. The things that took place before chapter seven are related to man's outward situation, not to his inward condition. The gospel, however, is for our entire being. The problem of man's inward condition is much more serious than that of his outward situation. Actually, our inward condition is the root of all problems.

In the first six chapters of the Gospel of Mark many things are covered. But thus far nothing has touched the inward condition of fallen mankind. Now in chapter seven the questioning of the Lord by the Pharisees and scribes gave Him the opportunity to speak concerning man's inward situation. The intention of the Pharisees and scribes was to condemn the Slave-Savior. But they were used by God in His sovereignty. Without them, the Lord may not have had the opportunity to talk about man's inward condition.

The Pharisees and scribes certainly did not have any intention to touch the inward situation of man. They were concerned with outward formality, with outward washing and cleansing. They were not interested in anything of the inward condition of man. Nevertheless, they gave the Lord an excellent opportunity and even opened the way for Him

to unveil man's inward condition. The Lord Jesus exposed man's inward situation not only to the Pharisees and scribes, but also to the crowd and especially to His disciples (v. 17).

In 7:1-23 we have three groups of people: the entire crowd, including the Pharisees and scribes; a portion of the crowd (v. 14), and the Lord's disciples, His intimate followers. Verse 17 says, "And when He entered into a house from the crowd, His disciples questioned Him." Then the Lord unveiled to them in a full way man's inward condition. Eventually it was the Lord's intimate followers who received the benefit. They came to see clearly not only man's outward situation, but also man's inward condition.

As a divine-human Person, the Lord Jesus heals man's situation. This healing takes care not only of our outward sickness, but especially of our inward sickness. Concerning this, in chapter seven of the Gospel of Mark we have an important step in the Slave-Savior's gospel service. As we have seen, before chapter seven the Lord's gospel service was concerned with man's outward situation. But the Pharisees and scribes, as opposers, provided the Lord an excellent opportunity to touch the inward condition of fallen man.

In chapter six we see opposition and rejection. This chapter records the martyrdom of John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Slave-Savior, a martyrdom that was motivated by the hatred of Herodias for John. At the end of this chapter, the Lord crossed the sea and then came into a country where the people received His healing. The Lord's disciples must have been happy and excited over what was happening. Wherever the Lord went, He was welcomed and people were healed. If we had been among the followers of the Slave-Savior at that time, we certainly would have been happy about the situation.

We may say that the Pharisees and scribes in chapter seven were professional opposers. Probably before they came down from Jerusalem to the place where the Lord Jesus was, they were trained to spy on Him in order to have some ground to arrest Him and put Him to death. The Pharisees and scribes may have said to one another,

"This one is a devil, and we must get rid of him. We must find something to convince the Roman government to put this man to death." These trained, professional spies thought they had ground to accuse the Lord Jesus in the matter of eating with unwashed hands. Actually, they simply opened up the way for Him to speak concerning the condition of man's heart.

We may compare the Lord Jesus in chapter seven to a surgeon operating on a patient. We may also say that the professional opposers prepared the "surgery room" for the Lord's "operation." Then He opened up man's heart and exposed its inward condition.

THE PHARISEES AND SCRIBES REBUKED BY THE LORD

The Lord said to the Pharisees and scribes, "Isaiah prophesied rightly concerning you, hypocrites, as it is written, This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me; and in vain they are worshipping Me, teaching as teachings the commandments of men" (vv. 6-7). Here the Lord seemed to be saying, "You hypocrites only take care of the outward situation. You do not take care of man's inward condition. Whether you wash your hands or not before eating does not mean anything. What matters is your inward condition. Let me open your heart and expose its condition." In this chapter the Lord goes on to expose the evil condition of the heart of fallen man.

The Pharisees and scribes came for the purpose of finding fault with the Lord Jesus. But the outcome was that they were rebuked by Him. The Lord is genuine; He never pretends. On the one hand, He is kind and has compassion on the seeking ones. But on the other hand, as indicated by the record in chapter seven, He was frank with the professional opposers, calling them hypocrites. In verses 8 and 9 the Lord went on to say to them, "Leaving the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men....You nicely set aside the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition." Furthermore, in verse 13 He said that they were "invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have delivered; and many such similar things you do."

Here the Lord seemed to be saying, "You hypocrites come to find fault with Me. But I take this opportunity to expose you. You ask why My disciples do not keep the traditions. I ask why you invalidate the word of God by your traditions. You serve God with your mouth, but I shall expose what is in your heart."

In verses 10 through 12 the Lord said to the Pharisees and scribes, "Moses said, Honor your father and your mother; and, He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him surely die. But you say, If a man says to his father or mother, corban (that is, a gift), whatever you may be profited from me, you no longer allow him to do anything for his father or mother." By this we see that the Pharisees and scribes were wrong not only in the worship of God, but even in the way they dealt with their parents. Concerning the matter of honoring father and mother, they invalidated the commandment of God through the keeping of their tradition.

The word "corban" in verse 11 is from the Hebrew word *qorban,* an offering, a gift, signifying anything offered to God. This word is used a number of times in the first seven chapters of Leviticus, chapters that speak of the different kinds of offerings. Actually, the English word "offering" as used in Leviticus 1--7 is a translation of the Hebrew word *qorban.*

The Lord rebuked the Pharisees and scribes for being wrong in the matter of honoring their parents and taking care of them. They actually taught others to neglect to honor their parents, and in so doing they invalidated the commandments of God. A person should spend a certain amount to take care of his parents. But according to the Pharisees and scribes, if that person made a corban to God, an offering to God, there was no need for him to take care of his parents. Regarding this tradition, the Lord Jesus strongly rebuked the Pharisees and scribes, telling them that they were invalidating the word of God by their tradition.

The Lord's bold rebuke silenced the professional opposers. He had publicly exposed them. What a shame this was to the Pharisees and scribes, who were

knowledgeable in the Mosaic law and probably regarded themselves as superior to the Galileans. But in front of the crowd the Lord exposed them and rebuked them, calling them hypocrites. He said that they worshipped God with their mouths, but that their hearts were far away from Him. He even exposed them for invalidating the law of God, for making the law of none effect. He exposed them for not only cheating God, but also for cheating their parents. What a severe rebuke! By this rebuke the Pharisees and scribes were muzzled. No doubt they disappeared silently from the scene.

THE THINGS THAT DEFILE A MAN

After the Pharisees and scribes disappeared, the Lord called the crowd to Him again and said to them, "Hear Me, all of you, and understand. There is nothing outside of a man which entering into him can defile him, but the things coming out of a man are the things which defile a man" (vv. 14-15). Here the Lord is indicating that the things that defile a man are the things that come out from his heart. Therefore, we should not be concerned for outward things, because these things cannot defile us. Instead, we should be very concerned about the inward things, for these are the things that defile us.

Verse 17 says, "And when He entered into a house from the crowd, His disciples questioned Him concerning the parable." Not understanding the Lord's word, the disciples asked Him to explain it to them. The Lord said, "Are you also in the same manner without understanding? Do you not perceive that everything from outside entering into a man cannot defile him, because it does not enter into his heart, but into the stomach, and goes out into the drain, making all foods clean?...That which goes out of a man, that defiles a man" (vv. 18-20). According to the Lord's word here, it is what comes out of man's heart that defiles him. Jeremiah said that the condition of man's heart is incurable (Jer. 17:9). The heart of fallen man is corrupt, full of defiling germs.

In verses 21 and 22 the Lord goes on to list a number of defiling things in the heart of man: "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil reasonings, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, a wicked eye, blasphemy, arrogance, foolishness." Then in verse 23 the Lord concludes, "All these wicked things proceed from within, and they defile a man." The wicked things which proceed from within are the evil issues of man's fallen and sinful nature (Rom. 7:18).

We need to apply the Lord's word here to ourselves and realize that whatever comes out from us is defiling. Nothing that has its source in us is clean. Naturally speaking, we are a constitution of evil things.

It is a great matter that in chapter seven of Mark the Slave-Savior in His gospel service comes to the matter of analyzing the inward condition of man. The Lord did this for the benefit of His disciples, His intimate followers. He wanted them to know that anything that proceeds out of their heart defiles others. The Lord seemed to be saying to them, "Beware of defiling others, and beware of being defiled by others. No one among you is clean. No matter how much you may wash your hands, you cannot cleanse your heart. The things that defile you are the things in your heart. You need to see that whatever comes out of your heart is unclean and is defiling to yourselves and to others."

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE TWENTY-ONE

THE MOVE OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S GOSPEL SERVICE

(6)

Scripture Reading: Mark 7:1-23

In the foregoing message we pointed out that in chapter seven the opposition of the Pharisees and scribes gave the Lord Jesus an excellent opportunity to expose man's inward condition, the condition of man's heart.

In 7:15 the Lord said to the crowd, "There is nothing outside of a man which entering into him can defile him, but the things coming out of a man are the things which defile a man." When He had entered into a house, His disciples questioned Him concerning this saying. Then the Lord went on to say, "Are you also in the same manner without understanding? Do you not perceive that everything from outside entering into a man cannot defile him, because it does not enter into his heart, but into the stomach, and goes out into the drain, making all foods clean?" (vv. 18-19). In verse 19 the Lord refers to the heart. In verse 20 He continues, "That which goes out of a man, that defiles a man." Following this, the Lord gives a list of some of the evil things that proceed out of man's heart (vv. 21-22).

A CONSTITUTION OF EVILS

In 7:21 and 22 the Lord says, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil reasonings, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, a wicked eye, blasphemy, arrogance, foolishness." Here the Lord designates that part of man from which evil things proceed--the heart. Man's heart is rotten, corrupt. The heart of fallen man is corrupt to such

an extent that it is incurable (Jer. 17:9). Therefore, we should not think that we are good in our heart. Perhaps you are good outwardly, but there is nothing good in your heart. For this reason, Paul could confess that nothing good dwelt within him (Rom. 7:18).

In this chapter the depth of man's condition is exposed by the Slave-Savior. In our preaching of the gospel we also should touch the condition of man's heart. However, much of today's gospel preaching fails to do this.

We need to see from the Lord's word in chapter seven of the Gospel of Mark what our inward condition really is. The actual condition of our heart is that it is a constitution of evils. Because our heart is corrupt, we should never think that it is good. To believe that our heart is good is to be deceived and to believe a lie. Anyone who thinks that he has a good heart is deceived. Our heart is corrupt, and we should not have any trust in it.

In verse 21 the Lord Jesus uses the word "proceed." According to this verse, evil reasonings, fornications, thefts, and murders proceed out of the heart of men. The word "proceed" implies continuation. Not only do evil things come out of man's heart; they continually proceed out from his heart, coming forth one after another.

Evil Reasonings

The first item listed by the Slave-Savior as proceeding out of man's heart is evil reasonings. Reasonings, of course, come from the mind. The New Testament tells us that the mind of fallen man is reprobate, disapproved (Rom. 1:28). Because man's mind is reprobate, nothing that comes out of it can be accepted by God or justified by Him. Rather, the reasonings of the fallen mind of man are condemned and rejected by God. Because our fallen mind is reprobate, our reasonings are evil, no matter how good they may seem to be.

Fornications and Thefts

After evil reasonings, the Lord lists fornications. We need to be impressed with the fact that the Lord did not speak of these things in a careless way. On the contrary, knowing man's inward situation, He speaks in a careful

way of what proceeds out of man's heart. First come the evil reasonings and then fornications. This indicates that the evil reasonings are related to fornication.

The third item in verse 21 is "thefts." Some may claim that they have never stolen anything. In fact, everyone has committed theft in one way or other. Actually, fornication itself is a kind of theft, for it is a matter of obtaining something improperly. To steal is to take something illegally. In principle, fornication is in this category. Fornication is a matter of following an illegal course, a course not ordained by God. Anything that is taken illegally is a matter not only of theft but also in the principle of fornication.

Although we are saved ones, children of God, our fallen nature, including our old heart, is still with us. In particular, the two evil things--fornication and theft--are crouching behind us, waiting for an opportunity to ruin us. Throughout the centuries, many Christians, including pastors and ministers, have fallen into the snare of fornication. Even many of those who love the Lord Jesus have been caught in this way. Many have disregarded the fact that their heart is evil. As a result, they failed to keep a proper distance from the opposite sex and fell into fornication.

In a real sense, the church life is a social life. Males and females often have contact with one another. Because of the danger of fornication, we need to keep ourselves at a proper distance from the opposite sex.

I wish to emphasize the fact that even though we have been regenerated, according to the teaching of the New Testament, our old nature remains with us. We should never forget this fact. Until our body has been redeemed, transfigured, our fallen nature will be with us. No matter how holy you may be, you need to realize that you still have your fallen nature. This is the reason I advise the saints not to be in a room alone with a member of the opposite sex.

I appreciate and respect this country very much. Nevertheless, I am bothered by the fact that males and females are too free in their contact with one another.

Many women are not aware of the danger of being defiled. If they had such a consciousness, they would keep themselves at a proper distance from the opposite sex.

As we have indicated, in our preaching of the gospel we need to touch the condition of man's heart. In particular, we need to expose the fact that in principle all fallen people are fornicators and thieves. When I was preaching the gospel in China, I often used to say, "You ladies and gentlemen appear to be very nice. But suppose I could take an x-ray picture of what you are inside. If I did this, you would not have the boldness to remain here. You know that you are evil inside and unclean. Perhaps even as you are listening to this message, you are reasoning concerning evil things. You have the appearance of a lady or gentleman, but in your inward condition you are filthy." It is a fact that evil reasonings proceed out of man's heart, and these reasonings are related to fornication and theft.

It is very significant that in chapter seven of Mark the Slave-Savior in His gospel service touches the inward condition of man. We should remember that the Lord's word in 7:21-23 is a word uttered not to the crowd but to His intimate followers. It seems that here the Lord is saying, "Peter, John, James--you all need to realize that out from your hearts proceed evil reasonings, fornications, and thefts."

Murders and Adulteries

The next item mentioned by the Lord as proceeding out of man's heart is murder. Many murders are committed for the sake of fornication or theft. Fornication and theft often issue in murder.

Next, the Lord goes on to speak of adulteries. There is a difference between adultery and fornication. If a married person commits sin with another married person, that is adultery. But if an unmarried person commits sin with another unmarried one, that is fornication. Here the Lord speaks concerning both fornication and adultery.

Covetousness

The Lord goes on to speak of covetousness. Paul tells us that he could overcome other things, but he could not overcome covetousness (Rom. 7:7-8). He could keep all of the Ten Commandments except the commandment concerning covetousness. "For I had not known coveting except the law had said, You shall not covet. But sin, taking occasion through the commandment, wrought in me coveting of every kind" (Rom. 7:7-8). The reason Paul could not fulfill the commandment about covetousness is that this commandment is related to man's inward condition, whereas the other commandments are concerned with outward conduct. Covetousness, like the other evil things mentioned by the Lord, proceeds out of the corruption of man's heart.

Deceit and Licentiousness

In 7:22 the Lord goes on to speak of wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, a wicked eye, blasphemy, arrogance, and foolishness. The Greek word rendered "deceit" may also be translated "guile."

Fornication, adultery, and licentiousness are of one category. We have pointed out the difference between adultery and fornication. Those who indulge either in fornication or in adultery are licentious persons. The Lord certainly knows man's actual situation. This is the reason He uses these particular words.

A Wicked Eye and Blasphemy

We may wonder what a wicked eye has to do with our heart. It may seem that the eye cannot be in the heart. However, if we consider this matter, we shall see that sometimes in our heart we may have a wicked eye. According to the Lord's word, a wicked eye is something that proceeds out from our heart.

In verse 22, a wicked eye is followed by blasphemy. A wicked eye is toward other persons, but blasphemy is mainly directed toward God.

Arrogance and Foolishness

The last two items mentioned by the Lord are arrogance and foolishness. Arrogance is even stronger than pride. Foolishness here denotes nonsense. Much of what proceeds out of our heart is foolishness, nonsense.

A DIAGNOSIS OF OUR INWARD CONDITION

In 7:21 and 22 the Lord lists thirteen items. Paul gives a much longer list in his description of fallen mankind in chapter one of Romans. But the thirteen items listed by the Lord are sufficient to describe the actual condition and situation of the heart of fallen man. We need to realize that all these things are still in our old, corrupted heart. The condition of our heart is that described by the Lord in Mark 7.

When I was young, I loved the Gospel of John because it is a book on life. According to John 10:10, the Lord Jesus came that we may have life and have it abundantly. In the Gospel of Mark we may not find the word "life," but in this book we have life in actuality, if not in terminology. For example, the seed in Mark 4 implies life. The Lord came to sow the seed of the kingdom. For Him to sow the seed means that He imparts life. The sowing of the seed is the imparting of life. What we have in Mark, therefore, is a record concerning life written in a practical way.

In chapter seven Mark does not simply tell us that man's heart is evil. To talk like that would be to speak in a doctrinal way. What Mark does is record the word of the Lord Jesus concerning what comes out of our heart. This is to deal with the heart in a practical way. From this we see that Mark is not a book on doctrine; instead, Mark is a book on practicality, on actuality.

In chapter seven of the Gospel of Mark the Lord purposely lists the evil things that come out of our heart. None of us is an exception. Chapter seven is outstanding in that it touches man's inward condition.

In His gospel service the Slave-Savior took the opportunity afforded Him by the opposers to expose, analyze and diagnose man's inward condition. In 7:21 and 22 we have the diagnosis of the condition of our heart. Every human being has a heart problem, and the Lord's

diagnosis of the condition of man's heart applies to each one of us.

Concluding His diagnosis of man's heart, in 7:23 the Lord says, "All these wicked things proceed from within, and they defile a man." The wicked things that proceed from within are the evil issues of man's fallen and sinful nature (Rom. 7:18). Not only are wicked things in our heart; these things proceed out from within us. This means that there is a procession of wicked things out from the heart of man, a procession that is defiling.

When worldly people come back to work after the weekend, they often speak about the evil things they have been indulging in. Their conversation is a procession of evil things from within their heart. They may be educated and well-mannered, but from within their heart and out of their mouth comes a procession of evil, defiling things.

The Lord's gospel is able to deal with the condition of man's heart. In chapter seven, however, we have only the diagnosis; we do not yet have the dealing with the heart in a positive way. In this chapter the Lord opens our heart, exposes it, and then seems to leave us on the "operating table." But chapter seven is not the end of the book. In the remaining chapters of the Gospel of Mark we shall see how the Lord is the "heart expert" who knows man's heart and how He takes care of the condition of man's heart.

The picture portrayed in chapter seven is very different from the pictures in the preceding chapters. Before chapter seven, we have pictures of society, of the world. But in chapter seven we have a picture of our inward condition, a picture of the inward situation of our heart.

THREE CRUCIAL MATTERS

The Ten Commandments

If we study 7:1-23 carefully, we shall see that the

Lord's word here actually covers all of the Ten Commandments. The Lord even uses the word "commandment" in verse 8: "Leaving the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men." Then in verse 9 He

goes on to say, "You nicely set aside the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition." In verse 13 the Lord speaks of the word of God, pointing out that the religious ones were invalidating the word of God by their tradition. In this portion of the Gospel of Mark the commandments are the word of God.

As we study this portion of Mark, we see that here the Lord's word is concerned with the worship of God. The first four of the Ten Commandments are related to the worship of God. The fifth commandment is about honoring our parents. In verse 10 the Lord specifically refers to the commandment to honor our father and mother. The remainder of the Lord's word recorded here deals with the last five commandments, the commandments about fornication, theft, murder, false witness, and covetousness.

If we consider all these matters together, we shall see that the Lord's conversation with the Pharisees and scribes, the crowd, and the disciples was based on the Ten Commandments. For the Pharisees and scribes to invalidate the word of God meant that they were invalidating the Ten Commandments. It is important for us to see that in this section of the Gospel of Mark the Ten Commandments are covered by the Lord's word.

Tradition and Man's Heart

Mark 7:1-23 actually covers three crucial matters: the commandment of the Lord, the word of God; the tradition of man; and the real condition of man's heart. The condition of man's heart is always exposed by the word of God, or the commandments of God. But the tradition of man always covers up the condition of man's heart. For this reason, wherever tradition is maintained there is hypocrisy. Instead of exposing the real situation of man, tradition covers it. The Lord even says that the Pharisees and scribes "nicely set aside the commandment of God" so that they could keep their tradition (v. 9).

Apparently traditions are good. Actually they are subtle, and those who maintain such traditions are hypocrites. In religion today there is much hypocrisy because there is so much tradition to cover up man's real

condition. But the word of God always exposes man's inward situation.

In this short portion of the Gospel of Mark, the Ten Commandments are applied. The Lord Jesus is actually repeating the Ten Commandments and using them to expose man's inward condition. Whereas the Pharisees and scribes were concerned with the washing of hands, there is no mention of such washing in the Ten Commandments. What is important in the application of the Ten Commandments is not that we wash our hands, but that we come to worship God with a sincere heart, honor our parents, and faithfully carry out our duties. God's commandments do not expose the dirt on man's hands; they expose the filthiness in man's heart. Therefore, the Lord repeats the Ten Commandments in order to uncover the actual condition of man's heart. I encourage you to look into this portion of the Gospel of Mark according to these points.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE TWENTY-TWO

THE MOVE OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S GOSPEL SERVICE

(6)

Scripture Reading: Mark 7:24-30

The Gospel of Mark is a progressive book, a record of the Lord's life on earth. No doubt, whatever the Lord experienced was sovereign, for God arranged the environment so that the Lord would experience certain things in His earthly life.

Thus far, we have seen the contents of the Slave-Savior's gospel service, the ways to carry out this service, and the auxiliary acts for the gospel service. We have also seen that, in chapter four, the Lord Jesus gave a strong word concerning the intrinsic element of the kingdom of God. Following this, He exercised His authority, the authority of the kingdom, to deal with man's outward situation. Concerning this, we have in Mark a picture of human society. We also have a picture showing the attitude of the worldly people toward the Lord's gospel. Then in chapter seven there is a turn from the dealing with man's outward situation to the dealing with the inward condition of man's heart.

THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN AND THE CHILDREN'S BREAD

In this message we shall consider the case of the Syrophoenician woman (7:24-30). Mark 7:24 tells us that the Lord "went away into the districts of Tyre." Then a woman, whose little daughter had an unclean spirit, came

to Him and fell at His feet (v. 25). "The woman was a Greek, Syrophoenician by race." She was a Syrian by tongue, Phoenician by race (see Acts 21:2-3), and, the Phoenicians being descendants of the Canaanites, a Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:22). What made her a Greek--religion, marriage, or something else--is difficult to discover. In the New Testament the word "Greek" is used to signify the Gentile world. This woman was a typical Gentile. We may say that she was manifoldly a Gentile, for she was a Greek, a Syrophoenician, and a Canaanite. Nevertheless, she came to ask the Lord to do something for her. She wanted Him to cast a demon out of her daughter (v. 26).

Because this Syrophoenician woman was such a Gentile, the Lord Jesus said to her, "Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs" (v. 27). Here the Lord seemed to be saying to her, "As a Gentile, you are a little dog, and I cannot throw the children's bread to you. You are not qualified to be one of the children. You are qualified only to be a Gentile. Because I must satisfy the children first, I should not take the children's bread and throw it to you."

In chapter six of the Gospel of John the Lord clearly told the Jews that He is the bread of life (John 6:35). He indicated to them that He is the bread of God, the One who "comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world" (John 6:33). He came down from heaven to be the bread of life to satisfy the hunger of the world. Although a word concerning this was clearly given in John 6, there is not such a word in the synoptic Gospels, in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. But in Mark 7:27 the Lord Jesus used the word "bread." He said that the bread should first be given to the children.

What the Lord says concerning the children's bread in verse 27 indicates that He did not come simply to do miracles. The Lord Jesus came to feed the hungry children. The Lord's word here definitely indicates that in the previous chapters the Lord was feeding the people.

FEEDING AND DISPENSING

Feeding is a matter of dispensing. In my study of the Greek word for "dispensation" (*oikonomia*), I have learned that this word comes from a root that means to distribute food. An example of a person distributing food is Joseph in Egypt. As one who distributed food to the people, he was a good steward carrying out a stewardship. That stewardship was an *oikonomia,* a dispensing of the supply of food.

We may say that the real Joseph is the Lord Jesus, the Slave-Savior. In chapter seven of the Gospel of Mark we see Him dispensing Himself as bread, as nourishing food. He is dispensing Himself as the element of the life supply to satisfy the hungry ones.

When a Syrophoenician, a typical Gentile, came to Him and asked Him to cast a demon out of her daughter, He opened Himself to let her know what He was. He revealed Himself to her as bread. He caused her to realize that He was bread for the feeding of the hungry children, that He was distributing Himself to people as their life supply.

Many of those who received benefit from the Lord's ministry did not realize that, as He was ministering to them, He was feeding them. In a similar way, many of today's Christians do not realize that the Lord desires to distribute Himself as bread. Some Christians appreciate healings and miracles. But have you ever heard that genuine healings and miracles are for the Lord's feeding of hungry people? Nevertheless, this is the very matter revealed by the Lord Jesus to the Syrophoenician woman.

In His conversation with this woman, the Lord revealed that what He was doing was not merely the performing of miracles--it was a feeding. Actually, He was not doing miracles; He was dispensing Himself as bread, as the supply of food.

In the preceding sections of the Gospel of Mark, we have the contents of the gospel service, the ways to carry out the gospel service, actions that are helpful in the gospel service, the word concerning the intrinsic element of the kingdom, a picture of human society, a picture of the attitude of worldly people toward the gospel, and the

exposure of the condition of man's heart. Having seen all this, now we need to see in 7:24-30 that the Lord is distributing Himself as the food supply needed by us all. Actually, we do not need a miracle, and we do not even need healing. Our real need is for bread, for the life supply. Therefore, the Lord Jesus is dispensing Himself to us as food.

A FURTHER STEP IN THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S GOSPEL SERVICE

In 7:24-30 the Slave-Savior takes a further step in the carrying out of His gospel service. We have seen that in 7:1-23 the Lord uses the Ten Commandments to expose the condition of man's heart. That also was a further step in His gospel service. After taking that step, the Lord goes on to indicate that in His gospel service He was not merely doing miracles. That was not the inner significance of His gospel service. The inner significance of this service is that He was distributing Himself as food.

The Lord Jesus seemed to be saying to the Syrophoenician woman, "You think that you need Me to heal your daughter. Actually, your need is for Me to be your bread. Also, I must let you know what your position is. Your position is that of a little Gentile dog. Since you are such a dog, you do not have the right to enjoy the children's portion. I am the children's portion, and the children are the Israelites, the chosen people. I came from the Father to feed His children."

Have you ever realized that the Gospel of Mark unveils the Lord Jesus as our bread? As the record of this Gospel progresses, going on step by step and going up level by level, it eventually brings us to the crucial matter of the Lord Jesus being our bread.

If we did not have the Lord's word about Himself as the children's bread, we would not realize that in His gospel service He was distributing Himself as our bread. It is not very difficult for us to understand how the Lord is the Physician, the Bridegroom, and the Emancipator. It is easy for us to know Him in these ways. But who would ever imagine that the Lord is bread? Yes, as the God-man,

He is the Physician, the Bridegroom, and the Emancipator. But now we see, through His answer to the Syrophoenician woman, that He is the children's bread. How marvelous!

TAKING THE PROPER POSITION

Let us read verse 27 again: "And He said to her, Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." In Greek "little dogs" are pet dogs, dogs that are kept in the house.

In verse 28 we have the answer of the Syrophoenician woman: "Yes, Lord, but even the little dogs under the table eat of the little children's crumbs." In her answer she seemed to be saying, "Yes, Lord, You are right. I don't deny the fact that I am a little dog. But even the little dogs under the table have the right to eat of the children's crumbs."

Her answer indicates that she took the Lord's word as her standing to claim something from Him. What was her standing? Her standing was that she was a little dog, a pet dog, under the table. According to the Greek word used, she was not a wild dog; she was a pet dog. This indicates that as a Gentile she was one of God's "pets." We may say that the Gentiles today also are God's "pet dogs."

The Syrophoenician woman, taking the proper standing, might have been saying, "Lord, I may be a little dog, but I am not a wild dog, a dog outside the house. Rather, I am a pet dog, a dog who stays under the table while the Master is feeding the children. Since I am Your pet dog, You have pleasure in me. Yes, You love Your children, but You also have pleasure in me. While Your children are eating at the table, Your pet dog is moving about under the table. Lord, am I not Your pet dog? Am I not pleasing to You? I don't have a position at the table, but I surely have a position under the table."

THE BREAD ON THE TABLE AND UNDER THE TABLE

We may say that the Syrophoenician woman caught the Lord by His own word. He used the expression "little dogs." Immediately, it was as if she seized upon this word

to say, "Very good, Lord! You have said that I am a pet dog. This is good enough for me. I don't need to be a child at the table. As long as I am a pet dog under the table, I have the position to eat the crumbs that drop down from the table."

In a very real sense, in 7:24-30, the Lord Jesus Himself was not the bread on the table. Instead, He was under the table. We need to remember that this incident took place in the districts of Tyre, north of the holy land, a region that may be called "under the table." The holy land was the "table." But the Jews, as "naughty children," cast the bread off the table, and it fell under the table. As the crumbs under the table, the Lord could now be the portion of the little Gentile dogs.

We know from 7:29 that the Lord Jesus said to the Syrophoenician woman, "Because of this word, go; the demon has gone out of your daughter." When she returned to her house, "she found the little child lying on the couch and the demon gone out" (v. 30). However, the crucial point here is not the casting out of the demon from the daughter of the Syrophoenician woman. The crucial point is that in His gospel service the Lord Jesus is distributing Himself to people as their bread, as their inner supply.

OUR NEED FOR THE LORD AS OUR LIFE SUPPLY

A lack of the realization of the need for the Lord Jesus as bread, as life supply, may be the greatest shortage in today's Pentecostal or charismatic movement. Those in this movement may appreciate outward healings and miracles, but they may not appreciate the Lord as bread to be their inner life supply. Even if we receive a healing from the Lord, we still need Him as our life supply. To experience a miracle without receiving the Lord as our inner life supply is vain. Among those who emphasize miraculous things, there may be some genuine healings or miracles, but there is very little realization of the inward feeding on the Lord as our life supply. We need to realize that even when He is our Healer, the Lord Jesus is our bread.

In chapter seven of the Gospel of Mark the Lord opened Himself to the Syrophoenician woman to let her know that He was her food. She needed Him not only as the One to heal her daughter; she especially needed Him to be her food, her bread.

The revelation in 7:24-30 is deeper than that in 7:1-23. In the step of the gospel service recorded in 7:1-23 the Lord exposes the real condition of the human heart in order that we may know what our need is. Our need is not outward; it is inward. We do not need an outward washing; we need an inward cleansing, a cleansing of our heart. Then in 7:24-30 the Lord takes a further step to cause us to see that if what we have is only inward cleansing, we shall still be empty. It is not sufficient for our heart to be cleansed, purified. A clean heart may still be an empty heart. Therefore, in addition to the cleansing of our heart on the negative side, we need the supply of bread on the positive side. Even more than cleansing, we need the Lord Jesus to be our bread. This revelation concerning Himself as our bread is a further step taken by the Lord in the carrying out of His gospel service.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE TWENTY-THREE

THE MOVE OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S GOSPEL SERVICE

(7)

Scripture Reading: Mark 7:31--8:26

In this message we shall consider 7:31--8:26. In this section of the Gospel of Mark five matters are covered: the healing of a deaf and dumb man (7:31-37), the feeding of four thousand (8:1-9), not giving a sign to the Pharisees (8:10-13), warning the disciples concerning the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod (8:14-21), and the healing of a blind man in Bethsaida (8:22-26).

THE HEALING OF A DEAF AND DUMB MAN

In 7:31-37 we have the healing of a deaf and dumb man. Before chapter seven, most of the healings in the Gospel of Mark were healings of a complete person. For instance, Peter's mother-in-law was sick of a fever (1:30-31). She was healed, and that was the healing of a complete person. Another example of this kind of healing is the healing of the paralytic (2:3-12). When the paralytic was healed, the complete person was healed. The same is true of the cleansing of the leper (1:40-45). But in 7:31-37 we do not have the healing of a complete person; instead, we have the healing of specific organs. In fact, all the healings after Mark 7 involve particular organs, not complete persons. Mainly these healings are of three organs: the eyes, the ears, and the tongue.

We may say that in the Gospel of Mark we have the following sequence related to healing: general healings, the exposure of the condition of man's heart, the Lord as bread, as the supply of life, and the healing of specific organs. This also is the sequence in our spiritual

experience. When we were saved, we experienced healing in a general way. Later the condition of our heart was exposed. Then, probably after coming into the church life, we learned to enjoy the Lord inwardly as our bread, as our life supply. Following this, we have the healing of our ears, tongue, and eyes. Some who have been in the church life for years still need the specific healing of these organs.

Unable to Hear the Voice of God and Speak for Him

Mark 7:32 says, "And they bring to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they entreated Him that He would lay His hand on him." This deaf and dumb person signifies one who is spiritually deaf and dumb, one who is unable to hear the voice of God and praise Him (Isa. 35:6) and speak for Him (Isa. 56:10). His dumbness was due to his deafness. The Slave-Savior's healing salvation is fully able to heal such a one's deafness and dumbness by dealing with his ears first and then touching his tongue.

Verses 33 and 34 say, "And taking him away from the crowd privately, He put His fingers into his ears, and spitting, He touched his tongue; and looking up into heaven, He groaned and said to him, Ephphatha! that is, Be opened!" The Greek word rendered "put" in verse 33 may also be translated "thrust." The Slave-Savior's thrusting His fingers into the deaf one's ears signifies His dealing with his hearing organ (see Isa. 50:4-5; Job 33:14-16), and His touching of his tongue with His spittle signifies His anointing the dumb one's speaking organ with the word that proceeds out of His mouth. This was a healing.

A Portrait of Our Condition

The deaf and dumb man in 7:31-37 portrays our condition today. Verse 32 tells us that this one spoke with difficulty. Is it not your situation that in the church meetings you speak with difficulty? I believe many among us will admit that they have difficulty speaking in the meetings. Therefore, the case of the deaf and dumb man in chapter seven depicts the need of us all.

Deafness is often the cause of dumbness. In many cases, a person who is deaf is also dumb. The reason for this is that speaking is based on hearing. A child learns to talk by listening to others speak. Eventually, a child speaks what he hears. By this we see that a child learns to speak by listening. We may say that his hearing becomes his speaking.

Do you know why we speak with difficulty in the meetings? We speak with difficulty because we are careless in listening to the Lord's speaking. If we were more careful in our hearing, we would speak spontaneously.

We need to practice listening to the Lord's speaking. As we listen to the Word, it will penetrate our being. Then we shall be able to speak fluently. But many cannot speak without difficulty because they do not hear properly. If we take care of listening to the Word of God, this listening eventually will become our speaking.

Sometimes the leading ones in the church encourage the saints to speak in the meetings. But when some try to speak, they seem to have nothing to say. The problem is with their hearing. Apart from listening to the Word, we do not have anything to say in the meetings.

Feeding, Hearing, and Speaking

The healing of the deaf and dumb man follows the record concerning the Lord as the children's bread. This indicates that after we enjoy the Lord's feeding, we need further healing. In particular, we need the healing of our deafness and dumbness. The healing is another step, a progressive step, in the carrying out of the Slave-Savior's gospel service.

We have pointed out that the Gospel of Mark is a progressive book. Step by step we go from the Lord's feeding to His healing of our deafness and dumbness. We need to say, "0 Lord Jesus, thank You for Your feeding. You feed me in order to heal me. Lord, Your feeding is for the healing of my deafness and dumbness." If we do not enjoy the Lord's feeding, it will be very difficult for us to speak for Him. Many of us can testify that before we

enjoyed the Lord's feeding in the church life, it was difficult for us to pray publicly in a meeting. Not only did we not have the proper hearing, the hearing that becomes our speaking; we did not enjoy the Lord as our food. But since coming into the church life, we have been enjoying Him as our bread. The feeding follows the exposure of our heart and is followed by the healing of our deafness and dumbness. According to the sequence in Mark 7, after the case of the Syrophoenician woman, we have the case of the healing of a deaf and dumb person.

We have emphasized the fact that speaking depends on hearing. We should not try to speak without listening. If we speak without listening, we shall speak in a nonsensical way. First we must have the proper hearing, and then we shall be able to speak. We need to listen with the intention of speaking, with the intention of repeating what we have heard. If we all listen this way, many of us will be able to speak without difficulty in the church meetings. Because we are no longer deaf, we shall no longer have difficulty in speaking.

Experiencing the Healing of Our Ears and Tongue

It is rather easy to have our person healed in a general way. To experience such a healing it may not be necessary for the Lord Jesus to touch us. For example, in chapter five the woman was healed simply by touching the hem of the Lord's garment. However, if we would receive the particular healing of our ears and tongue, we need the Lord to touch us in a definite way.

According to verse 33, the Lord took the deaf and dumb man away from the crowd privately, thrust His fingers into his ears, and then touched his tongue. This indicates that if we want our ears to be healed, we need the Lord to take us away to a private place. Then, in private, He will thrust His fingers into our ears and touch our tongue with His spittle.

The healing of the ears requires only the thrusting of the Lord's fingers into them. But for the healing of our tongue we need something that proceeds out of the Lord's

mouth to be applied to our tongue. This signifies that we need the anointing of our speaking organ with the word that proceeds out of the Lord's mouth.

Oh, how much we need the Lord to open our ears! For too long our ears have been closed to the word of God, to God's speaking. We also need the essence of the Lord's word to be applied to our tongue. We cannot speak, we are dumb, because we lack the Lord's "spittle," the essence of the word that proceeds out of His mouth. Our tongue needs to be touched by this essence. We need to let the essence of the Lord's word become an ointment applied to our tongue. If we allow the Lord to anoint our tongue with the essence of His word, then our stammering tongue will be able to speak fluently.

FEEDING THE FOUR THOUSAND

After healing the deaf and dumb man, the Slave-Savior fed the four thousand (8:1-9). Mark 8:2 says, "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have remained with Me now three days, and they do not have anything to eat." The Slave-Savior's virtues of compassion, sympathy, and tender care are vividly and sweetly displayed here in His humanity.

The case of the feeding of the four thousand indicates that after we have been healed and are able to hear and speak, we are qualified to feed others. Today many Christians are not qualified to feed others, because they themselves are still deaf and dumb. If we do not listen carefully to God's speaking and if we do not have an anointed tongue, we shall not be able to feed others. Only when we have been healed in a particular way, not merely in a general way, shall we be qualified to feed others.

In the case of the Syrophoenician woman the Lord Jesus was the only one doing the feeding. But in the case of the feeding of the four thousand all the disciples became the feeding ones. This indicates that after we experience the healing of our listening and speaking organs, we become those who can feed others. I expect that this will be the situation in the Lord's recovery. I believe that when

the saints have been healed particularly in their listening and speaking organs, they will all become feeders. They will be able to feed others by presenting the truth to them. For this feeding, we need a particular healing, the healing of our ears and our tongue.

THE PHARISEES SEEKING A SIGN

After the feeding of the four thousand, "the Pharisees came out and began discussing with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, tempting Him" (8:11). Groaning in His spirit, the Lord Jesus said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly I tell you, No sign shall be given to this generation" (v. 12). This time the Pharisees did not come to accuse or find fault but came to seek a sign. Like many today, they pretended to be spiritual. However, the Lord knew their heart, and he refused to give them a sign.

Today certain Christians are sincere. They have received the Lord's particular healing, and they have become those who can feed others. But meanwhile some are pretenders, hypocrites. They pretend to seek spiritual signs; they pretend that their purpose is spiritual.

A WARNING ABOUT LEAVEN

In 8:14-21 the Lord Jesus goes on to warn His disciples concerning the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. In verse 15 the Lord says, "Watch! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." In the Bible leaven signifies evil things (1 Cor. 5:6, 8) and evil doctrines (Matt. 16:6, 11-12). The leaven of the Pharisees was their hypocrisy (Luke 12:1), and the leaven of Herod was his corruption and injustice in politics. The Lord warned His disciples to beware of these two kinds of leaven, the Pharisees' leaven of hypocrisy and Herod's leaven of injustice.

THE DISCIPLES' MISUNDERSTANDING

In 8:16-21 we see that the disciples did not understand the Lord's word concerning leaven. They were occupied by

the thought of bread: "They reasoned with one another because they had no bread" (v. 16). When they heard the word "leaven," they immediately thought of bread, because they realized that they had not brought an adequate supply with them in the boat. We today are often like the disciples: we may hear a message, but we do not interpret it correctly.

THE HEALING OF A BLIND MAN

In 8:22-36 we have the healing of a blind man: "And they came to Bethsaida. And they bring to Him a blind man, and entreat Him that He would touch him." This blind man signifies one who has lost his inner sight, one blinded spiritually (Acts 26:18; 2 Pet. 1:9).

Verse 23 says, "And taking hold of the hand of the blind man, He led him forth outside the village; and having spit in his eyes and laid His hands on him, He asked him, Do you see anything?" By taking hold of the blind man's hand the Slave-Savior expressed His intimate and loving care in His humanity for the needy one.

The Lord took the blind man outside the village. This may indicate that the Slave-Savior would not let what He intended to do for this blind man be seen and known by the crowd, since He later charged him not even to enter into the village (v. 26). Spiritually, this may also indicate that the Slave-Savior wanted the blind man to have a private and intimate time with Him so that He could infuse him with the element that could recover his sight. All who are spiritually blind need such a time with the Slave-Savior.

For this further particular healing, the Lord then spit in the blind man's eyes and laid His hands on him. Blindness is related to darkness (Acts 26:18). For sight there is the need of light. The Slave-Savior's spittle may signify the word that proceeds out of His mouth, a word that conveys the divine light of life to the receiver for the recovery of his sight. The significance of such spitting of the Slave-Savior, plus that of His laying on of hands, was much richer than the significance of His touch. Those who wanted to help the blind man requested only the Lord's touch. The Lord's laying His hands on the blind man

indicates His identification with him in order to transfuse His healing element into him.

When the Lord asked the blind man if he saw anything, he answered, "I behold men; I see them as trees walking" (v. 24). This may illustrate a person's spiritual sight. At the initial stage of his spiritual recovery, he may see spiritual things like this blind man beholding men as trees walking. After a further recovery, he sees all things clearly as this man did.

Verse 25 says, "Then again He laid His hands upon his eyes, and he looked intently and was restored, and he saw all things clearly." This may indicate that after we receive the complete healing of our eyes, we have a clear view concerning the things of God.

Verse 26 concludes, "And He sent him to his home, saying, Do not even enter into the village." Throughout His ministry the Slave-Savior, as the Slave of God, did not like publicity.

In this message we have seen that the Slave-Savior took a further step to heal people particularly in their hearing, speaking, and seeing organs. After we have been healed in this way, we have the ability to see the things concerning God. In the next section, therefore, the disciples began to see Christ and to know Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE TWENTY-FOUR

THE MOVE OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S GOSPEL SERVICE

(8)

Scripture Reading: Mark 8:27--9:13

In this message we come to 8:27--9:13. This portion of the Gospel of Mark may be considered the highlight of the Lord's contact with His disciples.

BROUGHT TO CAESAREA PHILIPPI

In order for the disciples to be brought to the point described in 8:27--9:13, it was necessary for them to pass through a number of steps. We may take Peter as an example. In chapter one of the Gospel of Mark, Peter was called by the Lord and began to follow Him. From chapter one to chapter eight, Peter and the other faithful followers passed through a number of different steps. They went on step by step, higher and higher, until they were brought to a place called Caesarea Philippi.

Mark 8:27 says, "And Jesus went out and His disciples into the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, Who do men say that I am?" Caesarea Philippi was in the northern part of the Holy Land, close to the border, at the foot of Mount Hermon, the mountain on which the Lord was transfigured. Caesarea Philippi was far from the holy city with the holy temple, where the atmosphere of the old Jewish religion filled every man's thought, leaving no room for Christ, the Slave-Savior. The Lord brought His disciples purposely to such a place where there was a clear atmosphere so that their thought could be released from the effects of the religious surroundings in the holy city and the holy temple and that He might reveal to them

something new concerning Himself. It was here that the vision concerning Him as the Christ was given to Peter.

I wish to emphasize the fact that the Lord Jesus brought His disciples to Caesarea Philippi so that they would be in a clear atmosphere, an atmosphere without clouds or fog. He knew that in such an atmosphere their understanding and spiritual sight would be clear.

The Lord brought His followers from the river Jordan and the Sea of Galilee to Caesarea Philippi. It took Him at least two years to bring His followers through all the steps that enabled them to come to this point. These steps are recorded in the preceding chapters of the Gospel of Mark. Especially three of the Lord's disciples--Peter, John, and James--were fully qualified to see something which no other human beings had been able to see. They were able to see a wonderful Person, a Person who is the secret of the universe and a mystery to all mankind. This One is also the secret of God's eternal economy. Although He was a man, even a man in the form of a slave, He was an excellent, wonderful, mysterious Person.

In order to see the vision concerning this Person, the disciples had to pass through the steps recorded in the preceding chapters. They had to be healed in a general way and then in a particular way. Every function of their being--hearing, sight, and speech--needed to be healed. As the result of experiencing both the general and specific healings, they were qualified and enabled to receive the vision concerning who the Lord is.

THE REVELATION CONCERNING CHRIST

In verse 27 the Lord asked His disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" As a man, Christ was a mystery not only to that generation, but also to people today. To the Lord's question the disciples replied, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but others, one of the prophets" (v. 28). This indicates that, at most, without revelation, people can realize only that Jesus is the greatest among the prophets. Without heavenly revelation, no one can know that He is truly the Christ.

Verse 29 says, "And He questioned them, But you, who do you say that I am? Peter answering says to Him, You are the Christ!" Here we see that Peter took the lead to declare that Jesus is the Christ. Peter did not speak of the Lord simply in a general way as Christ, as an anointed One. Rather, he said, "You are *the* Christ." This term may not be as striking to us today as it was during the time of the disciples. Peter was declaring that Jesus is the Christ, the anointed One, the Messiah.

When Peter made the declaration that Jesus is the Christ, he may not have been very clear concerning this point. Nevertheless, he saw that this One was not common, that He was not an ordinary person. He realized something that is very particular concerning the Lord, that He is the Christ, God's anointed One, the Messiah. As we have pointed out, in order for Peter to see this vision, it was necessary for him and the other disciples to pass through all the steps in the preceding chapters to be brought to the stage of seeing the vision concerning Christ's Person.

THE REVELATION CONCERNING CHRIST'S CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION

After Peter made the declaration that Jesus is the Christ, "He warned them that they should tell no one concerning Him" (v. 30). Then "He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise" (v. 31). Here we see that after the revelation of the mystery concerning Christ, we have the revelation of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. In order for Him to fulfill God's purpose, Christ had to go to the religious center, pass through crucifixion, and enter into resurrection.

In verse 31 the Lord opened up some of the mysteries of God's economy concerning Himself as the Christ, the anointed One of God. In this verse the Lord refers to Himself as the Son of Man. After Peter saw the vision concerning Jesus the Nazarene being the Christ, the Lord went on to unveil the fact that He, God's anointed One, is

the Son of Man. It is a great matter to see that the Messiah is the Son of Man.

In verse 31 the Lord went on to reveal that the Messiah, who is the Son of Man, must suffer and be rejected. Instead of being honored, respected, and exalted, He would be dishonored, despised, and rejected. The Lord said that He would suffer many things, be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and even be killed.

PETER REBUKING THE LORD AND THE LORD REBUKING PETER

The unveiling of Christ's rejection, suffering, and death must have come as a great surprise to Peter. He may have been shocked by such an unveiling. To be sure, Peter never imagined that the Messiah would be persecuted and even executed. From his youth among the Jews, Peter had heard many things concerning the Messiah. He surely expected the coming Messiah to be honored and exalted, regarded in the highest way. He had never before heard that the Messiah would suffer and be put to death.

At the end of verse 31, the Lord Jesus clearly indicated that He, the Christ, would rise after three days. Thus, in a brief way He spoke concerning His resurrection. It is doubtful, however, that this word concerning the Lord's rising from among the dead made an impression on Peter. He had no understanding at all about what it meant for the Lord to rise after three days. Peter either did not hear this word or he had no realization concerning it.

We are told in 8:32 that the Lord "spoke the word openly." This verse also says, "Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him." Peter actually began to rebuke the Lord Jesus! To rebuke someone implies that he is wrong and needs to be adjusted. If someone is not wrong, there is no need to rebuke him and thereby correct him. The fact that Peter was rebuking the Lord indicates that Peter thought the Lord was wrong in saying that the Messiah would be despised, suffer persecution, and be killed. Here Peter seems to be saying, "Lord, what are You talking about? You are the Messiah. Certainly You are wrong in

telling us that the Messiah will be despised, rejected, and killed. I must correct You concerning this matter."

According to verse 32, Peter even took the Lord aside in order to rebuke Him. Apparently Peter was endeavoring to train the Lord, to teach Him, to open His eyes to see what Peter saw. Only the Gospel of Mark, neither Matthew nor Luke, gives us this detail concerning Peter's taking the Lord aside. Mark received the report concerning this from Peter himself. Peter, then, must have told Mark that he took the Lord aside and began to rebuke Him.

Did the Lord go along with Peter when he took Him aside to rebuke Him? It seems that He did. But after Peter began to rebuke Him, He rebuked Peter. Peter tried to correct the Lord, and then the Lord corrected him.

In verse 33 we see the way the Lord rebuked Peter: "But He, turning around and seeing His disciples, rebuked Peter and said, Go away, behind Me, Satan, because you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men!" In the four Gospels this may be the strongest negative word uttered by the Lord Jesus. He perceived that it was not Peter but Satan who was frustrating Him from taking the cross. This reveals that our natural man, which is not willing to take the cross, is one with Satan. When we are setting our mind not on the things of God, but on the things of men, we become Satan, a stumbling block to the Lord in the fulfillment of God's purpose.

SETTING OUR MIND ON THE THINGS OF MEN

In verse 33 the Lord said specifically that Peter was not setting his mind on the things of God, but on the things of men. This is a matter of the evil reasonings mentioned in 7:21. Man's corrupted heart is filled with evil reasonings. Here the Lord Jesus seems to be telling Peter, "Peter, there are evil reasonings in your heart. In particular, you have evil reasonings within you concerning My word about My being put to death. First you reason, and then you rebuke Me. This reasoning indicates that your mind has been set on the things of fallen man, not on the things of God."

The Lord's word here reminds us of Paul's word concerning the mind in Romans 8:6: "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace." No doubt, at this juncture Peter set his mind on the flesh. When he was reasoning concerning Christ's sufferings and death, he was setting his mind on the flesh.

COMING AFTER THE LORD

Verse 34 says, "And calling the crowd to Him with His disciples, He said to them, If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." To come after the Lord is to have Him, to experience Him, to enjoy Him, and to partake of Him. If we want to gain the Lord in this way, experiencing Him, enjoying Him, and partaking of Him, we must deny ourselves. If we remain instead of denying ourselves, the Lord is gone. If we would have the Lord, then we must go, we must deny ourselves.

In a previous message on the Lord's exposing the condition of our heart, I pointed out that at the end of chapter seven we do not have the solution to man's inward condition. Here in chapter eight we have the solution. The solution is that, as a fallen person with an evil heart, we must have Christ. We must follow Him, partake of Him, enjoy Him, and experience Him. Then He Himself will be the "medicine" to heal our evil heart. Therefore, the solution to the condition of our evil heart is Christ Himself.

In chapter eight of Mark we have a revelation not only concerning the wonderful Person of Christ, but also concerning His marvelous death. In His death we are crucified, terminated, annulled. Hence, when we come to partake of Him, we need to deny ourselves; that is, we need to put ourselves aside and forget ourselves.

THE NEED FOR THE EPISTLES OF PAUL

Actually, the Lord's word here concerning His death requires all the Epistles written by the Apostle Paul for its definition. If we do not have an adequate understanding of the Epistles of Paul, we shall not be able to understand thoroughly the Lord's word in 8:34-37. According to the revelation regarding Christ's death in Paul's Epistles,

Christ went through the process of death for God and for us. His all-inclusive death dealt with sins, our sinful nature, the self, our flesh, the old creation, the Devil, the world, and all the ordinances. Through the all-inclusive death of Christ, we have been terminated. Now if we would enjoy Christ and partake of Him, we need to realize that we have already been terminated. Based upon the fact that we have been crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20), we should deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow the Lord.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE TWENTY-FIVE

THE MOVE OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S GOSPEL SERVICE

(9)

Scripture Reading: Mark 8:27--9:13

In 8:34 the Lord Jesus says, "If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." In the foregoing message we pointed out that to come after the Lord is to gain Him, experience Him, enjoy Him, and partake of Him. If we would come after the Lord in this way, we need to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him. Let us now consider what it means for us to take up our cross.

TAKING UP OUR CROSS

Being Terminated

Many Christians have a misunderstanding concerning the cross. They think that to take up the cross is to suffer hardship. This was my concept more than forty years ago. I told others that the difficulties in their environment were a cross to them. For example, if your husband or wife is troubling you, that is a cross. But when the Lord Jesus speaks of taking up the cross, He does not mean this. He means that we should apply the cross to our living. The real significance of the cross is not suffering--it is termination. In ancient times, crucifixion was not used merely to cause suffering; it was meant to cause death. Crucifixion, therefore, equals death, termination.

For us to take up the cross is for us to be terminated. I wish to emphasize the fact that the cross is for termination, not for suffering. Sometimes believers are not helped by suffering. I have known certain persons who suffered a great deal with the result that they became

strongly self-willed. The more a person suffers in himself, the more his self-will is strengthened. Those who have passed through hardships in life and have become strong in their will are extremely difficult to touch. Eventually, when such a person reaches the age of sixty or seventy, he may have become so strong in his will that he cannot be changed.

The concept that the cross is a matter of suffering is contrary to the revelation of the Lord's word in 8:34. In this verse He says, "If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Here the Lord speaks of denying the self. To deny the self is to give it up; it is not to keep the self so that it may suffer.

Applying What Christ Has Done on the Cross

Taking up the cross is not a matter of suffering. Instead, it is a matter of applying to our life what Christ has done on the cross to terminate us. Therefore, to take up the cross is to apply this termination to ourselves. Day by day we need to apply such a termination. If we do this, we shall realize not that we are suffering, but that we are terminated, finished, put to an end.

Suppose a brother says, "I thank God that, in His sovereignty, He has given me a wife who causes me to suffer and bear the cross. My wife is a cross given to me by God, and now I must bear this cross." This is a serious misunderstanding of what it means to bear the cross. In fact, this understanding is related to that found in Catholicism. To some extent at least, this misunderstanding of the cross has been promoted by a famous book entitled *The Imitation of Christ*.

A married brother does not need to learn how to suffer. Rather, he needs to realize that, as a husband, he has already been terminated in Christ and that now he should live as a terminated husband, simply enjoying Christ's termination. Then he may say to his wife, "Dear, I am not trying to be a good husband, to be a kind and gentle husband. I am here as a terminated husband. The more I am willing to experience Christ's termination, the better I

shall be as a husband, for then Christ will live in me. As He lives in me, He will be your husband through me."

To come after the Lord is to partake of Him, enjoy Him, experience Him, and let Him become our very being. In order to come after the Lord in this way, we need to deny ourselves. We need to apply to ourselves the termination Christ has accomplished on the cross. This means that to bear our cross is to apply Christ's termination to ourselves. When we do this, we become a crossed-out person, not a suffering person. Then we can testify, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me."

Christ's word concerning taking up the cross is a mystery. If we had only 8:34, we would not be able to understand Christ's word about the cross. In order to understand this word properly, we need the fourteen Epistles of Paul.

The cross is not merely a suffering; it is also a killing. The cross kills and terminates the criminal. Christ first bore the cross and then was crucified. We, His believers, have first been crucified with Him and then bear the cross day by day. To us, bearing the cross is to remain under the killing of the death of Christ for the terminating of our self, our natural life, and our old man. In so doing we deny our self that we may follow the Lord.

Before the Lord's crucifixion, the disciples followed Him in an outward way. But since His resurrection, we follow Him in an inward way. Because in resurrection He has become the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45) dwelling in our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22), we follow Him in our spirit (Gal. 5:16--25).

MIND, SELF, AND SOUL LIFE

In 8:35 the Lord goes on to say, "For whoever wants to save his soul life will lose it, but whoever will lose his soul life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it." In this verse the Lord speaks about the soul life, whereas in the preceding verse He speaks about the self. Actually, these terms, the soul life and the self, are synonymous. Our soul

life is our self, and our self is our soul life. We ourselves are a soul.

In 8:33-35 three matters are related to one another: mind, self, and soul life. Our mind is the expression of our self, and our self is the embodiment of our soul life. Our soul life is embodied in and lived out by our self, and our self is expressed through our mind, thought, concept, opinion. When we set our mind, not on the things of God, but on the things of man, our mind grasps the opportunity to act and express itself. This was what happened with Peter. Therefore, the Lord said that we must deny the self and not save our soul life. Instead of saving the soul life, we should lose it. To lose the soul life is the reality of denying the self. This is to take up the cross.

LOSING THE SOUL LIFE FOR CHRIST AND THE GOSPEL

In verse 35 the Lord speaks of saving the soul life and losing the soul life. We may say that to save the soul life is to allow the soul to have its enjoyment and not to suffer. To lose the soul life is to cause the soul to suffer the loss of its enjoyment. If the followers of the Slave-Savior allow their soul to have its enjoyment in this age, they will cause their soul to suffer the loss of its enjoyment in the coming kingdom age. If they allow their soul to suffer the loss of its enjoyment in this age for the sake of the Lord and the gospel, they will cause their soul to have its enjoyment in the coming kingdom age.

Not Merely a Matter of Behavior

In verse 35 the Lord speaks of losing the soul life for His sake and the gospel's. Many readers of the Gospel of Mark misinterpret the Lord's word about losing our soul life for His sake and the gospel's. Some may say, "The words 'for My sake' mean for the Lord's purpose and glory. The phrase 'for the gospel's' must mean for the sake of the preaching of the gospel, for the sake of the effectiveness and result of the gospel. For the sake of the Lord's glory and for the sake of preaching the gospel, I must behave

myself in a proper way." This concept is wrong. It is not a correct interpretation of the Lord's word here.

Living Christ and the Gospel

What, then, is the correct understanding of "for My sake and the gospel's"? Here for the Lord's sake actually means "no longer I, but the gospel." We have been terminated in Christ. Now we need to apply this termination to ourselves and to every aspect of our living. Then in our living it will be "no longer I, but Christ, no longer I, but the gospel." This means that we shall be living Christ and living the gospel. This is very different from trying to behave ourselves properly as Christians for the sake of the Lord's glory and for the sake of the effectiveness of the gospel.

Let me illustrate the difference between living Christ and the gospel and trying to behave properly for the sake of Christ and the gospel. Suppose a certain brother is working in an office. This brother may say to himself, "My colleagues here in the office realize that I am a Christian and that I am in the church in the Lord's recovery. Recently I have preached the gospel to them. Now I should behave myself and be very careful about what I say and do. For the gospel's sake, I need to be careful with my colleagues. Now that I have preached the gospel to them and have told them that I am in the church, I need to be very watchful concerning my conduct." Actually, this is a matter of the brother's own effort. Furthermore, it is an absolutely incorrect understanding of the Lord's word in 8:35.

If this brother working in the office has the correct understanding of the Lord's word, he will say to himself, "As a follower of the Lord Jesus, I am a partaker of Him. I have been crucified with Him. Now it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. At work I do not need to try to behave myself. I do not have to exert myself to be so careful. Instead, I should simply live Christ day by day. When I wake up in the morning, I need to call on the Lord Jesus and breathe Him in. As I call on Him, He becomes

my breath, the intrinsic and essential element of my inner being, the essence of my living. Then at the office I simply live Him. I shall not deliberately try to preach the gospel to my colleagues, and I shall not worry because of the fact that I have told them that I am in the church. I only care for one thing--for living Christ. All day long, I want to breathe in Christ and then live Him." This is the correct understanding of losing our soul life for the Lord's sake.

The principle is the same in the matter of living for the sake of the gospel. When we live Christ, we shall certainly live the gospel. As we live Christ, others will see the gospel in our living and not only hear it. Our living will be Christ, and this Christ will become the gospel to others in an actual and practical way. By this we see that living for the sake of Christ and the gospel is not a matter of our behavior; it is a matter of living Christ in a practical way. Regarding this, I would say once again that we need the Epistles of Paul in order to have an adequate understanding of the Lord's word in verse 35.

In 8:27-38 we have an unveiling not only of the Lord's wonderful Person, but also of His death and resurrection. This unveiling also includes our application of the Lord's death and our living in His resurrection. Through the application of Christ's death to ourselves we may live in Christ in resurrection.

THE LORD'S TRANSFIGURATION-- THE KINGDOM OF GOD COMING IN POWER

After the unveiling of Christ's Person and His death and resurrection, the Lord went on to say in 9:1, "Truly I tell you, there are some of those standing here who shall by no means taste death until they see the kingdom of God come in power." This was fulfilled by the Lord's transfiguration on the mountain (9:2-13). His transfiguration was the coming of the kingdom of God in power. This was seen by three of His disciples, Peter, James, and John.

The Lord's transfiguration on the mountain was the coming of the kingdom. This kingdom is actually the enlargement of Christ. First, Christ is sown as a seed into

our heart. This seed will then grow and develop until it is manifested in glory. This is the kingdom. The time has not yet come for the kingdom to be manifested in full. However, through His transfiguration Christ demonstrated to three of His disciples what the reality of the kingdom is. When He was transfigured, that was the manifestation of the kingdom of God.

On a High Mountain

Mark 9:2 says, "And after six days Jesus takes with Him Peter and James and John, and brings them up into a high mountain by themselves alone. And He was transformed before them." Since the Lord's transfiguration took place six days after the revelation concerning Christ and His death and resurrection in chapter eight (given at the very foot of Mount Hermon), the high mountain here must be Mount Hermon. To receive the revelation concerning Christ and His death and resurrection, we need to be far away from the religious environment. But to see the vision of the transfigured Christ we need to be on a high mountain, far above the earthly level.

Moses and Elijah

In verse 4 the record continues, "And there appeared to them Elijah together with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus." Moses died and God hid his body (Deut. 34:5-6), and Elijah was taken by God into heaven (2 Kings 2:11). God purposely did these two things so that Moses and Elijah might appear with Christ on the mount of His transfiguration. They were also preserved by God to be the two witnesses in the great tribulation (Rev. 11:3-4). Moses represented the law, and Elijah the prophets. The law and the prophets were the constituents of the Old Testament as a full testimony of Christ (John 5:39). Now Moses and Elijah appeared and conversed with Christ concerning His death (Luke 9:31) as it had been prophesied in the Old Testament (Luke 24:25-27, 44; 1 Cor. 15:3).

On the mountain with the Lord Jesus, Peter, James, and John had a foretaste of the coming kingdom. Here we see a miniature of the millennium. We have the Old

Testament saints--Moses and Elijah--and New Testament saints--Peter, James, and John. We may say that Moses, one of the Old Testament saints, signifies the resurrected ones, and Elijah, Peter, James, and John, all living ones, represent those who are raptured.

Peter's Absurd Proposal

Peter was very excited, and said to the Lord Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. And let us make three tabernacles--one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (v. 5). Peter's absurd proposal was to put Moses and Elijah on the same level with Christ, which means to make the law and the prophets equal to Christ. This was absolutely against God's economy. In God's economy the law and the prophets were only a testimony to Christ; they should not be put on the same level with Him.

Hearing the Son

Mark 9:7 says, "And a cloud came overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, This is My Son, the Beloved. Hear Him!" This declaration of the Father to vindicate the Son was first given after Christ's rising from baptism, which signified His resurrection from the dead. This instance is the second time the Father declared the same thing, this time to vindicate the Son in His transfiguration, which prefigures the coming kingdom.

In verse 7 God charges us to hear His Son. In God's economy, now that Christ has come, we should "hear Him," no longer the law or the prophets, because the law and the prophets were fulfilled in Christ and by Him.

Verse 8 continues, "And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them, except Jesus only." Peter proposed to keep Moses and Elijah, that is, the law and the prophets, with Christ. But God took Moses and Elijah away, leaving no one "except Jesus only." The law and the prophets were shadows and prophecies, not the reality; the reality is Christ. Now that Christ, the reality, is here, the shadows and the prophecies are no longer needed. No one

except Jesus Himself alone should remain in the New Testament. Jesus is today's Moses, imparting the law of life into His believers. Jesus is also today's Elijah, speaking for God and speaking forth God within His believers. This is God's New Testament economy.

The New Testament age is a matter of Jesus only. We should hear Him, not the law represented by Moses or the prophets represented by Elijah. Christ Himself is the New Testament. Here in chapter nine of Mark a miniature of the millennium appeared briefly as an example that was shown to the Lord's disciples. Then the scene returned to that of the New Testament age.

The Resurrection of Christ

Mark 9:9 says, "And as they were coming down from the mountain, He ordered them that they should relate to no one the things which they had seen, except when the Son of Man should rise from the dead." This indicates that the vision of the transfigured, glorified Jesus could not be realized by anyone except in the resurrection of Christ.

Verse 10 says, "And they kept the matter to themselves, discussing what rising from the dead is." At that time, Peter, James, and John did not understand what the Lord meant when He said that the Son of Man should rise from the dead. They had seen a vision, but they did not understand it thoroughly. But on the day of Pentecost, when Peter stood up with the eleven, he was clear and could testify strongly concerning Christ's resurrection. On the day of Pentecost, the central point of Peter's preaching was the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The resurrection of Christ became the focal point of Peter's gospel preaching. Peter not only came to understand what the resurrection is, but he himself was in this resurrection. He came to live Christ in His death and resurrection.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE TWENTY-SIX

THE MOVE OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S GOSPEL SERVICE

(10)

Scripture Reading: Mark 8:27--9:13

THE HIGHLIGHT OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK

In 8:27--9:13 we have a revelation of the mystery of the Lord's Person and His death and resurrection. We may say that what is recorded here is the highlight of the Gospel of Mark. Here the account in this Gospel reaches its peak.

In chapter eight the Slave-Savior healed a blind man at Bethsaida. The Lord did more in this case of healing than in any of the other cases. For example, the first instance of healing in the Gospel of Mark is the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. This healing was easily carried out. The Lord simply came to her and raised her up, holding her hand. Then the fever left her, and she served them (1:31). From that initial healing, this book progresses step by step until we have in chapter seven the exposure of man's heart, the exposure of man's inward condition.

After exposing the condition of man's heart, the Lord Jesus revealed that He is bread, our life supply. He is not only the forgiving God, but our Physician, the Bridegroom, today's David, and the Emancipator. He is also both the Feeder and the bread.

After the Lord's unveiling of Himself as the bread to nourish us inwardly, we have the record of healings that are carried out in a particular way. We have the healing of the ears and the tongue of a deaf and dumb man and also the healing of the eyes of a blind man. After these particular healings, we may say that we have a complete person whose organs have been healed in a particular way. Now this one is prepared and qualified to receive the

revelation of Christ's Person and His death and resurrection.

For the purpose of revealing His Person, death, and resurrection, the Lord Jesus brought His disciples away from the religious region to Caesarea Philippi. While on the way, He questioned His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I am?" (8:27). After they responded, the Lord further questioned them, "But you, who do you say that I am?" (v. 29). At this point Peter saw the vision that Jesus is the Christ, and he declared, "You are the Christ!"

The revelation given at Caesarea Philippi is the highest step, the peak, in the book of Mark. Before the disciples were brought by the Lord to Caesarea Philippi, their eyes were healed. Therefore, they had the sight to see not common things or material things, but to see mysterious, divine things. In particular, their eyes were opened to see Christ, His all-inclusive death, and His marvelous resurrection. In the realm of mysterious, divine things, the revelation concerning Christ and His death and resurrection is foremost.

A MYSTERY TO THE NATURAL MAN

The realm of mysterious, divine things is altogether hidden from the natural man. As Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 2, the natural man cannot apprehend the things in this realm: "A soulish man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he is not able to know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (v. 14). A soulish man is a natural man, one living in his soul, not in his spirit. Such a man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God. Rather, he rejects them.

The Lord Jesus is a mystery to the natural man and the natural mind. Even today, certain Jewish scholars are studying who Jesus was. They are also studying His crucifixion. Because the Person of Christ and His death and resurrection are the topmost matters in the realm of mysterious, divine things, even some Christian professors

of theology, as well as Jewish scholars, have not seen the vision concerning them.

FEEDING AND HEALING

We should not regard the Gospel of Mark merely as a book of stories. This Gospel is a record showing us how the Lord Jesus as the Slave-Savior serves sinners. This service begins in chapter one and continues into chapter seven, where the Lord exposes the condition of man's heart. We may say that in Mark 7 the Slave-Savior conducts Himself as a surgeon, for He opens our heart and exposes its condition.

In chapter seven we see the Lord not only as the divine Surgeon but also as the One who feeds us with Himself as bread. This indicates that our basic need is for bread, for the supply of life. The Slave-Savior not only heals us, recovers us, and brings us back into fellowship with God; He also feeds us, and He feeds us with Himself as bread. He Himself is our life supply.

First we experience the Lord's feeding us with Himself as bread. As the result of being fed by Him, spontaneously we experience His healing in a particular way: He heals our deaf ears, our dumb tongue, and our blind eyes.

CHRIST AND HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION

We need to fit together various portions of the Gospel of Mark like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. When the individual pieces have been fitted together, we see a picture. In the Gospel of Mark we see a portrait of certain ones chosen by God. These ones are healed not only in a general way, like Peter's mother-in-law, the leper, and the paralytic, but also in a particular way in the organs of hearing, speech, and sight. These specific healings involve the Lord's anointing, as signified by His spittle. Once these chosen ones were nourished by receiving the life supply--the Lord as their bread--their organs were healed. As a result, they could hear, speak, and see. Their organs were functioning properly. Therefore, at this point the Slave-Savior brought

them to Caesarea Philippi, to a place where the spiritual atmosphere was clear.

We have pointed out that in Caesarea Philippi the Lord Jesus spoke to the disciples concerning Himself. As He talked with them, He opened to them the realm of mysterious, divine things. At least one of His disciples came to see that He is the Christ. However, this one saw the Person of Christ only within certain limits. He did not see anything concerning Christ's death and resurrection For this reason, the Lord went on to tell His disciples that He would be crucified and that after His death, He would rise up. In speaking about His death and resurrection, the Lord further opened the realm of mysterious. divine things. He showed His disciples not only His Person; He also revealed to them His wonderful death and His marvelous resurrection.

THE ALL-INCLUSIVE REPLACEMENT

Now we come to a crucial matter. We need to see that, in the sight of God, everything in the universe except Himself needs to be replaced. Christ with His death and resurrection is the unique replacement in the universe. He is the entire, all-inclusive replacement. Christ with His death and resurrection replaces everyone and everything that is not God Himself. He replaces Moses, He replaces Elijah, and He replaces us. He replaces our self. He replaces our soul, and He replaces our mind. This One replaces everyone else, everything, and every matter in the entire universe. This is the reason we say that He is the entire and all-inclusive replacement.

When the Lord Jesus revealed to His disciples the matters of His death and resurrection, they may have been confused. Peter, in particular, did not understand, and he went so far as to rebuke the Lord (v. 32). Then the Lord rebuked Peter, saying, "Go away, behind Me, Satan, because you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men!" (v. 33). The Lord went on to say, "If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (v. 34). Do

you know what it means to deny ourselves? To deny ourselves is to be replaced by Christ.

Here the Lord seems to be saying, especially to Peter "Since you have seen Christ, you need to be replaced by Him. You must be put aside and allow Christ to become you. You need to deny yourself and be replaced by Christ."

REPLACED BY CHRIST THROUGH DEATH AND RESURRECTION

How is it possible for us to be replaced by Christ? We can be replaced by Him only through His death and resurrection. Apart from His death and resurrection, Christ Himself would not be able to replace us. Also, it would not be possible for us to be replaced by Him. This replacement can be carried out only through Christ's death and resurrection.

We need to realize that it is necessary for us to deny our self. Our attitude should be of willingness to be replaced. We also need to see that a replacement has been prepared for us, and this replacement is Christ. In the words of Paul in Galatians 2:20, it should be no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us.

When we live, we live according to our corrupt heart. We live according to ourselves, and within us we have an evil heart. If we would be delivered from what we are in ourselves, from our evil heart, we need to deny ourselves. To deny ourselves actually means to be replaced by Christ through His death and resurrection.

Christ's death on the cross included us. This means that when He died, we died with Him. Now we need to realize this fact and apply it to our living. To see that we have been crucified with Christ and apply this fact to our living is to take the cross. Therefore, to take the cross means to admit that we have been terminated by Christ's death and to apply this termination to ourselves. When we make this application, resurrection life comes in.

In our daily living, the crucified and resurrected Christ is the life-giving Spirit. The reality of Christ's resurrection is actually the life-giving Spirit. Whenever we apply the

cross of Christ, the life-giving Spirit, as the reality of Christ's resurrection, comes in to be our real replacement. Then we are able to say, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live--Christ lives in me."

WHAT GOD WANTS

Have you seen what is revealed in 8:27--9:13? Here we have a revelation of Christ's Person and His death and resurrection. Oh, we all need to see this! I am concerned that some of us have not seen the crucial matters of Christ's all-inclusive Person, His wonderful death, and His marvelous resurrection. If we see them, we shall say, "Amen! Amen to Christ! Amen to the death of Christ! Amen to the resurrection of Christ! Amen to my termination! Because I have been terminated, it is no longer I who live, hut Christ lives in me. Christ is the entire replacement in this universe. God does not want Moses, God does not want Elijah. and God does not want me in what I am. I say amen to the fact that God only wants Christ."

God does not want whatever we are in ourselves. He does not want our flesh, and He does not want our heart in its corruption. God only wants Christ, for Christ is the unique, all-inclusive replacement.

In 9:7 God declared, "This is My Son, the Beloved. Hear Him!" We need to hear Him, not ourselves. We should not listen to our mind, emotion. or will. We should not listen to what we think, imagine, or love. We should listen to Christ. Christ is God's Beloved, God's Favorite. He is the One who replaces everyone else and everything. Therefore, He should have all the ground in our living. Everything in our living should be given over to Him.

LIVING CHRIST THROUGH HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION

As the One who is our replacement, Christ has been crucified. On the cross He died an all-inclusive death, a death that included us and terminated us. After dying such a death, Christ was resurrected. Now in resurrection He is the life-giving Spirit to be the reality of our life.

When we apply His death as our termination, the Spirit has the full ground to make Christ real to us. Then we enjoy a real replacement. As a result, we can declare that we have been crucified with Christ and that we live no longer, but Christ lives in us. We can even say with Paul, "To me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). In everything, whether in death or life, we live Christ and magnify Him (Phil. 1:20).

In order to interpret these verses from chapters eight and nine of the Gospel of Mark, we need the fourteen Epistles written by Paul. With the help of these Epistles, we can see the picture in the first eight and a half chapters of Mark. May we be so deeply impressed with this picture that we never forget it! Praise the Lord that this picture includes us! We are in a divine realm living Christ through His death and resurrection. How wonderful! Praise the Lord for this highlight in the Gospel of Mark, the place where we have a revelation of Christ with His death and resurrection!

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE TWENTY-SEVEN

THE MOVE OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S GOSPEL SERVICE

(11)

Scripture Reading: Mark 9:14-50

In the foregoing message we saw that in 8:27--9:13 we have a revelation of Christ with His death and resurrection as the universal replacement for everything that is not God Himself. In this message we shall go on to consider 9:14-50.

It is not easy to understand what is revealed in 9:14-50. What is the main subject of this portion of the Gospel of Mark? If we divide this section into small pieces, we may have some understanding of particular points. But what do we see when all of the verses are put together?

THE CASTING OUT OF A DUMB SPIRIT

This portion of thirty-seven verses begins with the case of casting a dumb spirit out of a man's son (9:14-29). This took place immediately after the Lord and three of His disciples came down from the mount of transfiguration. "And coming to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes disputing with them. And immediately all the crowd seeing Him were amazed, and running to Him, greeted Him" (vv. 14-15). When the Lord Jesus questioned them about the dispute, "one of the crowd answered Him, Teacher, I brought my son to You, having a dumb spirit; and wherever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth, and he is wasting away; and I told Your disciples that they might cast it out, and they were not able" (vv. 17-18).

Here we see that the case involved a dumb spirit; it was not a matter of the entire person needing to be healed.

In verse 25 we see that it was a dumb and deaf spirit that was cast out of the child. Therefore, once again there was the need for a particular dealing with the hearing and speaking organs.

The Reason for the Disciples' Failure

The father of the child had asked the Lord's disciples to cast out the demon, but they were not able to do so. As learners, they should have been able to cast out this demon. But because they were not able to do it, there was a serious dispute. When the Lord came down from the mountain of transfiguration, He came into that situation. He then proceeded to cast out the dumb and deaf spirit.

Mark 9:28 says, "And when He entered into a house, His disciples questioned Him privately, Why were we not able to cast it out?" The disciples seemed to be saying to the Lord, "We have been following You and learning of You for a long period of time. It was easy for You to cast out the demon. But why were we not able to do it?"

In verse 29 we have the Lord's answer to the disciples' question: "This kind cannot come out by anything, except by prayer." The Lord's word here indicates that the disciples failed to pray, and that was the reason they could not cast out the demon.

Prayer and the Denial of the Self

Do you know what it means to pray? To pray means that we realize that we are nothing and that we can do nothing. This implies that prayer is the real denial of the self. To pray, therefore, is to deny ourselves, knowing that we are nothing and are not able to do anything. Furthermore, to pray is actually to declare, "Not I, but Christ."

Instead of praying, the disciples tried to cast out the demon. Perhaps they said to themselves, "We have been watching the Lord cast out demons for more than two years, and we have learned of Him. We should be able to cast the demon out of this child." But although they attempted to cast out the demon, they were not successful. We may say that they tried to cast out the demon without the necessary power, energy, divine electricity.

I wish to emphasize the fact that the word "prayer" in 9:29 actually indicates "no longer I, but Christ." Concerning this matter, we need to understand why this case immediately follows the revelation of Christ as our replacement and the Lord's word about denying ourselves. We need to deny ourselves so that Christ may be our replacement and become everything to us. Although the disciples saw this revelation, they did not practice it or live according to it. To see the revelation is one thing; but to live it is another.

Applying the Revelation concerning Christ as Our Replacement

Mark 9:14-50 is actually a practicing of the revelation of Christ as our replacement. It had been revealed to the disciples that Christ is the entire replacement through His death and resurrection. Death terminates us, and resurrection brings Christ to us. The result is "no longer I, but Christ." But how can this revelation be applied? According to the case of the casting of the dumb spirit out of the man's son, this vision is applied by prayer.

As human beings, we all have a problem with our temper. Thus, we may use the matter of temper, especially in married life, as an illustration of the fact that certain "demons" can be cast out only through prayer. In married life it is easy for a husband or wife to have a problem with temper. Surely every husband has a problem with his temper, and every wife has trouble with her temper. Temper is a serious problem in married life and is a cause of separation and divorce. If a husband and wife never exchange words and are never troubled by their temper, most problems in married life would be eliminated. But temper is a problem. Therefore, we certainly need Christ in our married life. I would say in no aspect of our human living do we need Him more than in our married life.

Do you know how to have the best married life? The way is to practice "not I, but Christ." But how can we practice this? The way to practice is to pray. For example, you should not try to subdue your temper. If you try in yourself to subdue your temper, you will eventually have a

more serious problem with it. The more you strive to subdue your temper, the more you will make a "deposit" in the "temper bank." Sooner or later, you will lose your temper in a more serious way. This is to try to cast out the "demon" of temper by your self-effort instead of by prayer.

Instead of trying to subdue your temper, you should pray. If you ask the Lord why you are not able to cast out the demon of your temper, He may say, "This kind cannot be cast out except by prayer. You need to pray."

Calling on the Lord

Actually, we do not need to pray in a lengthy way. It is sufficient simply to call, "O Lord Jesus!" Even such a short prayer indicates "no longer I, but Christ." Your prayer testifies that you do not exercise your self-effort to deal with the situation. Instead, you apply Christ. This is to practice the vision concerning Christ with His death and resurrection being our replacement.

You should not try to cast out demons by your self effort. In order to cast out demons, you need to pray. As we have pointed out, prayer means "no longer I, but Christ." Hence, the case in 9:14-29 points out that if we would be replaced by Christ, we need to pray instead of trying in ourselves to cast out demons.

THE SECOND UNVEILING OF THE LORD'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION

In 9:30-32 the Lord Jesus unveils His death and resurrection the second time. Verse 31 says, "For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, The Son of Man is being delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He is killed, after three days, He will rise." However, as verse 32 says, the disciples "did not understand what He was saying, and they were afraid to

question Him." Literally, the phrase "what He was saying" is "the word" (Gk., *rhema*).

TEACHING CONCERNING HUMILITY

The disciples may have had some understanding after their failure to cast out the demon that prayer is a matter of "not I but Christ," that prayer implies that we deny ourselves and realize that we are nothing, that we can do nothing, and that we need to be replaced by Christ. In order to be replaced by Him, we need to pray that the Lord will come in and be everything to us. However, we cannot be trained to practice this only by one instance, for a particular case is limited in what it can accomplish. Therefore, in 9:33-37 we have another case--the teaching concerning humility--in which the same point is emphasized.

Mark 9:33 and 34 say, "And they came into Capernaum. And when He was in the house, He questioned them, What were you reasoning about on the road? And they were silent, for they had argued with one another on the road who was greater." None of the disciples dared to say anything. But the Lord already knew that they had been disputing concerning who among them was greater. Then the Lord went on to teach concerning humility. "He called the twelve and said to them, If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all" (v. 35). Then He took a young child, set him in their midst, took him in His arms, and said to them, "Whoever receives one of such young children in My name, receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me, but Him who sent Me" (vv. 36-37). By taking the young child in His arms the Lord expressed His humanity in His tender love toward the little ones.

Do you realize what humility is? Like prayer, humility means that we are nothing. Humility means "no longer I, but Christ."

Here the Lord is teaching the disciples the same lesson as in the case that involved the casting out of the dumb spirit. The disciples had seen the vision concerning Christ's Person, His death to terminate them, and His resurrection to bring Him in as their replacement. But

even though this vision had been revealed to them, they still needed to practice it. In the matter of casting out demons, they needed to practice the vision by praying. To pray is to testify that it is "no longer I, but Christ." Regarding the matter of greatness, the disciples needed to practice the vision by learning humility. When they were debating concerning who was greater, they were neglecting the vision of Christ as their replacement and the vision of His death annulling them and His resurrection supplying them. Therefore, it was necessary for the Lord to train them to practice the vision concerning Himself as their replacement.

TEACHING CONCERNING TOLERANCE FOR UNITY

In 9:38 John, one of the sons of thunder, suddenly said to the Lord, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name who does not follow us and we forbade him, because he was not following us." This was John's impetuous act as a son of thunder This act was against the virtue of the Slave-Savior whom he accompanied. John's attitude was like that of Joshua in Numbers 11:28.

It may have been John's intention to change the subject. The debate about who was greater may have been instigated by the two sons of thunder, James and John. I believe that they played a leading role in this argument.

Instead of rebuking John, the Lord Jesus responded in a very wise manner. The remainder of the verses in this chapter (vv. 39-50) are devoted to the Lord's response to what John said in verse 38.

In verse 39 the Lord Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for there is no one who shall do a work of power in My name and be able soon to speak evil of Me." This is the Slave-Savior's tolerance, in the practice of the gospel service, toward His believers who were different from those closer to Him. In this aspect the Apostle Paul's attitude in Philippians 1:16-18 and that of Moses in Numbers 11:26-29 are like His, but not that of the impetuous John.

It is very meaningful that this section, from verse 38

through verse 50, continues the section of verses 33 through 37, where the Slave-Savior taught His disciples humility because they argued with one another concerning who was greater. In that argument the two sons of thunder, James and John, probably played the leading roles (see 10:35-45). It was the same John who would not tolerate a differing believer. This impetuous action was probably related to his ambition to be great. It may have been this ambition that caused his intolerance toward the different practice of other believers. This is a basic divisive factor among Christians. The Slave-Savior surely would not go along with John in this matter.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE TWENTY-EIGHT

THE MOVE OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S GOSPEL SERVICE

(12)

Scripture Reading: Mark 9:38-50

In this message we shall consider 9:38-50.

THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S TOLERANCE

As we pointed out in the foregoing message, in verse 38 John said to the Lord Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name who does not follow us, and we forbade him, because he was not following us." This was John's impetuous act as a son of thunder. This act was against the virtue of the Slave-Savior whom he accompanied. This is proved by the Lord's response in verse 39: "Do not forbid him, for there is no one who shall do a work of power in My name and be able soon to speak evil of Me." Here we see the Slave-Savior's tolerance, in the practice of the gospel service, toward His believers who were different from those closer to Him.

In verses 40 through 50 there are many puzzling things. In verse 40 the Lord Jesus says, "For he who is not against us is for us." For years I was bothered by this verse and had trouble understanding it, because I thought that it contradicted the Lord's word in Matthew 12:30. Actually there is no contradiction between these verses. Both issued from the Slave-Savior's mouth and may be considered maxims. The maxim in 9:40 speaks of the outward formality in practice regarding those who are not against the Slave-Savior (v. 39). The maxim in Matthew speaks of inward unity for purpose regarding those who are against Him (Matt. 12:24). To maintain inward unity we need to practice the word in Matthew. and for the

outward formality we should practice the word here and tolerate believers who are different from us.

In 9:41 the Lord goes on to say, "For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name because you are Christ's, truly I say to you that he shall by no means lose his reward." In verse 38 we see how John behaved as one who dealt with others. The Slave-Savior's wise word in verse 40 turned him and the other disciples to be those cared for by others. This implied that whether it was they or other believers--all were under the Lord's care because all were His. Whether it was their treatment of the other believers or other believers' treatment of them, if it was in the Lord's name, even the giving of a cup of water would be rewarded by Him.

In verse 41 the Lord speaks of someone giving a disciple a cup of water in His name because he is Christ's. This indicates that the Slave-Savior recognized that the one forbidden by John was a genuine believer and that he belonged to Him. This should have been a lesson to John.

A REWARD TO COME

In 9:41 the Lord says that the one who gives a disciple a cup of water "shall by no means lose his reward." This reward will be given in the coming kingdom age (Luke 14:14). The reward mentioned here is something in addition to eternal salvation. Eternal salvation is by faith, having nothing to do with our work (Eph. 2:8-9), whereas reward is for our work after we are saved (1 Cor. 3:8, 14). It is possible that we shall fail to receive a reward but instead suffer loss, even though we are saved, because we are lacking in the work which the Lord can approve (1 Cor. 3:15). At the Lord's coming back the reward will be given to us according to our works (Matt. 16:27; Rev. 22:12; 1 Cor. 4:5). It will be decided by the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10) and enjoyed in the coming kingdom (Matt. 25:21, 23).

In Mark 9:42 the Lord continues, "And whoever stumbles one of these little ones who believe, it is better

for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck, and he be thrown into the sea." Here the Slave-Savior turns the subject from John and the other disciples to His believers in general, all of whom He considers little ones (not related to the little children in verse 37), including John, the other disciples, and the one forbidden by them. This may be regarded as a warning to John and the other disciples not to cause to stumble any one of His believers who differed from them in following Him.

CAUSING STUMBLING TO OTHERS AND TO OURSELVES

Verse 43 says, "And if your hand stumbles you, cut it off; it is better for you to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go away into Gehenna, into unquenchable fire." Here the stumbling one is changed from a person to a member of the believer's fleshly body. The believers should not cause one another to stumble; neither should they be caused to stumble by their own fleshly members. This indicates how precious the believers are in the eyes of the Slave-Savior. They should all be fully preserved for Him. All the stumbling factors concerning the believers should be seriously dealt with.

In verse 43 "life" refers to eternal life, which the overcoming believers will enjoy in the coming kingdom. To inherit eternal life (Matt. 19:29) is to be rewarded in the coming age (Luke 18:29-30) with the enjoyment of the divine life in the manifestation of the kingdom.

"Gehenna" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Ge Hinnom, valley of Hinnom. This was a deep and narrow valley near Jerusalem, the refuse-place of the city, where the bodies of criminals were cast, along with all kinds of filth. It was also called Tophet, or Topheth (2 Kings 23:10; Isa. 30:33; Jer. 19:13). Because of its continual fire, it became the symbol of the place of eternal punishment, the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15).

In Mark 9:43 "unquenchable fire" is in apposition to

Gehenna. According to the context, it denotes a dispensational punishment, suffered by the defeated believers, such as being hurt of the second death in Revelation 2:11. As used in this verse, it does not refer to eternal perdition.

In 9:45 the Lord says, "And if your foot stumbles you, cut it off; it is better for you to enter into life lame, than having two feet to be thrown into Gehenna." This is very similar to the word in verse 43. (As verses 44 and 46, some manuscripts insert, "Where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.")

In verse 47 the Lord continues, "And if your eye stumbles you, cast it out; it is better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna." To enter into the kingdom of God is to enter into the enjoyment of eternal life in the coming age.

Verse 48 says concerning Gehenna, "Where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched." This word is a quotation from Isaiah 66:24.

SALTED WITH FIRE

Verse 49 says, "For everyone shall be salted with fire." The purpose of this salting is to have the germs of corruption through sin killed and eliminated in order that sin-committing believers may be preserved (see Lev. 2:13; Ezek. 43:24).

The fire in Mark 9:49 is a refining fire (Mal. 3:2), a purifying, purging fire, as in 1 Corinthians 3:13, 15 (see Isa. 33:14), which will purge, in the kingdom age, the believers who commit sin and are unrepentant in this age, as a dispensational punishment. Even in this age God purges the believers through trials as by fire (1 Pet. 1:7; 4:12, 17). Dispensational punishment by fire in the coming age is in the same principle as God's chastisement through sufferings as by fire in this age.

In verse 50 the Lord Jesus concludes, "Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltness, with what will you restore its saltness? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." Salt by nature is an element that kills and eliminates the germs of corruption. For the believers in

Christ to lose their saltness means that they have lost their salting function. In such a case, they have become the same as earthly people and can no longer be distinguished from unbelievers.

The application of the Lord's word here concerning salt differs from that in Matthew 5:13 and Luke 14:34. In Matthew and Luke, salt, portraying the believers' influence upon the world, is for salting the corrupted world; salt here, in apposition to purging fire, is for the salting of sin--committing believers, even as God's chastisements salt or purge sinning believers in this age. Hence, the believers should "have salt in themselves" so that they may be purified not only from sins but also from any divisive factor, such as that exhibited by the impetuous John in forbidding a brother who differed from him and in arguing for greatness. This purifying is that they may "be at peace with one another." Such purging salt purges the believers' speech as with grace (Eph. 4:29) that they may keep peace with one another (Col. 4:6). This way of speaking is very different from John's word to the brother who differed from him. Therefore, the entire section at the close of chapter nine (vv. 38-50) presents the Slave-Savior's teaching concerning the believers' tolerance for the sake of unity.

THE KEY TO THIS PORTION OF MARK

We need to understand 9:38-50 in the light of the vision given in 8:27--9:13 concerning Christ, His death, and His resurrection. Apart from that vision, we do not have the way to understand this section of the Gospel of Mark. The key that opens these verses is Christ with His death and resurrection.

We have pointed out that in 9:38 John told the Lord Jesus that they saw someone casting out demons in His name who did not follow them, and they forbade him, because he was not following them. It seems that John was saying, "This man was casting out demons in Your name, Lord. Yet, he would not follow us. He is divisive, sectarian.

Because he causes trouble, we forbade him to cast out demons in Your name. I told him that either he should

come along with us, or he should stop casting out demons in Your name."

In this situation could John say that he was living Christ, that now it was no longer he, but Christ? Certainly not. Had John been terminated by Christ's death, and had His resurrection been wrought into him? Not at all! In 9:38 John was still a natural son of thunder. He was still in himself, even in an enlarged self. When the Lord was speaking to the disciples concerning humility, John even went on in verse 38 to change the subject.

The Lord's reply in verse 39 must have come as a great surprise to John: "Do not forbid him, for there is no one who shall do a work of power in My name and be able soon to speak evil of Me." Here the Lord Jesus was saying to John, "You should not forbid him. He is not against Me; rather, he is for Me. All the believers are mine."

In verse 41 the Lord went on to say, "For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name because you are Christ's, truly I say to you that he shall by no means lose his reward." Here the Lord may have been saying, "Instead of forbidding this one to cast out demons in My name, you should give him a cup of water to drink. If he serves one of you with a cup of water, this will be remembered by Me. Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink in My name will receive a reward in the coming age."

A SERIOUS WORD ABOUT STUMBLING

In verse 42 the Lord goes on to speak a serious word about causing to stumble those who believe in Him: "And whoever stumbles one of these little ones who believe, it is better for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck, and he be thrown into the sea." How serious it is to cause to stumble those who believe in the Lord! John may have been shocked at this word concerning the seriousness of causing another believer to stumble. He might have said to himself, "If I cause another believer to stumble, my future may be worse than that of someone who has a

millstone hung around his neck and is thrown into the sea."

In verses 43 through 48 the Lord turns from the matter of causing others to stumble to causing ourselves to stumble. He points out that we may be caused to stumble by our hand, foot, or eye. It is serious to cause another believer to stumble, and it is also serious for us to be caused to stumble by any part of our fleshly body. The seriousness of this is indicated by the fact that if we are caused to stumble by a member of our body, we may be thrown into Gehenna, into unquenchable fire.

REWARD AND PUNISHMENT IN THE COMING AGE

Some Christians may be greatly surprised to hear that a believer may be cast into unquenchable fire. They may wonder how it could be possible for a saved one to be punished by fire. Concerning this, we need to consider the word of the Lord Jesus. He is the One who said that if we are stumbled by a member of our body, we may be cast into unquenchable fire.

In 9:41 the Lord speaks of reward, and in 9:42-48 He speaks concerning punishment. Both the reward and the punishment will be in the coming age, in the age of the kingdom. In the coming age the one who gives a disciple a cup of cold water to drink because that one is Christ's, will be rewarded. Likeness, the punishment spoken of in these verses will also be in the coming age.

In 9:43 the Lord speaks about entering into life. One aspect of the punishment in the coming age is losing the enjoyment of eternal life. As we have seen, here it is not a matter of receiving eternal life; instead, it is a matter of entering into eternal life. We received eternal life when we were regenerated. But entering into eternal life is a matter of the coming age, the age when the kingdom of God will be manifested. It is still pending whether or not we shall enter into the enjoyment of eternal life in the coming age. We may be hindered by the lust of our hand, the lust of our foot, or the lust of our eye. The lust in our members may cause us to lose the enjoyment of eternal life in the coming

kingdom age. Instead of entering into this enjoyment, we may be punished by fire.

When some hear that believers may suffer in the coming age, they may say, "This is serious! How could redeemed ones suffer such a punishment? Isn't the redemption of Christ complete and adequate?" Yes, Christ's redemption certainly is complete and adequate. Nevertheless, it is a fact that redeemed ones often receive some punishment by God in this age. According to 1 Peter 1:7 and 4:12, and 17, the believers may be purged through trials as by fire. For example, 1 Peter 4:12 says, "Beloved, do not think the fiery ordeal among you is strange, which is coming to you for a trial, as a strange thing happening to you." The Greek word rendered "fiery ordeal" is *purosei*. This word means burning and signifies the burning of a smelting furnace for the purification of gold and silver (Prov. 27:21; Psa. 66:10). Peter considered the persecution the believers suffered as such a burning furnace used by God to purify their life. This is God's way to deal with the believers in the judgment of His governmental administration, which begins from His own house (1 Pet. 4:17-19).

Many Bible teachers realize that it is possible that God's redeemed people may suffer God's punishment in this age. Since the redeemed ones may suffer God's punishment in this age, why should we think that it is not possible for them to suffer His punishment also in the coming age? Who has the ground to say that the believers cannot suffer the punishment of God in the coming age? The Bible does not tell us such a thing. On the contrary, the Bible reveals that God knows how to execute His punishment both in this age and in the coming age. For example, a father may consider what is the best way to discipline his child. He may carry out the discipline immediately, or he may choose to wait for a period of time. He will consider what is the best time to administer discipline to his child. In a similar way, God knows what is the best time for Him to discipline His children, and he also knows the best way.

The New Testament indicates that genuine believers, those who have been fully redeemed by Christ, may still suffer God's discipline, God's chastisement. The fact that God may discipline the believers does not mean that Christ's redemption is not complete or adequate. Even though Christ's redemption is fully complete and adequate, we still need to take Christ and be replaced by Him. We still need to pray and thereby be able to say in a practical way, "No longer I, but Christ." If we do not take Christ in this way, we may be caused to stumble by the lust in our hand, foot, or eye. Then instead of enjoying eternal life in the coming kingdom age, we shall suffer God's punishment.

THE WAY TO ENTER INTO THE COMING KINGDOM

Whether in the coming age we enjoy eternal life or suffer punishment depends on how we live today. We need to have a life of prayer and continually call on the name of the Lord, telling Him, "Lord, it is no longer I, but You. Lord, in every matter of my living may it be no longer I, but You. Lord, I take You as my replacement. Replace me through Your death and resurrection. Lord, I realize that I have been terminated on the cross, and I also realize that in Your resurrection You are living in me. Now I can say in my experience that it is no longer I who live, but You, Lord, are the One living in me."

If this is your experience, then you will overcome the lust in your hand, foot, and eye. You will be a person taking Christ as your replacement, enjoying Him as everything in your daily living, and living Him in a practical way. As a result, nothing will cause you to stumble, and neither will you cause others to stumble. Because you are filled and saturated with Christ, no part of your being will be able to cause you to stumble. Instead of being caused to stumble, you will be able to praise the Lord and say, "Hallelujah, it is no longer I, but Christ! Hallelujah for Christ! Hallelujah for His death and resurrection." This enjoyment today will bring you into the enjoyment of eternal life in the coming kingdom age. This is to enter into the coming kingdom and to be kept away from God's dispensational punishment in the kingdom age,

a punishment that takes place temporarily for a certain period of time.

In 9:49 the Lord says, "For everyone shall be salted with fire." This indicates that fire will function as salt, and we shall be salted with this fire. This salt kills the germs of lust that are within us. Although we have been saved and are children of God, we still have many "germs" within us. Therefore, we need the "salt" of "fire," a "fire-salt," to kill these germs and purify us. This is not merely a punishment; it is also a preservation. This fire-salt will preserve us from being corrupted eternally.

If we see what is revealed in these verses, we shall pray, "Lord Jesus, may it be no longer I, but You in my daily living. In all things and in relation to all people, may it be not I, but You. Lord, I need to be a praying person. Through prayer I can overcome the lust that is within me. Lord, I have been crucified with You, and now You are living in me."

Through the cross we have been terminated, and in resurrection Christ has been brought into us. Now we should enjoy Christ and live Him. Day by day we should live a life in His death and resurrection. Then truly it will be, "No longer I, but Christ." If we live such a life, we shall not cause others to stumble, and we shall not be caused to stumble by any lust that is within us. Then in this age we shall enjoy Christ and in the coming age we shall enter into a fuller enjoyment of eternal life, the enjoyment of the coming kingdom

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE TWENTY-NINE

THE MOVE OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S GOSPEL SERVICE

(13)

Scripture Reading: Mark 9:38-50

In this message we shall give a further word on 9:38-50. We have pointed out that in this portion of the Gospel of Mark we have the Lord's teaching concerning tolerance for the sake of unity.

THE DANGER OF CONSIDERING OURSELVES BETTER THAN OTHERS

In 8:27--9:13 we have a vision of Christ as our all-inclusive replacement through His death and resurrection. Throughout chapter nine the Lord was teaching the disciples to realize that they should be terminated and be nothing. However, in 9:33-37 we see that they were arguing with one another over the matter of who was greater. The Lord was teaching the disciples and trying to help them realize that they should be nothing, but they were arguing in their effort to be somebody, even someone who was greater than others. Therefore, in 9:33-37 we have the Lord's teaching concerning humility.

In 9:38 John said to the Lord Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name who does not follow us, and we forbade him, because he was not following us." The remainder of this chapter is given over to the Lord's teaching concerning tolerance for the sake of unity, a teaching given in response to John's statement in verse 38.

We need to see that if we forbid others in the way John

did in verse 38, this indicates that we consider ourselves greater than others. Furthermore, when we forbid others, thinking ourselves to be greater, we also cause others to stumble. While we are causing others to stumble, we are also causing ourselves to stumble. The evil one may use the members of our body--the hand, the foot, or the eye--to express lust and cause us to stumble. We need to be very careful regarding this.

We should not consider ourselves great. Instead, we need to realize that we are nobody and nothing. If we have this realization, we shall pray. For us to pray indicates that we realize that we are nothing and that we can do nothing. We need another One--Christ Himself--to replace us.

If we do not consider ourselves to be someone great, someone greater than others, we shall not cause others to stumble. But if we think that we are great, we shall cause others to stumble. At the same time, we shall open the gate for the enemy to use the lust in our members to cause us to stumble.

The members of our body, especially the eyes, are lustful. If we cause others to stumble by considering ourselves greater than they are, we may have a wicked eye. Then the way will be open for the enemy to utilize the lust in our members to cause us to stumble.

We all need to learn to take the cross, to bear the cross, and to apply the Lord's terminating death to our situation. If we put ourselves to death in this way, we shall not consider ourselves to be great. Rather, we shall regard ourselves as nothing. As a result, there will not be any ground for the enemy to come in to utilize the members of our body to cause us to stumble.

If we do not take the cross and apply it to ourselves, we shall not only cause others to stumble, but we shall cause ourselves to stumble again and again. We shall be caused to stumble by the lust in our hand, in our foot, and in our eye. If this is our situation, then eventually when the kingdom age comes, we shall need salting because we are still full of "germs."

PURGED AND PRESERVED BY FIRE

The salting about which I am speaking is the salting with fire. Concerning this, the Lord Jesus said, "Everyone shall be salted with fire" (v. 49). Here we have the "fire-salt," or fire as salt. In the coming age, some may be put into fire to be salted. This salting by fire will purge them. In a sense, this purging is a discipline, a chastisement, a punishment. But in another sense this purging causes the believers to be preserved. Hence, this purging is not merely a punishment but also a preserving that keeps the purged one from perishing, from being eternally lost.

As we have pointed out, the fire in 9:49 is a refining fire (Mal. 3:2), a purifying, purging fire. As in 1 Corinthians 3:13 and 15, this fire will purge, in the kingdom age, those believers who commit sin and are unrepentant in this age. Therefore, this refining by fire will be a dispensational punishment. We have seen that even in this age God purges the believers through trials as by fire (1 Pet. 1:7; 4:12, 17). Dispensational punishment by fire in the coming age is in the same principle as God's chastisement through sufferings as by fire in this age.

AT PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER

In 9:50, which is the Lord's concluding word in this section, we see the real significance of this portion of Mark. In this verse the Lord says, "Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltness, with what will you restore its saltness? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." Here we see that the underlying meaning of this portion is that we should be at peace with one another.

We have emphasized the fact that 9:38-40 begins with John's word about forbidding someone to cast out demons in the Lord's name, because he did not follow the disciples. In response to John's word, the Lord seems to be saying in these verses, "That one who cast out demons in My name did not follow you. But he is nevertheless one of My believers, and you should be at peace with him. However, you were not at peace with him because you regarded yourselves as greater than he. You also considered that you are closer to Me than he is. You think that you are

better than he. This kind of thought causes him to stumble and also opens the door for the enemy to come in to cause you to stumble by using your lustful members."

Actually, this portion of the Gospel of Mark is profound. Here we see the real cause of the divisions among today's Christians. Christians certainly are not at peace with one another. In 9:50 the Lord says, "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." But the entire situation among believers today is the opposite. We cannot say that the believers are at peace with one another.

The reason the believers are not at peace with one another is that so many consider themselves to be somebody and think of themselves as greater than others. The result is that others are caused to stumble, and the door is open for the enemy to utilize the lustful members of the believers' body to cause them to stumble. Therefore, eventually the vast majority of Christians today have been caused to stumble.

Where are those Christians who have not been caused to stumble either by others or by their own doing? The situation is that the believers cause others to stumble, and then Satan comes in to utilize their hands, feet, and eyes to cause them to stumble. Hence, the believers cause one another to stumble, and each one causes himself to stumble.

SALT AND GRACE

Because of the situation among believers, a situation full of stumbling, we urgently need the vision of Christ that the disciples saw on the mountain of transfiguration. Mark 9:7 says, "And a cloud came overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, This is My Son, the Beloved. Hear Him!" We also need to hear Christ, God's Beloved. We should not hear ourselves or anyone else.

We need a vision in which we see not only Christ but also His all-inclusive death and His resurrection. We need

to be replaced by Christ through His death and resurrection. This means that we need to apply His death to ourselves and then receive His rich supply in His wonderful resurrection. If we are replaced by Christ in this way, we shall be healed of the "germs" within us. We shall be salted even in this age. There will be no need for us to wait for the coming age in order to be salted.

To be salted in this age is to be salted by grace through the death and resurrection of Christ. But if we wait to be salted in the coming age, we shall be salted by fire. If we salt ourselves today through the death and resurrection of Christ, we shall have grace.

In Colossians 4:6 Paul puts grace and salt together: "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one." In Ephesians 4:29 Paul refers to words that give grace to those who hear: "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but only that which is good for needful building up, that it may give grace to those who hear." Grace is Christ as our enjoyment and supply. Our speech should convey this grace to others. The word that builds up others always ministers such grace to the hearers. For our speech to be with grace means that Christ is expressed through our words. This means that our words should be the expression and utterance of Christ. Every word should be the expression of Christ as grace.

According to Colossians 4:6, our speech should also be seasoned with salt. Salt makes things agreeable and pleasant to the taste. Speech seasoned with salt will keep us at peace with one another. This is the reason the Lord tells us in Mark 9:50 to have salt in ourselves and then to be at peace with one another. If our words are with grace and are salted, they will cause all things to be agreeable.

When we salt ourselves with Christ's death and resurrection, we receive grace. But if we do not salt ourselves with Christ's death and resurrection, we shall miss the opportunity to receive grace. As a consequence, we shall be salted by fire as a punishment in the coming age.

I would encourage the saints to pray-read 9:38-50. Through the pray-reading of these verses you will be enlightened. Then you will realize that you should never be divisive. You should not forbid others, and you should never force others to follow you.

TWO MAXIMS

Concerning Outward Formality

In this message I would also like to impress you with two maxims uttered by the Lord Jesus, the first in Matthew 12:30 and the second in Mark 9:40. In 9:40 the Lord says, "He who is not against us is for us." This maxim speaks of outward formality in practice regarding those who are not against the Lord (v. 39). According to verse 38, someone was casting out demons in the name of the Lord Jesus, although he was not following the disciples who were close to the Lord. Here we have a matter of outward formality. Both this person and the Lord's disciples were casting out demons. However, that one did not follow the Lord in the same way the disciples did. Here we see a difference in formality. The disciples' formality was to follow the Lord Jesus, but the formality of this other party was not to follow Him with the disciples. The disciples cast out demons by following the Lord; this other person cast out demons not by following the Lord but by being in the name of the Lord. What we have here is a difference in formal practice, a difference in outward formality.

Concerning differences in outward formality, we need to be very open. The person mentioned in verse 38 was casting out demons in the name of the Lord Jesus. It was right for him to do this, for he was doing the same thing the disciples were doing. Likewise, believers today may preach the gospel in a way that is different from our gospel preaching, but both they and we are still preaching the gospel. This is a matter of outward formality in practice, and we need to be general in our attitude regarding it.

Concerning Inward Unity

The second maxim is in Matthew 12:30: "He who is not

with Me is against Me, and he who is not gathering with Me is scattering." This word concerns inward unity for purpose, and it was spoken regarding those who were against the Lord. In particular, it was spoken concerning the Pharisees, who said, "This man does not cast out the demons except by Beelzebub, ruler of the demons" (Matt. 12:24). The Pharisees were not one with the Lord Jesus; rather, they were against Him. Instead of gathering with Him, they were scattering away from Him. Hence, they were absolutely separated from Him and joined to His enemy, Satan.

We need to see that the maxim in Matthew 12:30 is related to inward unity for purpose. This maxim surely applies to us today in the Lord's recovery. Because we are here for the recovery, we must be one with one another. It is not possible for any among us to say, "Even though we are not one with you, we are still for the Lord's recovery." We do not believe that someone can be for the Lord's recovery and yet not be one with those who are in the recovery. There must be an inward unity for purpose.

With respect to these two maxims. we need to see the difference between practice and purpose. Regarding practice, we need to be general. But regarding purpose, we need to be particular. Concerning outward practice, the Lord says, "He who is not against us is for us." But regarding inward unity for purpose, He says, "He who is not with Me is against Me."

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE THIRTY

THE MOVE OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S GOSPEL SERVICE

(14)

Scripture Reading: Mark 10:1-31

In this message we come to chapter ten of the Gospel of Mark. In verse 1 we have a word concerning the Lord's coming to Judea. Then in 10:2-31 we have His teaching concerning divorce (vv. 2-12), His blessing of the young children (vv. 13-16), and His teaching concerning the rich and the kingdom of God (vv. 17-31).

A CHAPTER FOR THOSE IN THE HIGHLIGHT OF THE DIVINE REVELATION

Many readers of the New Testament do not regard Mark to be as deep as Matthew, John, or even Luke. Some may even view the Gospel of Mark as containing stories for children. We thank the Lord for enlightening us concerning the various portions of this Gospel. As we have pointed out, in 8:27--9:13 we are brought into the highlight, the foremost vision, concerning matters in the realm of divine, mysterious things. This vision concerns Christ with His all-inclusive death and His wonderful resurrection to be our entire, universal replacement.

In 9:14-50 we have a training of the disciples in the light of what has been unveiled in the preceding chapters. In particular, the disciples were trained to be at peace with one another in order to maintain unity. This peace and unity among the believers is for the Body life. Following the training given in 9:14-50, the Lord goes on in chapter ten to give us further training.

Chapter ten of Mark is not a chapter for theological

study. This is a chapter of teaching for those who are in the highlight of the divine revelation in this Gospel; it is for those who have seen the living Person of Christ with His death and resurrection to be their replacement. If we have seen this vision, then we have the proper standing and are in the right sphere to receive what is unveiled in this chapter.

We should not isolate any part of chapter ten from the vision concerning Christ with His death and resurrection to be our replacement. For example, in 10:14 the Lord Jesus says, "Allow the young children to come to Me; do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of God." We should not consider this merely as a word to be read to little children at bedtime. Rather, we need to see this in relation to the heavenly vision concerning Christ with His death and resurrection.

TAKING CHRIST AS OUR REPLACEMENT THAT WE MAY ENTER INTO THE COMING KINGDOM

In 10:2-31 three matters are covered: marriage, young children, and riches. These matters are all related to the kingdom of God. In particular, they are related to our entering into the kingdom.

If we would enter into the kingdom of God, we need Christ as our replacement, and we need the application of His death and the enjoyment of His resurrection. According to what is revealed regarding the human heart in chapter seven, we are inwardly unclean, unclean in our heart. Our heart is a composition of unclean things. Because our heart is in such a condition, we need to be replaced by Christ. We need to be terminated through His death, and we need His resurrection to bring in the Lord Himself as our life supply, as our real bread of life.

If we have Christ as our replacement and if we experience His terminating death and supplying resurrection, we shall be able to handle the matters of marriage, age or oldness, and riches. Then we shall be qualified to enter into the kingdom. Otherwise, we shall not be fit for the kingdom; we shall not have an entrance

into the kingdom. If we do not have Christ as our replacement, if we do not have His death to terminate us, and if we do not have His resurrection to supply us with Himself as life-giving bread, we shall not have an entrance into the kingdom.

Studying the Bible is not a matter of using our natural mind to read merely the black-and-white letters. If we would see the vision revealed in and conveyed by the holy Word, we need divine light. We also need some amount of experience in the Lord. If we are lacking in the divine light and if we are short of experience, we shall not be able to see much in the Word, if anything at all. We thank the Lord for showing us something marvelous concerning Christ with His death and resurrection to be our replacement. This is a matter that the natural mind cannot comprehend. In order to see this, we need heavenly light and spiritual experience.

I wish to emphasize the fact that we need to read chapter ten of the Gospel of Mark in the light of what is revealed in chapters seven, eight, and nine. Especially we need to read chapter ten according to the vision of Christ with His death and resurrection to be our all-inclusive replacement. In 8:27--9:13 we have the highlight, and chapter ten is presented according to this highlight. If we did not have 8:27--9:13, we could not have the highlight. Now as we consider chapter ten, we should not regard what is recorded here merely as stories for children. On the contrary, everything in this chapter is related to the vision of Christ and His death and resurrection.

COMING INTO THE DISTRICTS OF JUDEA

Mark 10:1 says, "And rising up from there, He comes into the district of Judea and beyond the Jordan; and again crowds came together to Him, and again, as He was accustomed, He taught them." In this verse "there" refers to Capernaum, which is in Galilee. Up to this point the Slave-Savior's ministry had been in Galilee. But now, according to this verse, He rises up from the city of Capernaum in Galilee and comes into the district of Judea,

the district surrounding Jerusalem. This verse also speaks of the Jordan, the place where the Slave-Savior was initiated. Hence, Jordan reminds us of the beginning of the gospel and the initiation of the Slave-Savior. In our study of the Gospel of Mark, we need to find out why the writer mentions Judea and the Jordan.

The Slave-Savior had been ministering in His gospel service for over three years in the despised region of Galilee, far from the holy temple and the holy city, the place where He had to die for the accomplishment of God's eternal plan. As the Lamb of God (John 1:29), it was necessary for Him to be offered to God at Mount Moriah, where Abraham offered Isaac and enjoyed God's provision of a ram as a substitute for his son (Gen. 22:2, 9-14) and where the temple was built in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 3:1). It must be there that He would be delivered, according to the counsel determined by the Trinity of the Godhead (Acts 2:23), to the Jewish leaders (Mark 9:31; 10:33), and there be rejected by them as the builders of God's building (8:31; Acts 4:11). It should also be there that He would be crucified according to the Roman style of capital punishment (John 18:31-32; 19:6, 14-15) to fulfill the type concerning the kind of death He would die (Num. 21:8-9; John 3:14). Moreover, that very year was the year that Messiah (Christ) would be cut off (killed) according to Daniel's prophecy (Dan. 9:24-26). Furthermore, as the Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7) He had to be killed in the month of the Passover (Exo. 12:1-11). Hence, He had to go to Jerusalem (Mark 10:33; 11:1, 11, 15, 27; John 12:12) before the Passover (John 12:1; Mark 14:1), so that He might die there on the day of the Passover (14:12-17; John 18:28) at both the place and the time foreordained by God.

The gospel service was initiated by the ministry of John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Slave-Savior, in Judea (Mark 1:1-11), the region of honor. But it was continued by the ministry of the Slave-Savior in Galilee, a despised region, for a period of approximately three years (1:14--9:50). Unlike John in his Gospel, Mark does not narrate anything of the Slave-Savior's ministry in Jerusalem and Judea during this time, until He left

Galilee for Jerusalem the last time, to accomplish His redemptive work. Then the gospel service was continued by His ministry on the way to Jerusalem and in Jerusalem and its vicinity (10:1--14:42). It was concluded with His redeeming death, His life-imparting resurrection, His ascension for exaltation, and the continuation of His gospel service by His disciples' preaching to all the creation (14:43--16:20).

THE PLACE AND THE TIME ORDAINED BY GOD

As Christians we know that it was necessary for the Lord Jesus to die for us. In our reading of the Bible, we need to ask at what place and what time the Lord would die. According to the Old Testament, both the place and the time were ordained by God. The Slave-Savior was a slave of God, and as such He had no choice concerning the place and time of His death. Both the place and the time were determined by His Master. Furthermore, it was determined by a counsel of the Trinity of the Godhead that the Slave-Savior would be delivered to the Jewish leaders and be rejected by them (Acts 2:23).

We need to ask ourselves why, after He had been ministering in Galilee for about three years, the Slave-Savior suddenly rose up and went to the south, to the district of Judea and beyond the Jordan. He did this because the time of His death was approaching. He had to die in the year prophesied by Daniel. Furthermore, according to the type of the Passover Lamb, He had to die on the Passover, that is, on the fourteenth day of the first month of the Jewish calendar. Therefore, it is a very significant matter that, according to 10:1, the Lord left Galilee and went to Judea.

LAYING ASIDE TRADITIONAL TEACHINGS AND COMING BACK TO THE PURE WORD OF GOD

Although the scribes were dedicated to the study of the Scriptures, they did not see from chapter nine of Daniel the year that the Messiah would be cut off, put to death. Daniel 9 tells us that from the decree to build up

Jerusalem "unto the Messiah the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks...and after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off..." (vv. 25-26). The "weeks" here refers to years, with each week being the equivalent of seven years. Therefore, the length of time from "the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem" unto the cutting off of the Messiah would be four hundred eighty-three years. It should have been rather easy for the scribes to calculate the year in which the Messiah would be cut off. However, because they cared for tradition and were occupied by it instead of caring for the pure Word, they did not see this matter.

Just as the scribes were preoccupied by tradition and not by the pure Word, so the majority of today's Christians are occupied by traditional teachings instead of the pure Word of God. Many are not willing to come back to the Word and study it directly in a pure way. If the ancient scribes had been willing to forget traditional teachings and study the Scriptures in a pure way, they would have known the exact year in which the Messiah would be cut off. Moreover, they would have realized that in that very year they were trying to arrest the Lord Jesus.

Although the scribes did not know when the Messiah would be cut off, the Lord Jesus knew the time when He would be put to death. He knew the year, the month, and the day. He knew that He would be put to death on the Passover, that is, on the fourteenth day of the first month in the Jewish calendar. Knowing this, He went boldly to Judea, not wanting to be delayed. He knew that it was necessary for Him to be in Jerusalem four days before the Passover. That was the period of time when the Passover lamb was examined.

The Lord Jesus certainly knew all the prophecies and types concerning His death. He knew, in particular, that He would be crucified on Mount Moriah, another name for Mount Zion. The Lord knew that He should not be crucified in Galilee. It was necessary for Him to be crucified on Mount Moriah, at the very place where Abraham offered Isaac and received God's provision. The

Lord also knew that He would be put to death by being crucified, by being lifted up on a pole, as typified by the brass serpent in Numbers 21:8-9.

Although the matters related to the death of Christ were clearly prophesied and typified in the Old Testament, nevertheless the scribes, those who claimed to be "doctors" in the law, did not know these things. This should serve as a warning to us. If we fall under the influence of traditional teachings, our eyes also will be veiled from seeing the revelation in the pure Word. Therefore, we need to lay aside the traditional teachings and come back to the pure Word of God. If we do this, we shall receive much light from the Lord.

Mark 10:1 says that when the Lord came into the district of Judea, He taught the people, as He was accustomed. In 10:15 we see that here the Lord taught concerning the kingdom of God: "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a young child shall by no means enter into it." This verse indicates strongly that the Lord's teaching in 10:13-16 concerning young children is directly related to the kingdom of God.

RECEIVING THE KINGDOM AND ENTERING INTO THE KINGDOM

In verse 15 we see two aspects regarding the kingdom: receiving the kingdom and entering into the kingdom. Have you received the kingdom of God? To this question we all can answer, "Amen! I certainly have received the kingdom of God." Do you also have the assurance that you will enter into the kingdom of God? We may hesitate in answering this question, for although we are endeavoring to enter into the kingdom of God, we do not have the definite assurance that we shall enter into that kingdom

RICHES AND THE COMING KINGDOM

The teaching concerning riches in 10:17-31 is also related to the kingdom of God. For example, in verse 24 the Lord says, "Children, how difficult it is to enter into

the kingdom of God!" Then in verse 25 the Lord goes 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." These verses indicate that what we have in 10:17-31 is not merely a story for children; what we have here is a serious word concerning the kingdom of God.

In verse 26 we see the disciples' response to the Lord's word about entering into the kingdom of God: "But they were even more astounded and said among themselves, Then who can be saved?" Here we see that although the Lord was teaching about entering into the kingdom of God, the disciples' minds were occupied with the matter of being saved. In verse 27 the Lord went on to explain. "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God."

In verse 28 Peter, speaking frankly, began to say to the Lord, "Behold, we have left all and followed You." I appreciate Peter's frankness. He seemed to be saying, "Behold, Lord, we have left everything in order to follow You. We left our family, our fishing boats and even the Sea of Galilee. Doesn't this merit something?"

In verses 29 and 30 we have the Lord's reply: "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for My sake and for the gospel's sake but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and fields, with persecutions, and in the coming age, eternal life." Here eternal life is not mentioned with respect to our salvation. In this verse eternal life is a reward as our enjoyment in the coming age. In the coming kingdom the overcoming believers will enjoy eternal life. To enter into this enjoyment in the coming age is to enter into the coming kingdom and participate in its enjoyment of eternal life.

Now we can see that what is contained in chapter ten is related to the kingdom. The Lord's word here is related to receiving the kingdom of God and, in particular, to entering into the kingdom in the coming age.

THREE THINGS THAT MAY KEEP US FROM ENTERING INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In 10:2-31 we see three matters that may frustrate us from entering into the coming kingdom: marriage, oldness, and riches. The disciples had been brought into the way that leads into the kingdom. Now in chapter ten it was necessary for them to be taught concerning three things that could frustrate them from entering into the kingdom of God.

If we would enter into the coming kingdom, we need to learn to handle rightly the three matters of marriage, age, or oldness, and money. We need to take care of marriage according to God's ordination, we need to keep from becoming old spiritually, and we need to handle our money in a proper way. May we be impressed with the fact that the Lord's teaching concerning these matters in chapter ten is related to entering into the kingdom of God.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE THIRTY-ONE

THE MOVE OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S GOSPEL SERVICE

(15)

Scripture Reading: Mark 10:1-31

In this message we shall continue to consider 10:1-31. In this portion of the Gospel of Mark we have four matters: the Lord's coming to Judea (v. 1), the teaching against divorce (vv. 2-12), the blessing of young children (vv. 13-16) and the teaching concerning the rich and the kingdom of God (vv. 17-31). In the foregoing message we pointed out that three matters that may frustrate our entering into the kingdom of God are marriage, oldness, and riches. We have seen that if we are replaced by Christ, we surely shall have the way to handle these matters properly. Let us now consider in more detail what the Lord says in 10:2-31 concerning marriage, oldness, and riches.

TEACHING AGAINST DIVORCE

When God created man, He did not create all the people He needed for His purpose at the same time. If God had wanted to create a great number of people at the same time, He certainly could have done so. He could have created billions of people. However, this was not God's way. Instead, God created a couple and charged them to multiply and replenish the earth. According to God's ordination, the propagation of mankind takes place through marriage. Marriage, therefore, is second only to God's creation.

We should never despise marriage. Hebrews 13:4 says, "Let marriage be held in honor among all." Marriage is holy, and we must honor it.

Mankind was brought into existence through God's creation, and God ordained that mankind be propagated through marriage.

We need to see that marriage is honorable and holy, for it is ordained for the propagation of mankind for the fulfillment of God's purpose. Apart from the creation of man and the propagation of mankind through marriage, there cannot be the fulfillment of God's purpose. We need to look at marriage from this point of view. If we consider marriage in this way, we shall honor it. We shall realize that marriage is for the propagation of mankind so that God's eternal purpose may be fulfilled.

In our marriage life we need to be honest, faithful, and pure. If we are not honest, faithful, and pure, we shall offend God in a very serious way. According to the Bible, God condemns fornication and adultery. Hebrews 13:4b says, "Fornicators and adulterers God will judge." Fornication and adultery are second only to idol worship as sins that are most offensive to God. Therefore, we need to care for marriage in a proper way before God. We need to see that fornication and adultery damage the proper propagation of mankind. This is the reason that God does not allow divorce.

Because marriage is such a serious matter, I would caution the young people against entering into it in a hasty way. Young people, before you get married, you need to have much prayer and consideration. Do not simply consider marriage from your point of view. You need to consider marriage especially from God's point of view. Do not get married in haste, for once you are married, you no longer have any alternative. Divorce is highly offensive to God.

Since we are on our way to enter into the kingdom of God, we especially need to be firm in our standing regarding marriage. We need to realize that once we are married there should not be any divorce.

All married people should be "blind" to the shortcomings of their mate. They should not try to learn the faults of their spouse. All the investigating concerning the other party should be done before the time of

engagement. After you are engaged, and especially after you are married, you should close your eyes to the defects of the other party and be blind. Unless you are willing to be blind in this way, you will not have a proper married life.

According to 10:2, the Pharisees questioned the Lord Jesus "whether it is lawful for a man to put away a wife." When He asked what Moses commanded them, they replied, "Moses permitted us to write a certificate of divorce and put her away" (v. 4). This commandment was not a part of the basic law, but a supplement to the law. It was given by Moses, not according to God's ordination from the beginning, but temporarily because of the hardness of man's heart.

In 10:5-8 the Lord goes on to say, "In view of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, He made them male and female. For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife. And the two shall be one flesh; so that they are no longer two, but one flesh." Here the Lord's word not only recognizes God's creation of man but also confirms God's ordination of man's marriage, that is, one male and one female to be joined and yoked together as one flesh, inseparable by man. The commandment concerning divorce given by Moses was a deviation from God's original ordination. But Christ takes us back to God's ordination in the beginning.

In 10:9 the Lord says, "What therefore God has yoked together, do not let man separate." Here we see that divorce is not merely against the law of God; divorce is against God Himself. What God has yoked together man should not separate.

On the one hand, marriage is a necessity. On the other hand, married life is difficult. Nevertheless, we must learn to love this difficulty and even care for it with affection. This means that we should love our marriage and take good care of it. Otherwise, we shall be hindered in entering into the kingdom of God.

We believe that God is true, and we also believe that His Word, the Bible, is true. Hence, we must honor what

God says in His Word concerning marriage. It is a serious matter not to handle our married life properly. Failure to take care of our married life according to God will keep us from entering into the kingdom. Yes, we now are on our way to the kingdom. But whether we shall actually enter into the kingdom in the coming age is still pending. According to chapter ten of Mark, whether we shall enter the kingdom in the coming age depends in the first place on the way we handle our married life.

BLESSING THE YOUNG CHILDREN

I have given much thought as to why the record concerning the Slave-Savior's blessing the young children (vv. 13-16) is inserted into chapter ten. As a result of my consideration, the Lord enlightened me to see that this indicates that those who are on their way to enter into the kingdom of God should not become old. Instead, they should be young, even as young children.

Perhaps the most difficult thing for Christians to deal with regarding entering into God's kingdom is their oldness. Much of the teaching, doctrine, and theology among today's Christians is old. If we would enter into the kingdom of God, we need to be young and fresh.

I am very concerned whenever I see the saints in the Lord's recovery becoming old in their spiritual life. Thirty years ago, you may have been young and fresh, but now you may he old. Today Christians are held back from going on with the Lord by their oldness and also by their old teachings. These teachings may be fundamental and even scriptural and correct, but they are old.

In 10:14-15 the Lord Jesus says, "Allow the young children to come to Me; do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of God. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a young child shall by no means enter into it." Having said this, the Lord took the young children in His arms and blessed them (v. 16). We see from this that the Lord Jesus treasured the young children and embraced them. By taking the young children in His arms and blessing them, the Lord was indicating to

His followers that they should not become old, that they all should be as young children in order to enter into the kingdom.

In 9:38 John, one of the sons of thunder, said to the Lord, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name who does not follow us, and we forbade him, because he was not following us." The fact that John forbade someone from casting out demons in the Lord's name was an indication that John had become old, spiritually speaking.

The disciples of John the Baptist also became old. They followed John for not more than three years. But even in that short period of time they became old and eventually formed a religion. The same thing in principle may happen among us today. I am concerned that oldness is creeping into the Lord's recovery. Once oldness comes in we shall no longer be fresh day by day.

We may use the gathering of manna in the Old Testament as an illustration of our need to be new and fresh every day. The principle with the gathering of manna was that it was gathered one day at a time. Except for the Sabbath, any manna that was left over for the following day would stink and bring forth worms. This portrays our need to he refreshed and renewed daily. Day by day we should become newer and fresher.

I believe that the truth in the Gospel of Mark can be presented in an even fresher way than in these messages. We of course, do not change the truth. However, we can have a fresher way of presenting the truth. For example, although the earth remains the same, the means of transportation has improved. In a similar way, God's truth does not change, but the way to present this truth should be newer and fresher all the time.

God's kingdom has come in a new way. It was necessary for the Pharisees and scribes to be reborn in order to enter into the kingdom of God. What does it mean to be reborn? To be reborn is to be renewed. Because oldness has nothing to do with God's kingdom, we must be

reborn, renewed, in order to enter into the kingdom.

A great problem among Christians today is their oldness. Many turn to old expositions or cling to the old teachings of their denomination. Lutherans, for instance, may check matters by what Luther says. No doubt, justification by faith is a basic item of the truth. However, with respect to this truth we need to be renewed and refreshed.

In one of the foregoing messages we spoke of Christ as our entire, universal replacement. Before that message was given, I had never used such an expression. It was while I was speaking that this expression came forth. I do not know of any other expression that is so helpful in conveying the truth of Christ's replacing us. I use this as an example of not staying in our old knowledge.

We all should be new, and the teaching among us should also be according to new light. We have seen from chapter seven that the Lord Jesus is a Surgeon operating on our heart and exposing its condition. Is this not a new, fresh understanding of the Lord's dealing with our heart?

I do not want to be old in any way. Neither do I want to be limited by old ways of expressing the truth in the Word of God. Before 1949, we never spoke about being one spirit with the Lord, and we did not use the term "life-giving Spirit." Further, we never mentioned anything about the sevenfold, intensified Spirit. All these are new expressions among us.

Even the matter of calling on the name of the Lord is new, as far as our practice is concerned. When we were in China, we did not emphasize calling on the Lord's name. Some claim that I invented this. I did not invent calling on the Lord's name. At most, I discovered this matter in the Bible. As early as Genesis 4 men began to call on the name of the Lord. By the Lord's mercy, He has used us to discover this matter, but we surely did not invent it. A great many saints have been blessed by calling on the Lord's name. But even our calling should be new and fresh.

In a previous message we saw that prayer is actually a matter of "not I, but Christ." Have you ever heard that

prayer is a matter of not I, but Christ? I can testify that this understanding of prayer is new to me. This is a further illustration of our need to be new, young, and fresh.

Be assured that in the future more new things will come forth, and more striking terms and expressions will be used. Through new terms and expressions we may receive more light and grace. Therefore, let us not keep our oldness, but daily be renewed and refreshed.

TEACHING CONCERNING THE RICH AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

We have seen that two matters that can hinder us from entering into the kingdom of God are the way we handle marriage and oldness. In 10:17-31 we see that riches are another thing that can hinder us.

In verse 21 the Lord Jesus looked at the man who had asked Him what he should do in order to inherit eternal life, and He said to him, "One thing you lack: go, whatever you have, sell it and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." When I read this many years ago, I was troubled. As a student, I was concerned that I would not be able to fulfill the Lord's commandment to sell everything. Gradually, by studying the New Testament, I came to see that Paul did not instruct the Corinthians to sell all their possessions and give to the poor. Paul did not tell them, "Corinthians, if you mean business with the Lord, you must sell all that you have and give to others." Nowhere in Paul's writings is there such a word. However, Paul does emphasize the fact that none of the believers should be under the bondage of wealth. We should not be bound by riches in any way. Rather, the slavery of riches must be nullified. We are not for riches; riches are for us. We must be free from our material possessions and use our riches for the fulfillment of God's purpose.

Of course, as human beings, we need money in order to live. But we never should be enslaved to money. Money should not be our master. Rather, money should be under

our management and should be used for God's purpose. If money is not under our control and if it is not used for God's purpose, then we shall be enslaved to it. As a result, we shall not be able to enter into the kingdom of God.

If we are filled with Christ, we shall be able to handle the matters of marriage, oldness, and riches. We shall handle marriage with Christ, we shall deal with the matter of oldness with Christ, and we shall manage money with Christ. This means that in the matters of marriage, oldness, and wealth we are replaced by Christ so that we may enter into the kingdom of God.

May we be impressed with the truth that the best way to handle our married life is to take Christ as our replacement and to experience His death and resurrection. Likewise, the best way to keep ourselves new, fresh, and young is to take Christ through His death and resurrection. Furthermore, the best way to handle our money is Christ with His death and resurrection. If we do not have Christ and His death and resurrection, we shall not have the way to handle the three matters of marriage, oldness, and wealth. The only way to handle these things properly is to be replaced by Christ through His all-inclusive death and His wonderful resurrection.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE THIRTY-TWO

THE MOVE OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S GOSPEL SERVICE

(16)

Scripture Reading: Mark 10:32-52

In this message we shall begin to consider 10:32-52. This is the last section in the Gospel of Mark concerned with the move of the Slave-Savior's gospel service.

ON THE WAY TO JERUSALEM

Chapter ten describes a number of matters that took place on the way to Jerusalem. We have pointed out that in 10:1 the Lord Jesus rose up from Galilee and came into the district of Judea. The Lord made this move deliberately so that He might die in Jerusalem for the accomplishment of God's eternal plan. Therefore, to be on the way to Jerusalem is to be on the way to enter into the death of Christ. Then through death, we enter into His resurrection. Hence, the way to Jerusalem is the way into Christ's death and resurrection.

After the end of chapter ten, no further miracles of healing are recorded in this Gospel. At the end of Mark 10, the move of the Slave-Savior's gospel service is concluded with the healing of Bartimaeus, a blind beggar. After that healing, the Lord and His followers came into Jerusalem. Their purpose in entering into Jerusalem was to enter into death, resurrection, and even ascension. The last six chapters of the Gospel of Mark, chapters eleven through sixteen, unveil how Christ with His followers entered into an all-inclusive death, a wonderful resurrection, and a marvelous ascension.

As we have pointed out in foregoing messages, as the

Lord and His disciples were on the way to Jerusalem, He taught His followers how to handle the matters of marriage, oldness, and money. Each of these matters is closely related to our entering into the kingdom of God. The incidents in 10:32-52 also take place on the way to Jerusalem.

Mark 10:32a says, "Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid." Here we see that the Lord Jesus was strong, bold, and eager. Walking in front of the disciples, He took the lead to go up to Jerusalem with eagerness. The Lord's followers were greatly surprised, perhaps even shocked, by His boldness. This verse says that those who followed were afraid.

Why was the Lord Jesus so bold in going up to Jerusalem? Concerning this, Luke 9:51 says, "And it came about, when the days were being fulfilled for His being taken up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." The Lord's face was set like a flint, for He knew that the time of His death was very near. At this point, there was approximately one week remaining before He would be put to death. The Lord was not willing to be stopped, frustrated, or hindered in any way from going up to Jerusalem. If He were hindered, He would miss the day of the Passover, the day for Him to die as the Lamb of God. This was the reason the Lord was so bold to walk in front of all the disciples on the way to Jerusalem.

THE THIRD UNVEILING OF THE LORD'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION

According to Mark 10:32b-34, as the Lord was going up to Jerusalem, He unveiled His death and resurrection the third time: "And taking the twelve aside again, He began to tell them the things about to happen to Him: Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they shall mock Him and spit at Him, and

shall scourge Him, and kill Him; and after three days He will rise." The first time the Lord revealed His death to the disciples was in Caesarea Philippi, before His transfiguration (8:31). The second time was in Galilee, after His transfiguration (9:31). Now we need to see that the third unveiling took place on the way to Jerusalem. This revelation was a prophecy, altogether strange to the natural concept of the disciples, yet literally fulfilled in every detail.

INCLUDED IN THE LORD'S DEATH

Because the time for the Slave-Savior's death had come, He was willing to go to Jerusalem. He went before His followers with a speed and boldness that amazed them. This was His obedience to God unto death (Phil. 2:8), according to the counsel of God (Acts 2:23), for the fulfillment of His redemptive plan (Isa. 53:10).

The Lord Jesus knew that through His death He would be glorified in resurrection (Luke 24:25-26) and that His divine life would be released to produce many brothers for His expression (John 12:23-24; Rom. 8:29). For the joy set before Him, He despised the shame (Heb. 12:2) and volunteered to be delivered to the Satan-usurped leaders of the Jews and condemned by them to death. Therefore, God exalted Him to the heavens, seated Him at His right hand (Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33-35), gave Him the name which is above every name (Phil 2:9-10), made Him both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36), and crowned Him with glory and honor (Heb. 2:9).

The death of the Lord Jesus in Jerusalem included not only the Lord Himself, but also His followers. In fact, we also were included in His death. When the Lord entered into His all-inclusive death, He brought His followers into that death with Him. It is important for us to have this view as we consider the remainder of chapter ten and then the last six chapters of the Gospel of Mark.

When the Lord Jesus died on the cross, all His believers died with Him. According to the record of Mark, we can see that Peter, John, and James in particular were

put to death with the Lord Jesus. He brought them and the other disciples purposely with Him into death. As a result, they could share in His resurrection and even be witnesses of His ascension.

On the day of Pentecost, ten days after the Lord's ascension, the Spirit, who is actually the Lord Himself, was poured out upon all those who entered into Christ's death, participated in His resurrection, and saw His ascension. With Christ as the life-giving Spirit poured upon them, they could realize in their experience that truly they were in the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Furthermore, they could apply the Lord's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension to their living. Therefore, on the day of Pentecost Peter and the one hundred twenty were people in Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension. They were one with Christ, and they were actually His embodiment. On that day they were living Christ. We all need to see such a marvelous picture.

It was not an accident that on the day of Pentecost the one hundred twenty were witnesses of the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ. They all had followed Him and had passed with Him through death and into resurrection. They also saw His ascension. On the day of Pentecost they were in the reality of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

THE BLINDNESS OF THE LORD'S FOLLOWERS

As the Lord Jesus and His disciples were on the way to Jerusalem, He wanted to impress them with the matters of His all-inclusive death and His wonderful resurrection. Hence, for the third time, He spoke to them about His death and resurrection. However, the disciples did not have eyes to see. Even after the Lord had repeated this word the third time, His followers still were not able to see it.

The incidents recorded in 10:35-45 prove that the Slave-Savior's disciples were blind with respect to the vision of His death and resurrection. Immediately after the Lord's unveiling of His death and resurrection for the third time, James and John came to Him and said,

"Teacher, we desire that whatever we ask You, You will do for us" (v. 35). The Lord replied, "What do you want Me to do for you? And they said to Him, Grant to us that we may sit, one on Your right, and one on Your left, in Your glory" (vv. 36-37). This request exposes the fact that John and James were still natural sons of thunder. They certainly had not been replaced by Christ, and they had not been crucified and brought into the Lord's resurrection.

According to the account in the Gospel of Matthew, it was the mother of the sons of Zebedee who made this request (Matt. 20:20-21). She was a sister of Mary, the Lord's mother, and was therefore His aunt. From this we see that James and John were the Lord's cousins. It may have been based upon the fact that they thought they had a close natural relationship with Him that they asked for a favor--sitting at the Lord's right and left in His glory.

The Lord had told His disciples that He was about to die. But they were ambitious to sit at the Lord's right and left. Their request was altogether natural.

THE LORD'S CUP AND HIS BAPTISM

In Mark 10:38 the Lord said to James and John, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup which I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" Both the cup and the baptism refer to the Slave-Savior's death (John 18:11; Luke 12:50). The cup signifies that His death was the God-given portion for Him to take for the sinners whom He would redeem for God. Baptism denotes that His death was the God-ordained way for Him to pass through for the accomplishment of God's redemption for sinners.

From the Lord's answer we see that those who would sit at the Lord's right and left in His glory must be prepared to "drink the cup" of suffering. To suffer the cross is the way to enter into the kingdom (Acts 14:22). The selfish entreaty of John and James afforded the Lord an opportunity to reveal the way to enter into the kingdom.

When James and John told the Lord that they were able to drink His cup and be baptized with His baptism, He said to them, "The cup which I drink you shall drink; and the baptism with which I am baptized, you shall be

baptized. But to sit on My right or on My left is not Mine to give, but for those for whom it has been prepared" (vv. 39-40). Here we see that the Lord stood in the position of a man. Standing in such a position, the Lord was fully subject to the Father. He did not assume the right to do anything outside the Father.

THE WAY INTO THE KINGDOM

The ten were indignant about James and John (v. 41). Then, calling them all to Him, the Lord said to them, "You know that those who presume to rule the nations lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you, but whoever wants to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever wants to be first among you shall be slave of all" (vv. 42-44). The Lord's word here is absolutely contrary to the natural self-seeking mind. The indignation of the ten also afforded the Lord an opportunity to reveal the way into the kingdom. The way is to be willing to serve others as a servant, even as a slave, instead of ruling over them.

THE SLAVE OF GOD SERVING SINNERS

In verse 45 the Lord goes on to say, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." This is the strongest expression, stating that the Slave-Savior, as the Son of Man in His humanity, is a Slave of God to serve sinners even with His life, His soul. Furthermore, the word "ransom" here indicates that even the Slave-Savior's redemption was His service rendered to sinners for God's plan.

BLIND BEGGARS

As we shall see more fully in the next message, in making their request James and John were actually blind sons of Timaeus, blind beggars (v. 46). Their word about sitting at the Lord's right and left in His glory was a word spoken by those who were blind.

We may even say that James and John were actually blind beggars. In chapter ten we see them begging for a position at the Lord's right and left. It is significant, therefore, that this chapter closes with the healing of blind Bartimaeus. James and John certainly needed such a healing themselves. As blind men begging for position, they needed the Lord to open their eyes so that they could see Him and see His death and resurrection. We need to learn from Mark 10 that if we are still ambitious for a position in the church life, we also are sons of Timaeus poor, blind beggars needing the Lord's healing.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE THIRTY-THREE

THE MOVE OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S GOSPEL SERVICE

(17)

Scripture Reading: Mark 10:32-52

In this message we shall continue to consider 10:32-52, the last section in the Gospel of Mark concerned with the move of the Slave-Savior's gospel service. Here we have three matters: the Lord's going up to Jerusalem and the unveiling of His death and resurrection the third time (10:32-34), His teaching concerning the way to the throne in the kingdom of God (vv. 35-45), and His coming to Jericho and healing blind Bartimaeus (vv. 46-52).

AMBITION AND BLINDNESS

In 10:35 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to the Lord Jesus and said to Him, "Teacher, we desire that whatever we ask You, You will do for us." When He asked them what they wanted Him to do for them, they said, "Grant to us that we may sit, one on Your right, and one on Your left, in Your glory" (vv. 36-37).

These two brothers had been following the Lord from the very beginning. They were the next ones after Peter and Andrew to be called by Him. But, although they had followed the Lord for more than three years, they were still in their blindness and needed a further healing, a particular healing of their seeing organ. John and James were not able to see Christ and His death and resurrection. The Lord had spoken to them three times concerning His death, but because they were blind they were not able to understand what He was saying.

In 10:46 we are told that the Lord and His disciples

came to Jericho, a place of curse. It was according to God's sovereignty that they came to Jericho.

Mark 10:32 says, "Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid." The Lord was walking boldly in front of the disciples, and they were amazed and even frightened. While on the way, the Lord told them that He was going to Jerusalem in order to carry out an all-inclusive death, a death that would terminate the disciples and bring them into resurrection. As we have pointed out, because the disciples were blind, they could not understand the Lord's word concerning His death, even after He had revealed it the third time.

Before they arrived at Jerusalem, a city of peace, they came to Jericho, a city of curse. It is very significant that near Jericho they met a blind man: "As He was going out from Jericho, and His disciples and a large crowd, the son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, sat by the road" (10:46). This blind man, like the one in 8:22, signifies one who has lost his inner sight, one spiritually blind (Acts 26:18; 2 Pet. 1:9).

We may say that blindness is the worst kind of curse. When someone is blind, he is cursed. Furthermore, blindness is a matter of darkness, and darkness is the issue of sin and death. Therefore, blindness indicates darkness, which is a composition of sin and death. Where there is blindness, there is darkness, and where there is darkness, there is sin and death.

Even though the Lord's disciples had been following Him for more than three years, in chapter ten they were still blind. This means that, being in blindness, they were under darkness, and sin and death were present. Hence, they needed a clear vision of what the Lord Jesus would do in Jerusalem, a vision that He would enter into death in order to terminate the accursed situation. His death would eliminate blindness, darkness, sin, and death, and it would bring people into resurrection. Therefore, it was of God's sovereignty that the Lord and His disciples came to Jericho, into a place where there was a blind man.

The case of Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, indicates that all the disciples were blind. Their ambition for position was a sign of their blindness. Their ambition was also an indication that they were still under the curse. It is truly significant that immediately after John and James made their request to sit at the Lord's right and left in His glory, they all came to Jericho, a city of curse.

DEATH AS A PORTION AND A PROCESS

When James and John asked to sit at the Lord's right and left, He said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup which I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" (v. 38). We have seen that both the cup and the baptism refer to the death of the Slave-Savior (John 18:11; Luke 12:50). The cup signifies that His death was the God-given portion for Him to take for the sinners whom He would redeem for God. Baptism signifies that His death was the God-ordained way for Him to pass through for the accomplishment of redemption.

In 10:40 the Lord went on to say to John and James, "To sit on My right or on My left is not Mine to give, but for those for whom it has been prepared." Here the Lord seems to be saying, "You ask to sit at My right and left. But I have no position to give you such a place, for I Myself am a slave. You should ask My Master concerning this. Don't come to Me with such a request. As a slave I cannot do anything about it."

In His answer to John and James the Lord Jesus exposed their ambition and independence. At the same time, His answer implied that He was altogether dependent on the Father as His Master. Because He was not independent of the Father, He did not have the standing to give a position to anyone. Being a slave, He knew that only the Father could assign a position to anyone. Moreover, the Lord's wise answer implied that the disciples were in darkness, that they did not know what they were asking. By making such a request, they went beyond their limit; they went too far.

We have seen that in verse 38 the Lord asked James and John if they were able to drink the cup that He would drink and be baptized with the baptism with which He would be baptized. When they told Him that they were able, He went on to say, "The cup which I drink you shall drink; and the baptism with which I am baptized, you shall be baptized" (v. 39). Here the Lord seems to be saying, "Do you know what the cup indicates? It indicates death. Baptism also signifies death. Do you know what your portion is? Your portion is not a position--your portion is death. You want a position, but a position is not what you need. You need to realize that a portion, not a position, has been prepared for you, and this portion is My death. I must die, and you must die with Me. This death is also a baptism, a process through which I must pass. You will go through this process with Me. I do not have a position for you, for it is not My right to give you this. Your need is to take your portion and to pass through this process, both of which refer to death."

What is your portion in the church life today? Is your portion a certain position? Is it your portion to be an elder or a leader in a service group? We all need to realize that our portion in the church life is death. We need to drink the cup of crucifixion, of termination. Our portion in the church life is not position; our portion is termination. Do you want to be an elder? If so, you need to be terminated. Do you want to be a leader in a service group? If so, you need to be terminated. Our portion in the church life is termination, not position.

In the church we have death not only as a portion for us to drink, but also as a process through which we must pass. As those who are in the church life, we are in the baptism of the Lord's death. We are passing through the lengthy process of death.

When some hear about the portion and process of death in the church life, they may say, "Brother Lee, we are frightened. Your word terrifies us." However, I am not the one who first spoke about the cup and baptism of death. It was the Lord Jesus who said that we shall drink His cup and be baptized with His baptism. As we have seen, this

word was given to John and James, the sons of thunder, who wanted to sit at the Lord's right and left. The Lord seemed to be telling them, "You don't know what you are asking. Instead of being on My right hand or on My left, you need to be in My tomb. Instead of being promoted to My right or left, you will be buried with Me. I must drink the cup, and this cup will become yours. I shall be baptized into the process of death, and you will be baptized into the same process. Without passing through this process, you will not be able to enter into My resurrection."

We have seen that Christ is the unique replacement and that we shall be replaced by Him. But in order to be replaced by Christ, we need to pass through the process of His death. Also, in order to enter into the kingdom of God, we need to drink the cup of His death. Both the cup and the baptism refer to Christ's death. Now we need to take the cup and pass through the process.

Among many Christians today, the teaching regarding the Lord's death as the portion for us to drink and the process for us to pass through has been neglected. Instead, believers often regard chapter ten of the Gospel of Mark as a chapter of stories. But what we have here is not merely an account of some stories. Here the Lord reveals what the kingdom life is and what is the way into the kingdom.

The way into the kingdom is to take the portion of death and to walk through the process of death. This is to take Christ's death as our death. Our testimony should be that every day we are drinking His death and walking through His death. Then we shall be able to say, "Now it is no longer I, but Christ. I am drinking His terminating death, and I am walking through His death as a process." It is by taking this portion and by going through this process that we are in resurrection. In resurrection truly it is no longer I, but Christ.

THE HEALING OF A BLIND BEGGAR

All the disciples, represented by the two sons of

thunder, needed the healing of their blindness. Near Jericho they met a blind beggar, Bartimaeus. Mark 10:47 says, "And hearing that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and to say, Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me!" Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet. But he cried out even more, saying, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (v. 48).

Then Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." In spite of the rebuking of many, the Slave-Savior charged them to call the pitiful blind beggar. This again expressed His humanity in His pity toward miserable people. Bartimaeus then threw away his garment, leaped up, and came to Jesus (v. 50).

The Lord Jesus then said to him, "What do you want Me to do for you?" (v. 51). What open love toward the needy one! This love expressed the Slave-Savior's humanity to an unimaginable extent.

The blind man said to the Lord, "Rabboni, that I may recover my sight!" The Lord said to him, "Go, your faith has healed you" (v. 52). Immediately Bartimaeus recovered his sight and followed the Lord.

If we carefully read 10:35-52, we shall see that the two sons of thunder were one with the blind beggar. Our basis for saying this is that the Lord asked the same question both of James and John and of Bartimaeus: "What do you want Me to do for you?" (vv. 36, 51). In the Lord's understanding, the two sons of thunder were the same as the poor beggar. However, there was a significant difference: James and John begged in a wrong way, but Bartimaeus begged in a right way. James and John asked to sit on the Lord's right and left, but Bartimaeus asked to receive his sight.

We believe that, in spiritual significance, the healing of the blindness of Bartimaeus was also a healing of the blindness of James, John, and the other disciples. The Lord did not give them a position at His right and left, but He certainly was willing to heal their blindness. He knew that He had come to be the light of the world. Therefore, He was willing to give sight to the blind.

THROWING AWAY THE GARMENT OF POSITION

Mark 10:50, speaking of blind Bartimaeus, says, "And throwing away his garment, he leaped up and came to Jesus." A person throwing away his garment signifies that this one does not care for position. A garment or uniform signifies position. For example, a uniform worn by a policeman or a nurse signifies position. When a policeman is off duty, he will lay aside his uniform. Bartimaeus did not care for any position. His only desire was to have sight. Therefore, when he heard that Jesus called him, he immediately cast aside his garment and went to the Lord to receive sight.

In principle, all of us in the church life need to throw away our "garments." If you regard the eldership as a position, you need to throw away the garment of the eldership. Likewise, those who want to be leaders in the service groups should cast away the garment of leadership. We should throw away all the garments of position and care only to receive spiritual sight. Like Bartimaeus, we all need sight.

We may say that the Lord Jesus died so that those who believe in Him may receive their sight. By dying with Him we pass out of our blindness and into the Lord's resurrection. Then in resurrection we receive our sight.

RECEIVING OUR SIGHT IN RESURRECTION

The healing at the end of chapter ten is the last miracle of healing recorded in the Gospel of Mark. The final miracle of healing was the healing of blindness. I am very grateful to the Lord that He has fully healed my blindness. Hallelujah, I have received my sight! I do not care for any "garment," for any position.

After the healing of blindness in Mark 10, the Lord's followers were ready to enter into His death. By entering with Him into death, they would also be able to enter into His resurrection.

We need to be impressed with the fact that the Lord Jesus was not the only one who would pass through death in order to be in resurrection and ascension. All of His

followers would go with Him into death in order to enter into His resurrection and ascension. In chapter sixteen of Mark we have a glorious scene in which all the Lord's followers enter into His ascension through His death and resurrection. By the end of chapter ten, the disciples were qualified and prepared to go through death and resurrection so that they could be with the Lord in His ascension.

In your spiritual experience have you come to the end of chapter ten? Have you received a final healing, the healing of your blindness? Praise the Lord that we can say that our blindness has been healed! Hallelujah, we have no more blindness, darkness, sin, and death! Now we are ready to go with the Slave-Savior into death, through His resurrection, and into His ascension.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE THIRTY-FOUR

THE PREPARATION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR FOR HIS REDEMPTIVE SERVICE

(1)

Scripture Reading: Mark 11:1-26

THE CONCLUSION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S GOSPEL SERVICE

At the end of chapter ten we have the conclusion of the Slave-Savior's ministry of the gospel. Mark 4:35--10:52 is a long section covering the move of the Slave-Savior's gospel service. In this section twenty-nine matters are covered: silencing the wind and stilling the sea (4:35-41); casting out a legion of demons (5:1-20); healing a woman with a flow of blood and raising up a dead girl (5:21-43); being despised by the Nazarenes (6:1-6); sending the twelve to preach (6:7-13); the martyrdom of the forerunner of the gospel (6:14-29); feeding the five thousand (6:30-44); walking on the sea (6:45-52); healing everywhere (6:53-56); teaching concerning the defiling things from within (7:1-23); casting a demon out of a Syrophoenician woman's daughter (7:24-30); healing a deaf and dumb man (7:31-37); feeding four thousand (8:1-9); not giving a sign to the Pharisees (8:10-13); warning concerning the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod (8:14-21); healing a blind man in Bethsaida (8:22-26); being recognized as Christ and unveiling His death and resurrection the first time (8:27--9:1); being transfigured on the mount (9:2-13); casting a dumb spirit out of a man's son (9:14-29); unveiling His death and resurrection the second time (9:30-32); teaching concerning humility (9:33-37); teaching concerning tolerance for unity (9:38-50); coming to Judea (10:1);

teaching against divorce (10:2-12); blessing young children (10:13-16); teaching concerning the rich and the kingdom of God (10:17-31); going up to Jerusalem and unveiling His death and resurrection the third time (10:32-34); teaching concerning the way to the throne of the kingdom of God (10:35-45); coming to Jericho and healing blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52). By means of these twenty-nine matters, the Lord Jesus prepared His disciples to be brought into His death and resurrection.

BROUGHT INTO THE LORD'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Why was it necessary for a number of the Lord's disciples to be brought into His death and resurrection? The answer to this question is that the disciples could not participate in the enjoyment of the Lord otherwise. Furthermore, if they did not enjoy the Lord by being brought into His death and resurrection, they would not be able to enter into the kingdom of God or have anything to do with the kingdom.

We enter into the kingdom through the enjoyment of the Lord, through the enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ as the universal replacement. In order to enjoy Him in this way, we need to pass through His death and resurrection. Therefore, the Lord worked on the disciples to make them ready to be brought into the process of His death and resurrection.

We have seen that the Lord was proceeding onward to Jerusalem in order to die there. But we also need to realize that the Lord was not going to Jerusalem alone. Rather, He was bringing with Him a number of His faithful followers. These followers were not clear about what was happening. They may have felt only that the Lord was very lovable and that they wanted to go wherever He went. Actually, the Lord's purpose was to bring all of them into His death and resurrection. Once the Lord's followers were brought into His death and resurrection, they could participate in the enjoyment of Him in an actual and

practical way. It is through death and resurrection that the Lord becomes our portion and our replacement.

A WONDERFUL VISION

In the Gospel of Mark we see Peter, John, James, and other faithful ones following the Lord Jesus. From their point of view, they were following the Lord. But from the Lord's point of view, He was preparing them to be brought into His death and resurrection. By the time they came to Jericho, they were fully prepared for this.

By entering into the Lord's death and resurrection, the disciples could have the enjoyment of the Lord and experience Him as their replacement. As a result, on the day of Pentecost the one hundred twenty were those who had been replaced by the Lord and who were enjoying Him. They all had been brought into the Lord's death and resurrection. Through His death and resurrection they were participating in Him, a living, all-inclusive Person, as their replacement.

Through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the disciples also had a rich entrance into the kingdom of God. Hence, on the day of Pentecost we see a picture of the kingdom of God. With Peter and the one hundred twenty on the day of Pentecost, we have a manifestation of the kingdom of God. This manifestation includes the full enjoyment of Christ as the universal, all-inclusive replacement through His death and resurrection. How was it possible for the one hundred twenty to be in the kingdom of God on the day of Pentecost? This was possible only through their entering into the death and resurrection of Christ.

According to chapter one of Acts, the one hundred twenty were Galileans. Although they were from Galilee, the Lord Jesus brought them through many things to Jerusalem, where they entered into His death and resurrection. When the Lord was crucified, these Galileans were there and witnessed His death. Actually, they passed through crucifixion with Him. Eventually, they were brought into the Lord's resurrection and saw His ascension. Then on the day of Pentecost the Lord as

the Spirit was poured upon them. All that they had seen and passed through became a reality to them. They had seen the Lord's death, they had entered into His resurrection, and they had witnessed His ascension. But when the Lord as the Spirit was poured upon them, all these matters became a reality to them. This means that they were in the Lord's death, resurrection, and ascension. They were participating in the full enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ as the universal replacement.

We all need to have such a vision when we read the Gospel of Mark. If we do not have this vision, we shall not be able to get into the depths of this book.

Apparently, Mark is a book of stories. Actually, it is not a book of stories but a book containing a wonderful vision. As we read the chapters of this Gospel, it is as if we are watching a heavenly television, and scene after scene is "telecast" into our spirit. Praise the Lord for such a vision!

We thank the Lord for showing us how His intimate followers are qualified, perfected, equipped, and made ready to enter into His death and resurrection. The lengthy section from 4:35 through 10:52 presents a clear picture of how Galileans who once were very natural could be prepared to enter into the death and resurrection of Christ. At the end of chapter ten, they are fully made ready to come to Jerusalem, that is, to enter into the death and resurrection of Christ.

THE GREATEST MIRACLE IN THE UNIVERSE

Next to Christ Himself, the death and resurrection of Christ are the two greatest matters in the universe. Only the Person of Christ Himself is greater than these. Apart from Christ Himself, nothing is as great as His death and resurrection.

We have seen that actually the Lord Jesus in going toward Jerusalem was proceeding toward His death. Then through His death He entered into His resurrection. The Lord Jesus walked boldly from Capernaum to Jerusalem in order to enter into death. God and the entire creation were waiting for this. Jesus knew that He was going to

Jerusalem to carry out a great, all-inclusive death. Knowing the appointed time, the date of His death, He walked boldly to Jerusalem.

We may say that the greatest miracle in the universe was the Lord's entering into and accomplishing His all-inclusive death. According to Hebrews 12, the Lord was happy with what lay before Him (v. 2). He knew that there was a joy set before Him. Therefore, He went up to Jerusalem that He might accomplish God's purpose through His death. What a great step that was in God's economy!

It is a very significant matter that in carrying out His all-inclusive death, the Lord brought all of us into death with Him. If we see this, we shall not regard the Gospel of Mark merely as a book of stories. Instead, we shall see that this book conveys a great revelation.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE LORD'S REDEMPTIVE WORK

By the end of chapter ten, the Slave-Savior's gospel ministry had been completed. We have seen that the ministry of the Slave-Savior included five matters as the contents of the gospel service: preaching the gospel, teaching the truth, casting out demons, healing the sick, and cleansing the leper. All these matters were completed by the end of chapter ten. Therefore, chapters eleven through sixteen are different in nature from the preceding chapters of the Gospel of Mark. In the last six chapters of this Gospel we no longer have such things as the casting out of demons or the healing of the sick. Instead, in 11:1--14:42 we have the preparation of the Slave-Savior for His redemptive service. Before the Lord could perform His redemptive work, a certain preparation was necessary.

Not many readers of the Gospel of Mark realize that chapter eleven is concerned with the Lord's preparation for His redemptive service. In this chapter the Lord prepared the environment, He prepared those who were to crucify Him, and He also prepared His disciples. The Lord went to Jerusalem for the purpose of accomplishing His redemptive death. But this death required a great preparation.

Therefore, the Lord went to Jerusalem ahead of time in order to carry out this preparation, as recorded in 11:1 through 14:42. All that is recorded in these chapters is not accidental. Rather, all the matters recorded here are related to the Slave-Savior's preparation for the accomplishment of His redemptive service.

ENTERING INTO JERUSALEM AND LODGING IN BETHANY

The first aspect of the preparation of the Slave-Savior for His redemptive service was to enter into Jerusalem and lodge in Bethany. Mark 11:1 and 2 say, "And when they came near to Jerusalem, to Bethpage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, He sends two of His disciples, and says to them, Go to the village opposite you, and immediately, entering into it, you will find a colt tied, on which no man has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it." Here we see the Slave-Savior's omniscience. which spoke forth His deity.

Verses 7 and 8 say, "And they bring the colt to Jesus and throw their garments on it, and He sat on it. And many spread their garments in the road, and others spread layers of leaves, cutting them out of the fields." "Garments" signify the human virtues of people's conduct. The disciples honored the Slave-Savior by putting their garments on the colt for Him to ride on, and the crowd honored Him by spreading their garments in the road for Him to pass through.

The leaves (v. 8) came from branches of palm trees (John 12:13). Palm branches signify the victorious life (Rev. 7:9) and the satisfaction of enjoying the rich produce of this life, as typified by the feast of tabernacles (Lev. 23:40; Neh. 8:15). The crowd used both their garments and the palm tree branches to celebrate the coming of the Slave-Savior.

The Slave-Savior made a glorious entrance and received a warm welcome. This took place according to the Lord's wisdom. As a preparation for His redemptive service, the first thing He arranged was this welcome. By

means of this welcome, He received the approval of the people. It was as if He received their vote. The people were in favor of Him and recognized Him as the Messiah.

Mark 11:9 and 10 say, "And those going before and those following cried out, Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!" The words shouted by the people were quoted from Psalm 118:26, a prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah. Such a declaration will be repeated at the Lord's second coming. At that time, Psalm 118 will be fulfilled in a complete way. When He comes the second time, He will be riding on a cloud, not on a colt, and He will be coming from the heavens, not from Jericho. Then the converted Jews will exclaim, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" What we have in Mark 11:9 and 10 is a foretaste or a prefigure of the welcome the Lord will receive in that day. But in either case the principle is the same in that God's chosen people recognize and acknowledge their Messiah.

The Lord knew that in Jerusalem He would confront many opposers. But before He confronted them, He first received the approval of the people. This was the first step in His preparation for His redemptive service.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE THIRTY-FIVE

THE PREPARATION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR FOR HIS REDEMPTIVE SERVICE

(2)

Scripture Reading: Mark 11:1-26

In this message we shall continue to consider the preparation of the Slave-Savior for His redemptive service. In the foregoing message we saw that the first step of His preparation was entering into Jerusalem in a glorious way and receiving the acknowledgment, the approval, of the people.

THE CURSING OF THE FIG TREE AND THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

In 11:12-26 we have the cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple. The Lord saw the fig tree with nothing on it except leaves, and in verse 14 He said to it, "May no one eat fruit of you forever!" After cursing the fig tree, He entered into the temple and "began to cast out those who were selling and buying in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who were selling the doves" (v. 15). Then He said, "Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations? But you have made it a den of robbers" (v. 17).

These two actions--the cursing of the fig tree and cleansing of the temple--indicate that the entire nation of Israel, which had been chosen by God for His purpose, had become fruitless and corrupt. The fig tree cursed by the Lord had leaves, but no fruit. It had outward glorification, but it did not have any fruit. It did not have any reality. It had nothing that could satisfy God's desire. The temple,

which should have been a house of prayer for all nations, the Gentiles as well as the Jews, had become a den of robbers. In the sight of God, those worshipping in the temple were robbers. God's house on earth actually had become a den of robbers. Therefore, after cursing the fig tree to end its life, the Lord cleansed the temple in order to eliminate the corruption.

As the Lord was doing these things, no one dared to oppose Him outwardly, for He had already received the people's approval. Concerning this, verse 18 says, "And the chief priests and the scribes heard it, and they sought how they might destroy Him, for they feared Him, for all the crowd was astounded at His teaching."

The cursing of the fig tree signifies the terminating of the life of Israel as a nation. From that time onward, the nation of Israel was finished with God's New Testament economy. In addition to cursing the fig tree, the Lord also cleansed the corruption from the house of God.

In the first ten chapters of the Gospel of Mark the Lord was kind, merciful, and compassionate. But here in 11:12-26 it seems that He is very different, first cursing the fig tree and then cleansing the temple, even overturning the tables of the moneychangers. According to verse 16, "He did not permit anyone to carry a vessel through the temple." The Lord was very bold, strong, and even severe. He seemed to show no mercy at all.

We need to see that the cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple were part of the Slave-Savior's preparation for His redemptive death. He prepared the way for the Pharisees and scribes to put Him to death.

It was late in the day when the Lord cleansed the temple. Verse 19 says, "And when it became late, they went outside the city." It is likely that during the night He lodged in Bethany.

A WORD CONCERNING FAITH AND PRAYER

Mark 11:20 says, "And passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots." Remembering what the Lord Jesus had said the previous day, Peter said

to Him, "Rabbi, behold, the fig tree which You cursed has withered" (v. 21). The Lord answered by saying, "Have faith in God. Truly I tell you, that whoever says to this mountain, Be taken up and cast into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says happens, it shall be to him" (vv. 22-23). Then the Lord went on to speak about prayer. In particular He pointed out our need to forgive others: "And when you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, that your Father who is in the heavens may also forgive you your offenses (v. 25). Here we see that to forgive the offenses of others is the ground for our heavenly Father to forgive us. This is especially true in our prayer time. Strictly speaking, we cannot pray with a heart that holds anything against anyone, that is, with a heart that feels offended by anyone or remembers another's offense.

THE LORD'S DEALING WITH ISRAEL

The matter we are emphasizing with respect to the cursing of the fig tree is that this indicates that God had determined to give up the nation of Israel and to go to another people, the church. The church is composed of those who have been brought into the death and resurrection of Christ in order to participate in the full enjoyment of Christ. This people includes both Jews and Gentiles.

Mark 11:12 says that the Lord was hungry. This signifies that He was hungry for fruit from the children of Israel that God might be satisfied. The fig tree, however, did not have any fruit. We have seen that this fig tree is a symbol of the nation of Israel (Jer. 24:2, 5, 8). The fact that it was full of leaves but fruitless signifies that at that time the nation of Israel was full of outward show, but had nothing that could satisfy God.

In 11:12-26 the Slave-Savior's cursing of the fig tree and His cleansing of the temple are merged. This indicates His dealing with the corrupted and rebellious nation of Israel in different aspects at the same time. The fig tree was a symbol of the nation of Israel, and the temple was

its center in its relationship with God. As a fig tree planted by God, it did not bear fruit for Him, and as the center of its relationship with God, the temple was filled with corruption. Hence, the Slave-Savior cursed the fruitless fig tree and cleansed the contaminated temple. Such a dealing may be considered a harbinger of the destruction foretold in 12:9 and 13:2.

THE LORD'S HUMAN DIGNITY AND GENUINENESS AND HIS DIVINE WISDOM AND AUTHORITY

In His ministry for the spread of the gospel in Galilee in 1:14--10:52, the Slave-Savior's work was to preach the gospel, teach the truth, cast out demons, and heal the sick. In that work, His human virtues with His divine attributes were expressed as His qualification for, and beauty in, His divine service rendered to sinners for God. In His preparation in Jerusalem (11:15--14:42) for His redemptive work His major work was to confront the opposing Jewish leaders, who were supposed to be the builders of God's building (12:9-10), but actually had been usurped by God's enemy Satan and instigated by him to plot to kill the Slave-Savior. In this confrontation, under their subtle and evil questioning, testing. and examining, His human dignity was expressed in His human genuineness (11:15--18), and His divine wisdom and authority were expressed in His human conduct and perfection (11:27--12:37), so that eventually His fault-finders became His quality-provers. This paved the way for Him to point out to these blind opposers that He, the Christ, as the Son of David was the Lord of David, the very God (12:35-37), so that they might know His deity in His humanity, that they might know that He was God living in man.

In dealing with the opposers, the Lord's human dignity certainly was expressed in His human genuineness. While He was being examined by them, He expressed His dignity in His genuineness. Furthermore, at the same time, His divine wisdom and authority were expressed in His human conduct and perfection. As a result, those who came with the intention of finding fault with Him had to become those who could prove His qualities.

A GREAT SURPRISE TO THE DISCIPLES

In 11:1-26 there are three main points: entering into Jerusalem and lodging in Bethany, cursing the fig tree, and cleansing the temple. These three things all must have come as a great surprise, even as a shock, to the followers of the Slave-Savior. Peter, John, James, and the other disciples had been following the Lord Jesus for three and a half years. During those years, they had observed how the Lord conducted Himself, how He did things, and how He treated people. They had come with Him from Galilee, a despised region, to Judea, even to the city of Jerusalem, the most important place in the country. Jerusalem was the place where the temple was located and where the Sanhedrin, the great council of the Jews, met. There were many important people living in Jerusalem. Now into that great city came a group of despised Galileans led by a carpenter.

When the Lord and His disciples "came near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, He sends two of His disciples, and says to them, Go to the village opposite you, and immediately, entering into it, you will find a colt tied, on which no man has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it." These disciples obeyed the Lord's word without saying anything. They had been trained not to express their opinion. If the Lord had made such a request earlier, they might have asked Him why He wanted them to do such a thing. But now that they had passed through so many things, especially the healing at Jericho, they simply obeyed the Lord when He told them to go into the village and untie the colt and bring it. This indicates that the training rendered to the disciples in the foregoing chapters was effective. The Lord gave the two disciples an unusual command, a command that most people would not believe or accept. However, having been trained by the Lord, the disciples did not express any opinion about what the Lord commanded them to do.

Mark 11:7 says, "And they bring the colt to Jesus and throw their garments on it, and He sat on it." In a foregoing message we pointed out that when blind

Bartimaeus heard that the Lord was calling him, he threw away his garment. Here we see that the disciples threw their garments on the colt. This signifies that they no longer cared for position. They were willing for the Lord to have all the position. The disciples were absolutely for the exaltation of this One.

Verse 8 says that "many spread their garments in the road." We may say that the crowd followed the disciples in casting aside their garments. The people then proceeded to give the Lord a great welcome, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!" (vv. 9-10).

The disciples must have been surprised by the welcome given to the Slave-Savior. To be sure, they never imagined that the Lord Jesus, a carpenter from Galilee, would be so warmly welcomed by the crowd in Jerusalem.

The disciples must also have been surprised by the Lord's cursing of the fig tree. The Lord's Galilean followers may have said to themselves, "We have been following the Lord for three and a half years, and we have never seen Him do such a thing. Why did He curse the fig tree? The fig tree is a symbol of our nation, and we have a high regard for this symbol. Yet, the Lord cursed it. His behavior certainly has changed. It is much different now from what it was in the past."

After cursing the fig tree, the Lord entered the temple and began to cast out those who were selling and buying there. He even overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who were selling doves (v. 15). Imagine what the disciples must have thought when they saw this. They may have said to themselves, "Is this our Teacher? He has always been kind, gentle, and compassionate. What is He doing?" Of course, the disciples did not dare to say anything to the Lord.

THE LORD'S PREPARATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT, THE OPPOSERS, AND HIS FOLLOWERS

We have seen that by cursing the fig tree and cleansing

the temple the Lord was making the necessary preparations for His redemptive service. In particular, His cleansing of the temple stirred up the chief priests and the scribes, who sought how they might destroy Him (v. 18). Actually, the Lord's cleansing of the temple caused His opposers to speed up their efforts to put Him to death. This work of preparation, hastening the activity of the opposers, insured that the Lord would die on the day of the Passover. Therefore, the cleansing of the temple certainly was a preparation for the Lord's redemptive death.

Suppose the Lord Jesus had come into the temple and simply looked around, behaving Himself in a very polite manner. Then His followers might have said, Lord everything is excellent. Let us go somewhere to rest." If this had been the situation, I do not think that the opposers would have been as serious in their efforts to put the Lord Jesus to death. They might even have let Him go for a long period of time. In that case, the Lord would not have been crucified on the Passover. Hence, the Lord prepared the situation by cleansing the temple and in so doing He stirred up the opposers so that they put Him to death at the time appointed by God.

The Lord prepared not only His opposers but also His followers. No doubt, the cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple made a deep impression on the Lord's followers. Of course, they did not understand the significance of these things when they took place. But later, after the Lord's crucifixion and resurrection, they must have recalled these things. Then they began to understand why He cursed the fig tree and cleansed the temple.

In chapter eleven of Mark, we can see that Peter, John, James, and the other disciples were very much under the influence of tradition. To them, Jerusalem was blessed by God, and the fig tree was a symbol of the nation of Israel, a nation chosen by God. Their minds were filled with the traditional understanding. They must have been shocked when the Lord cursed the fig tree and cleansed the temple. Now we need to realize that in doing this the Lord not only stirred up His opposers that they might put Him to death,

but also impressed His followers that God was absolutely through with the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel was cursed, condemned, and soon-to-be overthrown.

On the day the Lord Jesus cursed the fig tree and cleansed the temple, the disciples did not have much understanding of what had taken place. But later they no doubt began to recall these things and were able to understand that God had given up Israel. Hence, the cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple were a preparation for those who were to put the Lord to death and also for His followers, that they might take His death and receive His resurrection.

The scene in chapter eleven is very different from that in chapters one through ten. In the first ten chapters of Mark the Lord Jesus is meek. merciful, gentle, and compassionate. But in chapter eleven He behaved in an altogether different manner. The Lord's purpose in this chapter was to prepare the environment, the situation, the opposers and His followers for the great event of His redemptive death.

This work of preparation lasted for six days. We may compare these six days to the six days in which God created the universe. During the six days before His death, the Lord prepared the environment and everyone involved for His death. He did this work of preparation not by teaching, preaching, or explaining. Rather, He did it by His actions.

THE DISCIPLES' REACTION

While the disciples were lodging in Bethany, they must have talked with one another about what the Lord had done in cursing the fig tree and cleansing the temple. Peter may have said to John and James, "Why did the Lord curse the fig tree and cleanse the temple? The fig tree is a symbol of our nation, but He cursed it. Then He immediately went into the temple, stopped all the traffic, and overthrew the tables. He even said that they were making the temple a den of robbers. What is the meaning of all this? It is better that we not ask the Lord. Let's wait

until tomorrow and see what happens next. We don't know what else He will do." I believe that the disciples had some private conversation like this.

If you had been with the disciples, would you not have talked with them about what had happened? If I had been there, I doubt if I would have had the heart to eat or sleep. I would have gone to the others and asked them their impression of what had happened that day. Furthermore, I certainly would have been eagerly awaiting the next day, wondering what the Lord would do. My point here is that the Lord in an unusual way was preparing all things and all people, especially His followers, for His death.

When many Christians read the Bible, they take things for granted. They may read about the Lord's entering Jerusalem, His cursing of the fig tree, and His cleansing of the temple without inquiring into the meaning of these things. Let us learn to study the Bible without taking anything for granted. We need to delve into matters, consider them, and seek to understand them. As we consider the significance of the events recorded in 11:1-26, we see that the Lord was making preparations to carry out the greatest act in the universe--His redemptive death.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE THIRTY-SIX

THE PREPARATION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR FOR HIS REDEMPTIVE SERVICE

(3)

Scripture Reading: Mark 11:27--12:44

BEING IN THE DEATH, RESURRECTION, AND ASCENSION OF CHRIST

When the Lord Jesus went from Galilee to Judea, His intention was to go to Jerusalem in order to enter into His death and resurrection and also to bring His close followers with Him into His death and resurrection. Peter, John, and James represented all the intimate followers of the Lord. From the very beginning, these three followed the Lord closely. As we read the Gospel of Mark, we see that Peter, John, and James followed the Lord Jesus step by step. Eventually, the Lord brought them into His all-inclusive death. Of course, they did not actually suffer death with the Lord; nevertheless, they went through the process of His death. They saw how the Lord prepared Himself to die. They also saw how He prepared the environment for His death and even prepared His opposers, who put Him to death. Moreover, they saw how the Lord was arrested, judged according to Jewish law, and judged by the Roman governor according to Gentile law. They saw how He was mocked, persecuted, and led as a lamb to the slaughter. They saw how the Lord was put on the cross and how He remained there for six hours.

The Lord passed through death, and the disciples passed through death with Him. The only difference was that they did not actually suffer death. The Lord Himself personally suffered death, whereas the disciples passed

through the process of death. Of course, they were not placed in the tomb nor did they go into Hades. However, we may say that the days between the Lord's death and resurrection were a "tomb" to the disciples. We may also say that, in a sense, they passed through Hades. Then on the morning of the Lord's resurrection, certain of the disciples discovered the empty tomb and learned that the crucified Jesus had been resurrected from among the dead.

We should not read the Gospel of Mark merely as a book of stories. Neither should we read this Gospel only to learn doctrine. On the contrary, as we read this Gospel, we need to see vision after vision. As we read the Gospel of Mark, we should have the sense that we are watching a heavenly television.

On the day of Pentecost the Spirit was poured out upon the one hundred twenty. Through death and resurrection, the very Slave-Savior revealed in Mark became the life-giving Spirit, who was poured out upon the disciples. This means that the Lord poured Himself out upon those who had seen the visions recorded in the Gospel of Mark. Through this outpouring of the Spirit, the one hundred twenty received the reality of all the visions they had seen.

I hope that these messages in the Life-study of Mark will help you to see the visions contained in this Gospel. Eventually, the resurrected Christ as the living Spirit will pour out Himself upon you to make whatever you see a reality to you. Then in reality you will be in the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Truly you will be enjoying Him as the entire, universal replacement.

SIX DAYS FOR THE NEW CREATION

In this message we shall go on to consider the last part of chapter eleven of Mark. Mark 11 describes events that took place during the last six days of the Lord's earthly life. These six days were for the new creation. According to the book of Genesis, within a period of six days God completed the old creation. Then on the seventh day, the Sabbath, God rested. In a similar way, the Lord took six days to bring forth God's new creation. After these six days

had been completed, there was another Sabbath. The Lord was crucified on a Friday, and the next day was a Sabbath. From this we see that it took the Lord six days to complete the preparation and bring the new creation into being. In the six days that concluded with His death, the Lord did everything necessary to bring the new creation into existence for God. Then after these six days, He rested on the seventh day, the Sabbath. In these messages we are seeking to understand what took place during these six days.

On the first of these six days the Lord Jesus triumphantly entered into Jerusalem, riding on a colt. The people cried out, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" (v. 9). Here we see that the Lord received the approval of the people. After making such an entrance into Jerusalem, He entered into the temple "and having looked around at all things, the hour being already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve" (v. 11).

Returning to the city the next day, He cursed the fig tree and cleansed the temple. In order to be impressed with the seriousness of these matters, we may compare them to someone going into the capital city of a country, burning the flag, and then entering one of the main government buildings and causing a great disturbance. Certainly such deeds would be written about in the newspapers.

After cursing the fig tree, the symbol of the Jewish nation, the Lord entered into the temple and turned over the tables of the moneychangers. Because He had already received the approval of the people, no one dared to stop Him. At the time, all the leaders were silenced. However, they plotted secretly how to destroy the Lord Jesus.

According to 11:19, "When it became late, they went outside the city." This took place on the evening of the second day. No doubt, that evening the disciples must have talked with one another about what the Lord had done in Jerusalem. Probably throughout the city of Jerusalem many were talking about what the Lord did in cleansing the temple.

On the morning of the third day, the disciples saw the fig tree withered from the roots (v. 20). Then they came

again to Jerusalem. Verse 27 says, "As He walked in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to Him." If the Lord had not received the approval of the people, He could not have walked in the temple in such a way. Instead, He would immediately have been arrested and put to death. But because He had been received by the people, He was free to walk about in the temple.

QUESTIONED BY THE CHIEF PRIESTS, SCRIBES, AND ELDERS

The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders--the three categories of those who made up the Sanhedrin--came to the Lord and said to Him, "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority that you may do these things? (v. 28). Here the chief priests, scribes, and elders seemed to be saying, "You cursed the fig tree, and then you overturned the tables in the temple. By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you authority to do these things? What you have done is extremely serious. Therefore, we want to know about your origin and authority."

In dealing with the chief priests, scribes, and elders, the Lord Jesus was very dignified. He was not afraid as He was confronting this situation, but answered their questions with boldness.

The Lord's Question

The Lord Jesus said to them, "I will question you about one thing, and answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism of John, was it of heaven or of men? Answer Me" (vv. 29-30). On the one hand, the Lord Jesus was not afraid of being questioned by the chief priests, scribes, and elders. On the other hand, He counter-questioned them with dignity.

Before answering the Lord's question, the chief priests, scribes, and elders held counsel among themselves. "They reasoned with themselves saying, If we say, Of heaven, he will say, Why then did you not believe him? But should we

say, Of men--they feared the crowd, for all held that John was really a prophet" (vv. 31-32). Realizing that there was no way for them to answer the Lord's question without losing the case, they decided to lie. Therefore, they said to the Lord Jesus, "We do not know" (v. 33). The Lord knew what was in their hearts. He knew that they were lying to Him.

The Lord's Answer

The Lord Jesus went on to say to the chief priests, scribes, and elders, "Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things" (v. 33). This indicates that the Lord knew that the Jewish leaders would not tell Him what they knew. Hence, neither would He tell them what they asked. They lied to the Lord in saying, "We do not know." But the Lord spoke the truth wisely to them, exposing their lie and avoiding their question.

In the Lord's answer we need to pay attention to the word "neither." This word indicates that the Jewish leaders were lying to the Lord. Since they would not tell Him what they knew concerning John the Baptist, neither would He answer their question.

The Lord's wise answer put the leaders of the Jewish nation to shame. They were exposed as being a group of liars. In dealing with them the Lord manifested both His dignity and His wisdom. We may say that His dignity was human and His wisdom was divine. This combination of human dignity and divine wisdom subdued the chief priests, scribes, and elders.

I believe that the Lord's disciples were very pleased with the way He dealt with the Jewish leaders. They may have looked at one another, nodding their heads and smiling. They saw the Slave-Savior's dignity and wisdom in the midst of that situation in the temple. How happy they must have been to see the chief priests, scribes, and elders subdued by the Lord Jesus.

TESTED BY THE PHARISEES AND HERODIANS

After the Slave-Savior was examined by the chief

priests, scribes, and elders, He was tested by the Pharisees and Herodians (12:13-17). Mark 12:13 says, "And they send to Him some of the Pharisees and the Herodians that they might catch Him in His speech." The Herodians were those who took sides with King Herod's regime and took part with him in infiltrating the Jews with Grecian and Roman manners of life. They sided with the Sadducees, but were opposed to the Pharisees. But here they united with the Pharisees to ensnare the Lord Jesus.

The Pharisees were very patriotic, wholly for the Jewish nation. The Herodians were for the Roman imperialists. Hence, these two parties could not work together. But in dealing with this wonderful Person. the Slave-Savior, those who were enemies came together to ask the Lord a subtle question, a question related both to patriotism and imperialism.

Coming to Him, they said, "Teacher, we know that you are true, and you do not care about anyone; for you do not regard the face of men, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? Should we give, or should we not give?" (v. 14). This was really an ensnaring question. To give tribute to Caesar was opposed by the Jews. If the Lord Jesus said that it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar, He would offend the Jews, whose leaders were the Pharisees. But if He said that it was not lawful to give tribute to Caesar, His answer would give the Herodians, who stood with the Roman government, ground to accuse Him.

It may seem to us that there was no way for the Lord Jesus to answer this question. Suppose He had said, "No, we should not give tribute to Caesar." Then the Herodians would have said, "You are against the Romans. You should be arrested and cast into prison." But suppose the Lord had said, "Yes, it is right to give tribute to Caesar." Then the Pharisees would have said, "You are betraying your country, for you are working for the Roman imperialists." How devilishly subtle was the question raised by the Pharisees and Herodians!

Although the Lord was questioned in a devilishly

subtle way, He was not afraid. Rather, maintaining His dignity, He said to them, "Why are you tempting Me? Bring Me a denarius that I may see it" (12:15). The Lord Jesus did not show them the Roman coin, but asked them to show one to Him. Since they possessed one of the Roman coins, they were caught.

After they brought a coin to Him, He said, "Whose image and inscription is this?" (v. 16). When they answered, "Caesar's," the Lord went on to say, "The things of Caesar pay to Caesar, and the things of God to God" (v. 17). To pay to Caesar the things that are Caesar's is to pay tribute to Caesar according to his governmental regulations. To pay to God the things of God is to pay the half shekel to God according to Exodus 30:11-16, and also to offer the tithes to God according to the law of God.

The section in the Gospel of Mark concerning the Slave-Savior being tested by the Pharisees and the Herodians concludes with these words: "And they marveled at Him." The Lord answered them in His divine wisdom, and they were silenced and subdued.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE THIRTY-SEVEN

THE PREPARATION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR FOR HIS REDEMPTIVE SERVICE

(4)

Scripture Reading: Mark 12:18-44

The testing and examining of the Slave-Savior (11:27--12:44) took place during the days immediately before the feast of the Passover. Jews from many different places had come to Jerusalem for this feast. The Lord's cleansing of the temple aroused the attention of the people. First, the chief priests, scribes, and elders came to the Lord Jesus with a question concerning His authority (11:27-33). After the chief priests, scribes, and elders were defeated by Him, the Pharisees and Herodians tried to catch Him in His speech (12:13-17). However, they also were defeated by the Slave-Savior.

THE SADDUCEES AND THE RESURRECTION

In 12:18-27 the Sadducees came to the Lord Jesus. The Sadducees were a sect among the Jews (Acts 5:17). They did not believe in the resurrection, nor in angels, nor in spirits (Acts 23:8). Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees were denounced by John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus as a brood of vipers (Matt. 3:7; 12:34; 23:33). The Lord warned His disciples against their doctrines (Matt. 16:6, 12). While the Pharisees were supposed to be orthodox, the Sadducees may be considered ancient modernists.

In Mark 12:18-27 the Sadducees thought that they could defeat the Lord Jesus regarding the matter of resurrection. They questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if anyone's brother should die and leave behind a wife, and leave no child, his brother should take the wife and raise up seed to his brother. There were

seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and dying, left no seed; and the second took her, and died, leaving behind no seed, and the third similarly; and the seven left no seed. Last of all the woman also died. In the resurrection, when they rise, which one's wife will she be, for the seven had her as wife?" (vv. 19-23). The Sadducees thought that they were very clever in asking the Lord such a question.

The Lord Jesus said to them, "Are you not deceived because of this--not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God?" (v. 24). Knowing the Scriptures is one thing, and knowing the power of God is another. We need to know both. Here "the Scriptures" refer to the verses of the Old Testament concerning resurrection, and "the power of God" refers to the power of resurrection.

The Lord went on to say that in the resurrection there will not be any marriage: "For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as angels in the heavens" (v. 25).

The Lord Jesus, however, did not stop here. He continued by saying, "But concerning the dead, that they are raised, did you not read in the book of Moses, at the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are greatly deceived" (vv. 26-27). Since God is the God of the living and is called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, therefore these three who had died, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, will be resurrected. This is the way the Lord Jesus expounded the Scriptures--not only by the letter, but by the life and power implied within them.

In His word to the Sadducees in verse 26, the Lord Jesus was actually referring to Himself, for He, as the Angel of Jehovah, was the One who spoke to Moses in Exodus 3. Here the Lord seems to be saying, "I was the One speaking to Moses. I, your God, was the Angel who spoke to him from within the bush. Furthermore, Jehovah is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. If they will not be resurrected, how could God be called their God? He would never be known as the God of the dead--He is the God of the living. Therefore, this title indicates resurrection."

RECEIVING LIGHT FROM THE LORD

We should not think that to understand the Bible it is sufficient to know the original languages of the Bible, Hebrew and Greek. The ancient scribes knew the Old Testament in Hebrew. But although they had the knowledge of the language, they did not have any light. The Lord Jesus, on the contrary, had the divine light. For this reason, He was able to point out how the matter of resurrection is implied in the title of God as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Without divine light, no one would be able to see that this divine title involves resurrection.

I encourage the saints to learn Hebrew and Greek. But you may have a doctoral degree in Hebrew or Greek and still be blind. You need light from God. In order to receive light, you should not trust in your knowledge of biblical languages or in the expositions of the great teachers, but you need to kneel down before the Lord and open to Him. You may need to say, "Lord Jesus, although I know Hebrew and Greek, without You I cannot see any light. Lord, I need Your enlightenment. Light does not come from my study or analysis. Light comes, Lord, through Your mercy. O Lord, how I need to receive light from You."

If we do not receive light from the Lord, we may read the Gospel of Mark again and again without seeing anything. We need the visions contained in this book to be "telecast" into our being. I can testify that, by the Lord's mercy, I have seen the visions in this book. Sometimes the light comes while I am speaking. For example, it was during the course of one of the messages that I saw the comparison of the six days for the old creation with the six days of preparation for the new creation. Such light does not come from knowing the biblical languages or the writings of expositors. It comes from the Lord through His mercy as we open ourselves to Him.

QUESTIONED BY A SCRIBE

In 12:28-34 the Slave-Savior was questioned by a scribe. In Matthew 22:35 this one is called a lawyer.

"Scribe" is a wider term that includes the lawyers, who were Mosaic jurists. The lawyers were versed in the law of Moses; they were professional interpreters of the law of the Old Testament.

This scribe, who knew the law in a thorough way, boldly came to the Lord Jesus. Knowing that He had answered well those who were disputing with Him, the scribe asked the Lord, "Which is the first commandment of all?" (v. 28). The Lord answered, "The first is, Hear, Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God from your whole heart, and from your whole soul, and from your whole mind, and from your whole strength" (vv. 29-30). To love the Lord in this way is to love Him with every part of our being, with our spirit, soul, and body.

In verse 31 the Lord continued His answer: "The second is this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these."

These two commandments are both a matter of love, either loving God or loving man. Love is the spirit of God's commandments. The greatest commandments, therefore, are altogether a matter of love, a love toward God and toward man.

THE IMPRESSION MADE ON THE LORD'S FOLLOWERS

Verse 34 ends like this: "And no one dared to question Him anymore." The Lord Jesus answered all the questions and gained a full victory. No doubt, Peter, John, James, and all the other close followers of the Lord Jesus saw these confrontations and were impressed with the way the Lord handled them. Do you not believe that they were deeply impressed with how the Lord answered the questions raised by the opposers, with how He passed through an insidious test and examination? Certainly, the Lord's followers must have been very impressed with Him.

QUALIFIED TO BE THE PASSOVER LAMB

In type, the Passover lamb was examined for four days before it was killed (Exo. 12:3-6). The Slave-Savior, as the

real Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7), was also examined for four days before He was killed. He came to Bethany six days before the Passover (John 12:1; Mark 11:1). The next day He came into Jerusalem and went back to Bethany (John 12:12; Mark 11:11). The third day He came to Jerusalem again (11:12-15) and began to be examined by the leaders of the Jews, according to the Jewish law (11:27--12:37; 14:53-65; John 18:13, 19-24), and by Pilate, the Roman governor, according to the Roman law (John 18:28--19:6), until the Passover day when He was crucified (Mark 14:12; John 18:28). This insidious and ensnaring examination from many angles took exactly four days, and the Lord Jesus fully passed through every test. This proved that He was fully qualified to be the Lamb required by God for the accomplishment of His redemption so that God may pass over sinners, both Jews and Gentiles.

As we shall see, under God's sovereignty, the Slave-Savior was judged not only by the Jewish leaders as a sheep before the shearer (Isa. 53:7; Mark 14:53-65), but also by the Roman governor, as a criminal before the accusers (14:64; 15:1-15), that He might die to serve sinners with His life as a ransom (10:45). He died not only for the Jews, represented by the Jewish leaders, but also for the Gentiles, represented by the Roman governor.

A QUESTION CONCERNING CHRIST

Mark 12:35 says, "And Jesus, teaching in the temple, answered and said, How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?" The Lord had been questioned about a number of different things. But here He asked His testers and examiners a question concerning Christ.

During these days in Jerusalem, the center of Judaism, the Slave-Savior had been surrounded by the chief priests, elders, scribes, Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees, who endeavored to ensnare Him by asking puzzling and insidious questions. First, the chief priests, scribes, and elders, representing the authority of the Jewish religion and the Jewish people, asked Him concerning His authority (11:27-33). This was a question according to

their religious concept. Second, the fundamental Pharisees and the political Herodians asked Him a question related to politics (12:13-17). Third, the modernistic Sadducees questioned Him concerning fundamental belief, in particular concerning belief in resurrection. Fourth, a scribe, a lawyer, asked Him a question related to the interpretation of the Bible.

After answering all their questions wisely, the Lord asked them a question concerning Christ. This is the question of questions. Their questions were related to religion, politics, belief, and the interpretation of the Scriptures. His question was concerning Christ, who is the center of all spiritual and divine things. They knew religion, politics, belief, and the Scriptures in letter, but they paid no attention to Christ. Therefore, in 12:35-37 He asked them concerning Christ.

After asking why the scribes say that Christ is the son of David, the Lord Jesus continued, "David himself said in the Holy Spirit, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand until I put Your enemies under Your feet. David himself calls Him Lord, and how can He be his son?" (vv. 36-37). The answer to the Lord's question is that as God, in His divinity, Christ is the Lord of David, and as a man, in His humanity, He is the son of David. The Pharisees and scribes had only part of the scriptural knowledge concerning Christ's Person, that He was the son of David according to His humanity. They did not have the other part concerning Christ's divinity as the Son of God.

After the Lord answered the four different kinds of questions raised by those who were testing and examining Him, and after He asked the question of questions--the question concerning Christ--He went on to give a warning concerning the scribes and to speak approvingly of a poor widow. We shall consider these matters in the following message.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE THIRTY-EIGHT

THE PREPARATION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR FOR HIS REDEMPTIVE SERVICE

(6)

Scripture Reading: Mark 11:27--12:44

FOUR KINDS OF QUESTIONS

In 11:27--12:34 the Lord Jesus was asked four kinds of questions. These questions represent different aspects of man's culture. The first question (11:27-33) concerned religion. The chief priests, scribes, and elders asked the Slave-Savior a question related to typical, bona fide religion. In particular, they questioned the Lord Jesus concerning His authority. The chief priests, scribes, and elders thought they were serving God and that they knew the law of Moses. We may say that they had a typical religion. Now they wanted to know the origin of the things the Lord Jesus was doing. Therefore, the first question asked of the Lord in 11:27-33 was related to bona fide religion.

The second question was raised by the Pharisees and Herodians (12:13-17). They came to Him and said, "Teacher, we know that you are true, and you do not care about anyone; for you do not regard the face of men, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? Should we give, or should we not give?" (v. 14). This question was related to politics.

The third question, asked by the Sadducees (12:18-27), was related to belief. In particular, the Sadducees wanted to know what the Lord believed concerning resurrection. As we have pointed out, the Sadducees, who may be considered ancient modernists. did not believe in resurrection. The third question, therefore, concerns belief.

The fourth question (12:28-34) was asked by a scribe. Mark 12:28 says, "And one of the scribes who had approached and heard them disputing, knowing that He answered them well, questioned Him, Which is the first commandment of all?" This question is related to the interpretation of the Bible. The scribe was asking the Slave-Savior how He interpreted the Bible with respect to which commandment was first.

CHRIST AS THE SON OF DAVID AND THE LORD OF DAVID

The matters covered by these four kinds of questions include the components of the highest human culture. However, each kind of question neglects Christ, the One who is the entire, universal replacement. Because His questioners did not pay attention to Christ, the Lord Himself made up the lack when He counter-questioned them, saying, "How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself said in the Holy Spirit, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand until I put Your enemies under Your feet. David, himself calls Him Lord, and how can He be his son?" (12:35-37). Here the Lord was asking how the scribes can say that Christ is the son of David when David himself calls Him Lord. Here the Lord was indicating that the scribes knew Christ only as a man. They did not realize that Christ, the Messiah, is also God Himself and hence, a God-man.

The Lord seemed to be saying to all those who were testing and examining Him, "You know Me only as a Nazarene. You do not know Me as God. Although I am frank and honest with you, I am also merciful. Even though I am the almighty God, your Creator, I have the patience to be examined and tested by you. If I were not merciful to you and if I manifested Myself in My divine essence, you would all be slain. But I am compassionate. Nevertheless, I am the very God whom David addressed as Lord."

We need to realize that Peter, John, James, and all the other close followers of the Lord Jesus were standing nearby observing what the Lord did and hearing what He

said. No doubt, they were deeply impressed with the Slave-Savior. They must have talked with one another. Perhaps Peter said to John and James, "On the one hand, our Teacher is the son of David. But on the other hand, He is the Lord. Have you ever realized this? Did you know that our Teacher is not only a man but also God the Lord?" I believe that the disciples spoke with one another in this way.

If you had been one of the Lord's disciples observing how He handled the opposers, would you not have spoken to the others about it? Would you not have been impressed with the fact that your Teacher revealed to the opposers that He was not only the son of David but also the Lord of David? No doubt, the Lord's close followers received a deep impression concerning Him.

We have seen that the Lord Jesus brought His followers into Jerusalem with Him for a purpose. He did not intend to go into death alone. Rather, He brought a group of His followers into death with Him. Those followers are our representatives. When they were with the Lord in Jerusalem, we all were there. Hallelujah, we today are the Lord's close followers! As His followers, we are seeing from the Gospel of Mark a series of heavenly visions, visions that are being "telecast" into our being.

At the time of 12:37 the Slave-Savior had gained a full victory. He had not only received the approval of the people; He had also subdued His opposers. The chief priests, scribes, elders, Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees all were subdued. Jesus the Nazarene was manifested as being a marvelous Person. To be sure, His disciples were very pleased with the situation.

A WARNING CONCERNING THE SCRIBES

Immediately after the Lord had subdued all the

opposers and had spoken to them concerning Christ, He went on to give them a warning concerning the scribes. Mark 12:38-40 says, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and like greetings in the marketplaces; and chief seats in the synagogues, and places of honor at the dinners; who devour the widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater judgment." Elsewhere the Lord had told His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod (8:15). The leaven of the Pharisees was their hypocrisy (Luke 12:1), and the leaven of Herod was his corruption and injustice in politics. With the scribes there was the matter of vain knowledge, even a vain knowledge of the Bible. The scribes taught theology or doctrine in a way that was vain.

In chapters eleven and twelve of the Gospel of Mark the scribes are mentioned a number of times. The scribes were among those who questioned the Lord concerning His authority (11:27-28). It was a scribe who asked the Lord a question concerning the interpretation of the Bible (12:28). Furthermore, in 12:36 the Lord inquired, "How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?" Now in 12:38 the Lord specifically issues a warning against the scribes.

The scribes thought they knew the Bible and also doctrine and theology. Although they may have known the Scriptures in letters, they certainly did not know Christ. Therefore, in His teaching the Lord asked how it is that the scribes say that Christ is the son of David. The scribes taught vain theology, a theology without Christ as reality.

It is possible that we may be today's scribes. Our teaching may be right, but it may be empty, that is, without Christ. The ancient scribes taught people according to the Old Testament, but they did not have the light concerning Christ. They did not have any understanding of Him as the God-man.

We need to discern whether a particular message or teaching has Christ as its center, reality, and living essence. Certain preachers and teachers are naturally eloquent and can present doctrine to others in a way that

pleases the itching ears. Such teaching, preaching, or expounding of the Bible is according to man's knowledge with human eloquence. We need to be able to discern whether Christ is the center, reality, and essence of each message. If Christ is not the center, then that message is empty. In principle, it belongs to the teaching of the scribes, and we should beware of it.

We should not think that as long as a teaching is scriptural, there is no problem with it. There is a means for us to discern all kinds of teaching, and that is to discern whether or not Christ is the center, reality, and essence of every teaching. In the Lord's recovery Christ must be the center, reality, and essence of every message. A message or teaching may be scholarly, academic, scriptural, and eloquent, providing a great deal of Bible knowledge. Nevertheless, it is possible for such a teaching to be a teaching of today's scribes. We need to follow this as a basic principle in discerning the teaching in the Lord's recovery.

Today's religion is full of scribes. Many teachings among Christians are scriptural and scholarly. Many who teach know Greek or Hebrew, and they are versed in different expositions of the Scriptures. But Christ may not be the center, reality, and essence of their speaking.

APPRAISING A POOR WIDOW

After the Lord Jesus gives the warning concerning the scribes, He appraises a poor widow in her loyalty (12:41-44). "And having sat down opposite the treasury, He beheld how the crowd was casting money into the treasury; and many rich people were casting in much" (12:41). The Slave-Savior was God living in His humanity. As such, He was concerned to see how God's people expressed their loyalty in their offering to Him. In this way He appraised the widow's loyalty to God. The Slave-Savior's observation is more penetrating than man's.

When the Lord Jesus saw "one poor widow having come cast in two small copper coins, which is a quadrans," He called His disciples to Him and said to them, "Truly I say

to you, that this poor widow cast in more than all those who were casting into the treasury; for they all cast in out of their abundance, but she, out of her poverty. has cast in all, as much as she had, her whole livelihood" (vv. 42-44). Those who gave out of their abundance did not touch the Lord's heart. However, the Lord was touched by the poor widow who cast in two small copper coins. He admired her for giving in such a way.

A CONTRAST OF VANITY AND REALITY

It is very significant that after the Lord subdued all the opposers, He gave a warning concerning the scribes and appraised a poor widow in her loyalty. First, He warned His disciples to beware of the vain empty teachings of the scribes. Then He encouraged them to appreciate a widow's inward reality. He wanted them to look into the situation among God's people, not outwardly according to man's way, but inwardly according to a person's inward reality. Because He had such a view. He could appreciate the poor widow.

In 11:27--12:37 we have four kinds of questions related to man's culture, followed by the question of questions, the question concerning Christ. The first four categories of questions concern religion, politics, belief, and the way to interpret the Bible. The unique question is that concerning Christ. The account concerning these five types of questions is followed by two incidents: the first regarding the vanity of the empty teaching of the scribes; the second regarding the reality of a believer's inward being. A scribe is someone among the Lord's people who speaks vanity, hut this widow signifies a believer with inward reality. As we consider these two incidents, we see that instead of being a scribe, we should be a poor widow. We all should say, "I don't want to be an empty scribe speaking vanity. I want to be a poor widow. I want everything I do to proceed from the reality that is within me."

We need to consider whether we shall be a scribe or a widow. Will you be an empty scribe or a widow full of reality? We thank the Lord that in His recovery there are

many full of inward reality like that widow. Apart from such widows, there would be no way for the recovery to go on. Thank the Lord that among us there are a good number of real widows, a good number of those with inward reality.

We need to ask ourselves why after the Lord answered the questions raised by the opposers and after He asked the question concerning Himself, He went on to speak concerning the scribes and a poor widow. The Lord had a little meeting with His disciples, a meeting in which He spoke to them concerning the scribes and a widow. With the scribes there is emptiness, vanity; with the widow there is inward reality. We need to learn to appreciate reality and to beware of vanity. Someone may be an excellent speaker, eloquent and knowledgeable. However, his speaking may be empty. By contrast, someone else may be poor in his speaking, without eloquence or knowledge. Nevertheless, with this one there is inward reality toward God. This is the significance of the two incidents--the warning concerning the scribes and the appraising of the poor widow--being placed together at the end of chapter twelve.

When we read chapter twelve of Mark under the heavenly light, we can see the significance of what is recorded in this chapter. In particular, we see the significance of the Lord's warning against the scribes and His appraising the poor widow. On the one hand, we see that someone's teaching may be knowledgeable and eloquent, but vain and empty. On the other hand, someone may be poor, yet full of reality. We may be poor in every way, but we can have within us the reality of the Lord on whom we call, a reality toward the very God whom we serve. We may not have much eloquence or knowledge, and we are not pursuing such things. But we may have one thing--inward reality.

Nothing proves a believer's inward reality more than the matter of money. The reason money proves a believer's inward reality is that in human life nothing is more tangible than money or material possessions. Your money

and possessions test whether or not you have reality toward God.

May we all beware of vanity, especially vanity in speaking, eloquence, knowledge, doctrine, and teaching. At the same time, we all should learn to appreciate, to treasure, what is real in the sight of the Lord.

We should not forget that Peter, John, James, and other close followers of the Lord were present when the Lord gave His warning regarding the scribes and offered His appraisal of the poor widow. They saw all the things that took place in chapters eleven and twelve. I believe that after the day of Pentecost, all these things came back to them in their living as heavenly visions. Today we need vision after vision from the Gospel of Mark to be impressed into our being. Then when we open ourselves to the life-giving Spirit to have sway over us, all these visions will come back to us in a real and living way.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE THIRTY-NINE

THE PREPARATION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR FOR HIS REDEMPTIVE SERVICE

(6)

Scripture Reading: Mark 13:1-37

Before we begin to consider 13:1-37, where the Lord Jesus speaks of things to come, I would like to give a further word on chapter twelve.

A WARNING CONCERNING THE SCRIBES

In 12:35 the Lord Jesus, teaching in the temple, says, "How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?" Then the Lord Jesus went on to ask how the Christ could be the son of David when David himself called Him Lord. The Lord's question concerning Christ silenced the opposers. Verse 37 says, "And the great crowd heard Him gladly."

As the immediate continuation of 12:35-37, verse 38 says, "And in His teaching He said, Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and like greetings in the marketplaces." This word, no doubt, is spoken in relation to the fact that, though the scribes supposedly knew the Bible, they knew very little concerning Christ. They knew something of Christ's humanity; however, they did not know anything at all regarding His deity. Hence, they were devoid of the proper knowledge of the reality of Christ. Because of this shortage, the Lord Jesus warned the people to beware of the scribes.

According to the Lord's word, the scribes not only liked to walk around in long robes and liked the greetings in marketplaces, but they also liked the chief seats in the

synagogues and places of honor at dinners (v. 39). Furthermore, the scribes "devour the widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers" (v. 40). This indicates that the scribes had only an appearance; they did not have reality. The fact that the scribes liked to walk around in long robes indicates that they cared for position, honor, and glory. They also enjoyed receiving the people's respect and regard. This indicates strongly that they were empty, vain teachers of the Bible, altogether lacking the reality of Christ. In their living there was no reality. Instead, they were seeking position, respect, honor, and glory.

We all need to heed the Lord's warning regarding the scribes. There is the possibility that even among us in the Lord's recovery some may be like the scribes in principle. They may have some knowledge of the Bible and the eloquence to speak in a way that attracts others. However, they may not have the reality of the God-man, the One who is both God and man, the all-inclusive Christ as our universal replacement. We should be warned concerning those who lack the inward reality of Christ and yet are seeking position, respect, honor, and glory.

We have seen that in 12:41-44 the Lord Jesus appraised a poor widow in her loyalty. This widow probably did not have much knowledge of the Bible. Nevertheless, she had reality, for her heart was sincere, honest, and faithful to God. There was inward reality in her daily life. This widow is presented in contrast to the scribes with their empty knowledge.

PREPARING HIS DISCIPLES

Mark 13:1-37 is usually considered a chapter of prophecy. However, this chapter is not merely a prophecy; it is also part of the Slave-Savior's preparation for His redemptive service. In 13:1--14:42 the Lord Jesus prepared the disciples for His death. We have seen that in 11:1--12:44 the preparation of the Slave-Savior for His redemptive work included three matters: entering into Jerusalem and lodging in Bethany (11:1-11), cursing the fig tree and cleansing the temple (11:12-26), and being

tested and examined (11:27--12:44). This work of preparation involved both the Lord's followers and His opposers. If we consider chapters eleven and twelve carefully, we shall see that although the opposers had been subdued by the Lord, they had also been speeded up in their efforts to put Him to death. The preparations had been made by the Lord for the opposers to put Him to death at the appointed time, on the day of the Passover.

Although the opposers had been put to silence, they did not cease from their endeavors to put the Lord to death. Actually, they were stirred by the situation to intensify their efforts to kill Him.

With respect to the opposers and the environment, everything had been prepared. The people had been gained by the Lord, and the situation had been subdued by Him. Those who tested and examined Him could not find anything at all wrong with Him. They did not have the legal ground to do anything to Him. Nevertheless, they had been prepared by the Lord's confrontation with them to do whatever was necessary to kill Him.

In chapters eleven and twelve the Lord thoroughly prepared the environment and the opposers for His death. Then in 13:1--14:42 the Lord no longer paid attention to the opposers, but turned to His disciples and had a private time with them in order to prepare them for His death.

In His preparation for His redemptive work (11:15--14:42), the Slave-Savior, after confronting the opposers (11:15--12:37), stayed with His followers to prepare them for His death (13:1--14:42)--a shocking and disappointing event for them. He prepared them by telling them the things that would come (13:2-37), by enjoying their love expressed in a feast and being anointed with costly pure nard (14:3-9), by instituting His supper (1 Cor. 11:20) so that they might remember Him (Mark 14:12-26), and by warning them concerning their stumbling and charging them to watch and pray (14:27-42). Immediately after such a preparation He was arrested to be crucified (14:43--15:28).

THINGS TO COME

Preparing the disciples for His death. the Slave-Savior first told them, in chapter thirteen, the things to come. These are the things that would take place in the world during the church age after His resurrection until the time of His coming back. The Lord Jesus did not leave His disciples in darkness concerning the following matters: the destruction of the temple (vv. 1-2), which would take place in A.D. 70; the plagues at the beginning of birth pangs, which would begin after His resurrection and continue until the great tribulation (vv. 3-8); the preaching of the gospel and the persecutions in the church age (vv. 9-13); the great tribulation in the last three and a half years of this age and His coming back (vv. 14-27); and watching, praying, and awaiting the Slave-Savior throughout the church age (vv. 28-37). Such an enlightening word to the Slave-Savior's suffering followers is like a "lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns" (2 Pet. 1:19).

In 13:1 the situation concerning the Lord Jesus was very serious. However, the Lord bore the situation in a very comfortable way. He brought certain of His disciples out of Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives, to a higher level where the atmosphere was clear. Sitting on the Mount of Olives with them, He spoke about the future in order to prepare them for what was coming. This was the environment in which the Lord spoke to His disciples the prophecy recorded in Mark 13. Let us now consider this chapter verse by verse.

GOING OUT OF THE TEMPLE

Mark 13:1 says, "And as He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples says to Him, Teacher, behold, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" The fact that the Lord went out of the temple indicates that He was leaving it. This was a fulfillment of His word in Matthew 23:38 concerning leaving the temple to the rejecting Jews as their house of desolation. This is equivalent to God's glory leaving the temple in the ancient time (Ezek. 10:18).

In Matthew 23:38 the Lord Jesus says, "Behold, your house is left to you desolate." Since "house" in this verse is singular, it must denote the house of God, which was the temple (Mark 11:15, 17). It had been the house of God, but now it became "your house," because it had been made a den of robbers.

When one of His disciples spoke to Him about the wonderful stones and buildings, the Lord Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There shall by no means be left a stone upon a stone which will not be overthrown" (v. 2). This was fulfilled in A.D. 70, when Titus with the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem.

The Lord's word in 13:2 corresponds to "desolate" in Matthew 23:38. The temple was left desolate when Jerusalem was destroyed.

We have seen that the Lord Jesus received a warm welcome from the people, that He cursed the fig tree, and that He cleansed the temple. The cleansing of the temple stirred up the opposers. For this reason, on the day after He cleansed the temple, He confronted the opposers, who examined Him and asked Him different questions. All these things took place before the eyes of His close followers. Nevertheless, in 13:1 one of them could still say, "Teacher, behold, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!"

The Lord Jesus had sought to impress His followers with the fact that at this point He no longer had anything to do with the Jewish nation or with the temple. He cursed the fig tree, the symbol of the Jewish nation, and He cleansed the temple. These actions indicated that He, as God, was through with Israel and the temple for that period of time.

Mark 13:1 speaks of the Lord Jesus "going out of the temple." When He went out of the temple, He forsook it. As we have pointed out, the temple was no longer God's house; it was "your house," the house of those who had made it a den of robbers. Therefore, their house was left to them for desolation. After the Lord walked out of the temple, He never returned to it. According to the Lord's

prediction, the temple was completely destroyed.

The Lord's disciples witnessed the cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple, but they did not understand the significance of these things. This was the reason they could still marvel at the wonderful stones and wonderful buildings. This made it necessary for the Lord Jesus to speak further to them in order to prepare them for His death.

In 13:2 the Lord says to the disciples, "Do you see these great buildings? There shall by no means be left a stone upon a stone which will not be overthrown." This prophecy was fulfilled in A.D. 70. In his writings, Josephus, a Jewish historian, records the details of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Jerusalem was utterly destroyed.

SITTING WITH HIS DISCIPLES ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES

Mark 13:3 and 4 say, "And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew questioned Him privately, Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?" The fact that the Lord was sitting with the disciples on the Mount of Olives indicates that to receive the vision of the Lord's prophecy of the things to come, we need to climb to the high mountain to enter into His presence. When the disciples questioned Him privately, they asked Him concerning the time these things would be and the sign when they would be accomplished.

We may find it surprising that at such a time the Lord Jesus had the heart to sit with His disciples on the Mount of Olives and speak to them concerning things to come. It certainly was a great matter for Him to have the heart to do this. Furthermore, this indicates that the Lord Jesus was at peace. Even though He knew that in a few days He would be put to death, He was still at peace. He could peacefully sit down on the mountaintop and look at the forsaken city of Jerusalem and the forsaken temple. In His

sight, Jerusalem and the temple had already been forsaken.

DECEIVERS, WARS, EARTHQUAKES, AND FAMINE

In verses 5 and 6 the Lord Jesus says, "Beware, lest anyone lead you astray. Many will come in My name, saying, I am He! and will lead many astray." In these verses the Lord says that many deceivers will come in the name of Christ and lead many astray. History tells us that this has been so. Since Christ ascended to the heavens, many have come claiming to be Christ.

In verse 7 the Lord goes on to say, "And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; it must happen, but the end is not yet." The "wars" here refer to all the wars from the first century to the present. They are signified by the red horse of the second seal in Revelation 6:3-4.

The "end" in verse 7 is the consummation of this age (Matt. 24:3; Dan. 12:4, 9, 6-7), which will be the three and a half years of the great tribulation.

If you know world history, you will realize that from the day the Lord Jesus ascended to the heavens, wars have been increasing. We may say that human history is a history of wars. In 13:7 the Lord prophesied concerning the wars that would come after His resurrection and ascension.

In 13:8 the Lord Jesus says, "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are the beginning of birth pangs." In this verse "nation" refers to the people, the Gentiles, and "kingdom" refers to an empire. The rising of nation against nation, or people against people, refers to civil war, whereas the rising of kingdom against kingdom refers to international war. From the time of the Lord's ascension there have been both civil wars and international wars. Moreover, there have been many famines, which are often the issue of war. According to history, war brings in famine, signified by the black horse of the third seal in Revelation 6:5-6. Therefore, the sequence is war, famine, and death.

In 13:8 the Lord also says that there will be earthquakes in various places. From the time of Christ's ascension, earthquakes have been increasing through all the centuries and will be intensified at the end of this age (Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16-18). It seems that each year there are more earthquakes than in the previous year.

BIRTH PANGS

Referring to wars, earthquakes, and famine, the Lord Jesus says in verse 8, "These things are the beginning of birth pangs." The Jews, as God's elect, will suffer "birth pangs" to bring forth a remnant who will participate in the Messianic kingdom, the earthly section of the millennium.

At this point we need to say a further word concerning the birth pangs spoken of by the Lord in 13:8. In order to understand this expression, we need to realize that from the time of the Lord's resurrection, a birth has been taking place. This is the birth of the universal new man.

The man created by God, the old man, failed God and became useless in fulfilling God's purpose. Because of this, through Christ's death and resurrection God has begun to bring forth a universal new man. The birth, or delivery, of this new man began with the Lord's resurrection, for we, God's called people, were all resurrected with Christ.

At the time of the Lord's resurrection, the delivery of the universal new man was not complete. Actually, that was only the beginning of the birth of the new man. This birth will continue until the end of the great tribulation.

Peter and the other disciples, according to the book of Acts, suffered the birth pangs. Throughout the centuries, many of the Lord's faithful ones have suffered these pangs, and today many are still suffering birth pangs. The reason these birth pangs continue is that the delivery of the universal new man has not yet been completed.

Before He died, the Lord Jesus spoke concerning the birth of the new man: "Truly, truly, I say to you, that you shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; you shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. When a woman gives birth she has sorrow, because

her hour has come; but when she brings forth the child, she no longer remembers the affliction because of the joy that a man has been born into the world. And you therefore now indeed have sorrow; but I shall see you again and your heart shall rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you" (John 16:20-22). In one sense, a child, the new man, was born at the time of the Lord's resurrection. But in another sense, the universal new man, revealed in chapters two and four of Ephesians, has not yet been fully delivered. On the contrary, this new man is still in the process of being born, and the process of birth, of delivery, involves suffering.

The persecutions endured by the saints are considered birth pangs by the Lord Jesus. These birth pangs began from the time of the Lord's resurrection and ascension. Since the day of Pentecost, these birth pangs have not ceased to be experienced by the Lord's followers. Because the delivery of the new man is still taking place, the birth pangs continue. What the Lord says in Mark 13:1-8 is related to the birth pangs for the bringing forth of the universal new man.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FORTY

THE PREPARATION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR FOR HIS REDEMPTIVE SERVICE

(7)

Scripture Reading: Mark 13:1-37

In 13:1-37 the Lord prepares His disciples for His death by telling them of things to come. Here He speaks concerning five matters: the destruction of the temple (vv. 1-2), the plagues at the beginning of birth pangs (vv. 3-8), the preaching of the gospel and persecutions (vv. 9-13), the great tribulation and the coming of the Slave-Savior (vv. 14-27), and watching, praying, and awaiting the Slave-Savior (vv. 28-37). We covered the destruction of the temple and the beginning of birth pangs in the previous message. In this message we shall go on to consider the other matters concerning which the Lord spoke to His disciples on the Mount of Olives.

THE GOSPEL AND PERSECUTIONS

In 13:9-13 the Lord speaks concerning the preaching of the gospel and persecutions. In verse 9 the Lord says, "But you yourselves beware; they will deliver you to sanhedrins, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them." In particular, the "you" here refers to Jewish disciples. The first martyrs were Jews.

Verse 9 indicates that the persecutions will come from both Jews and Gentiles. The sanhedrins and synagogues are related to the Jews, but the governors and the kings refer to the rulers of the Gentiles. Therefore, the persecutions described in verse 9 will come from two sources, from both Jews and Gentiles.

In verse 10 the Lord goes on to say, "And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations." According to Matthew 24:14, the gospel preached to all the nations will be the gospel of the kingdom. The gospel of the kingdom includes the gospel of grace (Acts 20:24). However, the gospel of the kingdom brings people not only into God's salvation but also into God's kingdom (Rev. 1:9). The emphasis of the gospel of grace is on forgiveness of sin, God's redemption, and eternal life; the emphasis of the gospel of the kingdom is on the ruling of God and the authority of the Lord. The gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole earth for a testimony to all nations before the end of the age comes. This testimony must spread throughout the earth before the end of this age, before the time of the great tribulation.

In verse 11 the Lord tells His disciples not to be anxious about what they will speak when they are delivered up, for the Holy Spirit will speak in them. Then the Lord continues, "And brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children shall rise up against their parents and put them to death; and you will be hated by all on account of My name; but he who has endured to the end, he shall be saved" (vv. 12-13). This word is brief, yet all-inclusive. The persecution will come from Jews, from Gentiles, and even from the members of one's own family. This kind of persecution has been carried out and still is happening today.

It is important to understand the meaning of the word "saved" in verse 13. Here "saved" may mean to be saved from those who hate and persecute. But eventually this word means to be saved into the manifestation of the kingdom in the coming age, a manifestation that will be a reward to the overcoming believers. This differs from eternal salvation as revealed in Ephesians 2:8.

THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

In 13:14-27 the Lord speaks concerning the great tribulation and the coming of the Slave-Savior. Verse 14 says, "But when you see the abomination of desolation

standing where it should not (let the reader understand), then let those in Judea flee to the mountains." How long the period of time will be for verses 1 through 13 we do not know. But the prophecy in verses 14 through 27 will definitely be fulfilled in the last three and a half years of this age, the time of the great tribulation, the second half of the last week prophesied in Daniel 9:27. This period of time will begin with the setting up of Antichrist's image (an idol) in the temple (Mark 13:14) and will end with Christ's open coming (v. 26).

In verse 14 the Lord speaks of the abomination of desolation standing where it should not be. "Abomination" means an idol (Deut. 29:17). Here it refers to the image of Antichrist set up in the temple of God as an idol (Rev. 13:14-15; 2 Thes. 2:4) at the beginning of the great tribulation (Matt. 24:21).

The Greek word translated "desolation" means causing desolation, desolating. The abomination, the idol of Antichrist, will cause desolation. Antichrist is called the destroyer (Apollyon, Rev. 9:11); he will do much destroying (Dan. 8:13, 23-25; 9:27).

The abomination of desolation will stand where it should not be. According to Matthew 24:15, it will stand in the holy place, that is, within God's temple (Psa. 68:35; Ezek. 7:24; 21:2).

THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

Jerusalem has already been destroyed more than once, and it will be destroyed again. Jerusalem was destroyed the first time under Nebuchadnezzar with the Babylonian army. Later, in the second century B.C., after the rebuilding of the temple, the temple was polluted by Antiochus Epiphanes. Many Bible students realize that he was a type of Titus, who came to destroy Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Titus was a prefigure of the coming Antichrist, who with his army will destroy Jerusalem once more.

There were prophecies concerning both Titus and Antichrist in Daniel. Antiochus Epiphanes was a type of Titus, and Titus was a type of Antichrist. The "little horn"

in Daniel 8 was a prefigure of Titus, and Titus is a prefigure of the coming Antichrist. With Titus there was the third destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and with the coming Antichrist Jerusalem will be destroyed again.

The Lord's word in Mark 13 refers to Antichrist and also implies the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 under Titus. In order to understand this portion of the Word, it is helpful to realize that Titus prefigures Antichrist, and the destruction of Jerusalem under Titus prefigures the destruction of Jerusalem that will be carried out by Antichrist.

THE CHOSEN

In 13:19 and 20 the Lord says, "For those will be days of affliction, such as has not happened from the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and by no means shall be. And unless the Lord had shortened the days, no flesh would be saved; but on account of the chosen, whom He chose, He shortened the days." Here the "chosen" refer to the Jews, God's chosen people (Rom. 11:28). The tribulation under Antichrist will be so severe that no one will be able to bear it. If God had not cut it short, no flesh at all would be saved. But for the sake of the chosen, the elect, those days will be shortened.

FALSE CHRISTS AND FALSE PROPHETS

In 13:21-23 the Lord goes on to warn the disciples concerning false Christs and false prophets: "And then if anyone says to you, Behold, here is the Christ! Behold, there! do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will be raised up, and they will show signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, the chosen. But you, beware; I have told you all things beforehand." The Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah and are expecting a Messiah to come. They need to be warned that Messiah, the Christ, will not arise "here" or "there" on earth, but will descend on the cloud from heaven.

The Lord says that false Christs and false prophets

will arise. Antichrist will be the last of the false Christs and will work signs and lying wonders with the power of Satan to deceive the perishing (2 Thes. 2:3-10). "Another beast" in Revelation 13:11 will be the last of the false prophets (Rev. 19:20) and will do great signs to deceive the earth's dwellers (Rev. 13:13-14).

THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN

In 13:24-27 the Lord Jesus speaks concerning His coming. Verses 24 and 25 say, "But in those days, after that affliction, the sun will b darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling out of heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken." These supernatural calamities in heaven will follow the great tribulation at the end of this age. This differs from the fourth trumpet in Revelation 8:12, which will occur very close to the great tribulation.

In verse 26 the Lord continues, "And then they shall see the Son of Man coming in clouds with much power and glory." In Christ's first coming His authority was manifested in casting out demons and healing diseases. In His second coming His power will be exercised to execute God's judgment, to destroy Antichrist and his armies, and to bind Satan for the establishment of God's kingdom on earth.

In Mark 13:27 the Lord says that the Son of Man "will send the angels, and He will gather together His chosen from the four winds, from the extremity of earth to the extremity of heaven." After the great tribulation, at His coming back to earth, the Lord will gather the scattered Jews from all parts of the earth to the holy land. This will be the fulfillment not only of the Lord's word in Matthew 23:37, but also of God's promise in the Old Testament (Deut. 30:3-5; Isa. 43:5-7; 49:9-13, 22-26; 51:11; 56:8; 60:4; 62:10-12; 27:13; Ezek. 34:13; 37:21; 28:25).

WATCHING, PRAYING, AND AWAITING

In 13:28-37 we have a word concerning watching, praying, and awaiting the Slave-Savior. Verse 28 says,

"Now from the fig tree learn the parable: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that the summer is near." This fig tree signifies the nation of Israel, which the Lord cursed in 11:14. It passed through a long "winter," from the first century to 1948, when the nation of Israel was restored. That was its branch becoming tender and the putting forth of its leaves. This fig tree is a sign to the believers of the end of this age.

To "become tender" signifies that life has come back, and to "put forth leaves" signifies outward activities. Winter signifies the time of being dried up, the time of tribulation; "summer" signifies the age of the restored kingdom (Luke 21:30-31), which will begin at the Lord's second coming.

In verses 29 and 30 the Lord goes on to say, "So also you, when you see these things happening, you know that He is near, at the doors. Truly I tell you, that this generation shall by no means pass away until all these things happen." The "generation" here is not that according to age or people, as the generations in Matthew 1:17. Instead, it is the generation according to the moral condition of the people, as the generation in Matthew 11:16; 12:39, 41, 42, 45; and Proverbs 30:11-14.

In verses 31 and 32 the Lord says, "The heaven and the earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away. But concerning that day or hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor even the Son, but the Father." The Son, standing in the position of the Son of Man (v. 26), does not know the day or hour of His coming back.

In 13:33-37 the Lord speaks strongly concerning watching. In verse 33 He says, "Beware, be watchful; for you do not know when the time is." In verse 35 He tells the disciples, "Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house comes, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning." Finally, in verse 37, the last verse of the chapter, He says, "And what I say to you, I say to all, Watch!" To be sure, the Lord's word about watching is more than a prophecy; it is also a charge to all the believers of the Slave-Savior. On

the one hand, we need to know the prophecies concerning the things to come. On the other hand, we need to watch.

THE REVIVING OF THE FIG TREE AND THE DELIVERY OF THE NEW MAN

Many aspects of the Lord's prophecy in Mark 13 have been fulfilled. In particular, we have seen the re-formation of the nation of Israel and the return of Jerusalem to the Jews. This may be considered the reviving of the fig tree that was cursed. Although its branch has already become tender and it has begun to put forth its leaves, we do not yet see any fruit. Rather, we may say that the leaves are merely an outward display. The nation of Israel today has an outward display, but it does not yet have fruit.

If you study a map, you will see that the nation of Israel is the center of the inhabited earth geographically, politically, and even militarily. The situation in the Middle East is a serious problem. The surrounding Arab nations do not seem to have a way to deal with the small nation of Israel.

The re-formation of Israel is a fulfillment of a number of crucial prophecies in the Bible. Israel has been re-formed, Jerusalem has been returned, and the fig tree is now showing its leaves. This should cause us to realize that summer is near. However, we cannot say how long it will be until summer.

While the nation of Israel is flourishing, the birth, the delivery, of the new man continues to take place. The flourishing of Israel and the delivery of the new man are taking place in a parallel way. This indicates that the recovery of the church life should go on in parallel with the flourishing of the nation of Israel. This twofold development will reach its climax almost at the same time, the time of the great tribulation.

After studying the first thirteen chapters of the Gospel of Mark, we see that it is not a simple matter to be prepared to enter into the Lord's death and resurrection. First we need to pass through the steps of the long process recorded in chapters one through ten. Then we need to follow the Slave-Savior to Jerusalem, where He prepared

the environment, the opposers, and His disciples for His redemptive work. We also need to hear His word regarding the things to come concerning the Jews, the church, the world situation, the great tribulation, and the Antichrist.

We need to study the biblical prophecies not merely to have a knowledge of the prophecies, but especially to have a view of what the Lord is doing today and to understand the purpose of the world situation. From our study of the Scriptures we know what the Lord is doing, and we know the purpose of the world situation. It is for the completion of the nation of Israel and also for the completion of the birth of the new man. Although we are not part of the nation of Israel, as believers in Christ we certainly are part of the new man.

In order to have the new man, we need to experience Christ's death and resurrection. Through His death and resurrection we may have the full enjoyment of the wonderful Person of Christ as our replacement. This is the clear view of God's economy presented in chapters one through thirteen of the Gospel of Mark.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FORTY-ONE

THE PREPARATION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR FOR HIS REDEMPTIVE SERVICE

(8)

Scripture Reading: Mark 13:1-37

In this message I would like to give a further word on chapter thirteen, one of the most difficult chapters for us to understand. Many readers of the New Testament regard Mark 13 merely as a prophecy. Actually, this chapter is not merely a prophecy; it is also a word of preparation given by the Lord Jesus to His followers. Two indications of this are the word "temple" in verse 1 and the expression "birth pangs" in verse 8.

CHRIST AS THE UNIVERSAL REPLACEMENT

In chapter eleven the Lord Jesus cleansed the temple (11:15-17). In a very real sense, the Lord condemned the temple. After cleansing the temple, the Lord Jesus dealt with the leaders of Judaism, those who were especially concerned for the temple. The disciples heard all that the Lord said to those leaders. After such a thorough dealing with the temple and with the Jewish leaders, the Lord went out of the temple. Mark 13:1 says, "And as He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples says to Him, Teacher, behold, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" This is a strong indication that the Lord's disciples were still occupied with the traditional concept of the temple, which was a sign or symbol of the Jewish religion. For the disciples to still have such a regard for the temple meant that they were fully occupied with their old religion.

When the Lord Jesus was on earth, God's intention in

His economy was to change the dispensation from the old things to Christ. It was God's desire that Christ would replace the things of the former dispensation. This is the reason we say that Christ, who is both God and man, is the universal replacement. Christ as the universal replacement was first revealed on the Mount of Transfiguration. The Lord brought three of His disciples to the top of this mountain in order to show them that God in His economy intended to replace everything with Christ. There would be no place for Moses or Elijah, and no place for the natural man. Everything and everyone must be replaced by Christ, the all-inclusive One.

When the Lord Jesus cleansed the temple, He was preparing to replace the old things with Himself. He was canceling, annulling, the things of the old dispensation in order to prepare the way for His disciples to take Him as their replacement. He was preparing them to be brought into His death and resurrection so that He might be their all-inclusive replacement.

THE PRODUCING OF THE NEW MAN

To take Christ as our replacement through His death and resurrection is to be brought out of the old creation and to enter into the new creation. God's economy is first to produce the old creation, and then to bring forth the new creation out of the old.

God's new creation is mainly the new man. The producing of the new man out of the old creation involves the process of birth. The expression "birth pangs" in 13:8 refers to the travail involved in the birth of the new man.

The period of time between Christ's resurrection and ascension and His coming back is for the delivery of the new man. We believe that we are living toward the end of that period of time in which the new man is being delivered. Looking back upon more than nineteen centuries of history since the Lord's ascension, it is easy for us to realize that throughout the centuries many have experienced the birth pangs for the delivery of the new man. The Jews, the Gentiles, and all the cultures and

civilizations of the world have been part of these birth pangs. Even the wars that have taken place have been part of the birth pangs. These birth pangs are for one thing--the bringing forth of the new man.

Today's world situation with its birth pangs is for the birth of the new man. This is the reason I watch the world situation.

THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL AND THE SUFFERING OF PERSECUTION

Do you know what has been taking place for the last nineteen hundred years? The centuries from the first century until the twentieth have witnessed the delivery of the new man through the preaching of the gospel and the suffering of persecution.

We need to understand why the new man is brought forth by the preaching of the gospel amid persecution. From the time of man's fall, the old creation has been under the usurping hand of Satan, God's enemy. God is now working to produce a new man out of His old creation. The enemy, however, is not willing to allow such a thing, and he is instigating everything and every matter to oppose God's economy in order to frustrate the birth of the new man. This is the reason for persecutions. From the time Peter stood up to preach the gospel on the day of Pentecost, this persecution has been taking place. Persecution first came from the Jews with their religion and then from the Gentiles, including the Roman rulers in their politics. Throughout all the centuries this persecution of those who preach the gospel has not ceased.

During the past nineteen hundred years, two things have been going on continually: the preaching of the gospel and persecution. It is sovereign of the Lord that these things have not ceased. Century after century, the Lord's faithful ones have preached the gospel at any cost, even at the risk of their lives. Meanwhile, Satan, having usurped the old creation with the old man and his society and culture, has instigated a great deal of persecution.

What will be the outcome of Satan's opposition to God's

economy? The outcome will be that neither Satan nor the world will gain anything. Ultimately, the outcome will be the full delivery of the new man.

After the lengthy process for the birth of the new man, the Lord Jesus will come back to receive the new man at the time of the saints' rapture. This means that when the Lord Jesus comes back, there will be a rapture, and this rapture will be the final delivery of the new man. If we see this and then read chapter thirteen of Mark again, we shall receive fresh light from the Word. In this chapter the Lord was bringing His close followers into such an understanding of God's economy.

THE CENTRAL POINT OF GOD'S ECONOMY

The central point of God's economy is the producing of the new man through Christ's death and resurrection. The death of Christ has terminated the old creation, and His resurrection has germinated the new creation. Therefore, to be brought into Christ's death and resurrection is to be brought into the termination of the old creation and the germination of the new creation. In this germination we enjoy the all-inclusive, universal replacement, who is the living, wonderful, marvelous Person of Christ, the God-man.

When we enjoy Christ as the universal replacement, He will become everything to us, for He will replace everything with Himself. This is the reason Paul says that in the new man "there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all and in all" (Col. 3:10-11). In the new man there are no racial differences. In the new man there is no culture or social rank. Instead, Christ, the universal replacement, is all and is in all.

Christ will replace the entire old creation, and He will be the whole new creation. How can this take place? It can take place only through Christ's death and resurrection. Hence, it is necessary for us to be brought into the death and resurrection of Christ. In His resurrection we enjoy Him as the all-inclusive, processed, indwelling, life-giving

Spirit. The Person who is this universal replacement is the One with both divinity and humanity. Today this wonderful Person is the compound Spirit to be our enjoyment so that God may have the new man for His expression.

I hope that we shall all be enlightened to see the vision related to the words "birth pangs" in 13:8. These birth pangs are required for the delivery of the new man. The delivery takes place through the gospel, and the preaching of the gospel is always accompanied by persecution.

Wherever we go to preach the gospel, we should be ready to suffer persecution. If you are preaching the gospel and teaching the truth, yet you never suffer anything but are always warmly welcomed, you need to question whether your activity is really of the Lord. If your preaching and teaching are of the Lord, you will face persecution. The reason for this is that the delivery of the new man always involves birth pangs. Even today, this birth with its birth pangs is still taking place.

ENTERING INTO CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION

As we read chapter thirteen of the Gospel of Mark, we should not be distracted from the main point in this chapter. The crucial matter here is that the Lord was telling His close followers that the entire world situation is for the producing of a new man. This new man can be produced only through Christ's all-inclusive death and His wonderful resurrection. This is the reason we need to be brought into His death and resurrection.

If you study the account of Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost, you will see that he emphasized the two matters of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He told the people that the One they despised and crucified has been honored by God, for God raised Him from among the dead. They crucified Him, but God resurrected Him. The Lord's followers were His witnesses. In particular, they were witnesses of His death and resurrection.

We have seen that Christ's death was the termination of the old creation and that His resurrection was the germination of the new creation. In the new creation we enjoy Him, the all-inclusive One, as our universal

replacement provided by God. Christ is not only our Savior--He is our life and everything to us. Not only is He everything to us; He is everything in God's economy. God's economy is to produce a new man, and in this new man there is nothing but Christ. In the new man Christ is in everyone, Christ is everyone, and Christ is everything. We all need to see this marvelous vision.

Concerning the vision of God's economy, the crucial matter for us to see is that we need to enter into Christ's death and resurrection so that we may participate in the full enjoyment of Him as the universal replacement. Today as our replacement Christ is the life-giving Spirit. It is not our intention to argue in a doctrinal way concerning the Trinity or the Spirit. Our aim is to help the believers know that we need to enter into the all-inclusive death of Christ so that we may be in His resurrection. Then in His resurrection we shall participate in Him and enjoy Him as the life-giving Spirit to be our replacement. This Spirit now dwells in our spirit. We have actually become one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). As we live in the Spirit and even live this Spirit, He will make Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension real to us.

THE PURPOSE OF THE WORLD SITUATION

The entire world situation is for the completion of the re-formation of Israel and also for the completion of the birth of the new man. Because we have a clear view concerning these two matters, we can see something that statesmen and politicians cannot see. They do not realize that the world situation is for the re-formation of Israel and the birth of the new man. Thank the Lord that we know the purpose for the things happening in the world. We thank Him for a clear view of the world situation.

ENJOYING CHRIST AS OUR REPLACEMENT

Not only do we know where the world is in relation to God's economy; we also know where we are as believers. We are in the death and resurrection of Christ, and we are

in the enjoyment of Him as our all-inclusive replacement This means that we are in Christ.

Many talk about being in Christ without having a full realization of what this means. To be in Christ is to be in the full enjoyment of Him as the entire, universal replacement through His all-inclusive death and His wonderful resurrection.

We need the Gospel of Mark to help us see that Christ is our replacement through His death and resurrection. It was not in an external, outward way that the New Testament believers entered into the death and resurrection of Christ. From the Gospel of Mark we see that the early disciples, our representatives, followed the Lord from the very beginning. Eventually, they, and also we, passed through the process leading into Christ's all-inclusive death and into His resurrection.

If we see the vision of the all-inclusive death of Christ, we shall realize that when He was crucified, we were crucified with Him and in Him. Likewise, when He was resurrected, we were resurrected in Him. We also are in ascension with Him. Therefore, now we can declare, "Hallelujah, in Christ's resurrection and ascension I am participating in the enjoyment of Him as my replacement!"

As our replacement, Christ is the indwelling, life-giving Spirit in our spirit. As we live by this Spirit, the Spirit will become in us the reality of Christ Himself with His death, resurrection, and ascension as our complete and full enjoyment. It is in this way that the new man is delivered. May we all see the vision of the bringing forth of the new man through our participation in Christ and in His death, resurrection, and ascension.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FORTY-TWO

THE PREPARATION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR FOR HIS REDEMPTIVE SERVICE

(9)

Scripture Reading: Mark 14:1-11

In 13:1--14:42 the Lord Jesus is preparing the disciples for His death. In 13:1-37 He prepares them by telling them the things to come. Then in 14:1-11 He prepares them by enjoying their love, while His opposers conspire to kill Him, and one of His disciples plots to betray Him. In 14:12-26 the Lord prepares the disciples by instituting His supper that they may remember Him and finally by warning them of their stumbling and charging them to watch and pray (14:27-42). In this message we shall consider the preparation carried out in 14:1-11.

In 14:1-11 three matters are merged: the opposers' conspiracy to kill the Slave-Savior, the Lord's enjoyment of His followers' love, and Judas' plot to betray Him. While "the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by craftiness and kill Him" (v. 1), the Lord's followers were showing their love for Him. Simultaneously, Judas Iscariot, "one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests that he might deliver Him up to them" (v. 10).

A TYPE OF CHRIST

Mark 14:1 speaks of "the Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread after two days." Although the chief priests and the scribes wanted to kill the Lord Jesus, they said, "Not at the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people" (v. 2). Eventually, under God's sovereignty, they did kill the Lord Jesus at the feast (Matt. 27:15) for the fulfillment of the type.

The Passover was a type of Christ (1 Cor. 5:7). Christ is the Lamb of God that God may pass over us, the sinners, as portrayed in typology by the Passover in Exodus 12. Hence, it was necessary for Christ as the Passover Lamb to be killed on the day of the Passover for its fulfillment.

According to the type, the Passover Lamb had to be examined for blemishes during the four days preceding the feast of the Passover (Exo. 12:3-6). Before His crucifixion, Christ came to Jerusalem the last time, six days before the Passover (John 12:1), and was examined by the Jewish leaders. There was no blemish found in Him, and He was proved to be perfect and qualified to be the Passover Lamb for us.

THE HOUSE OF SIMON THE LEPER

Mark 14:3 says that Christ was in Bethany "in the house of Simon the leper." Outside of Christ, it was not possible for anyone to find God. This One had left the temple. He had condemned the temple to be destroyed. However, the disciples were still occupied with their religious concept of the temple. According to their understanding, God was in the temple, for it was His house. I doubt that the disciples realized that God had left that house when the Lord Jesus walked out of the temple in chapter thirteen. Since Christ Jesus is God, when He left the condemned temple and forsook it, God forsook it as well. Going to the Mount of Olives with some of His disciples, He prophesied to them that the temple they admired would be destroyed. Furthermore, that temple would be replaced by Christ Himself.

In chapter fourteen we see that after leaving the temple, the Lord came to a house of a cleansed leper in Bethany. A leper signifies a sinner. Simon, as a leper, must have been healed by the Lord. Being grateful to the Lord and loving Him, he spread a feast in his house for the Lord and His disciples in order to enjoy His presence. A saved sinner would always do this.

Today God's house is with cleansed lepers. As believers in Christ, we all are cleansed lepers represented by

Simon. Simon loved the Lord Jesus and prepared a feast for Him. "When He was in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as He reclined at table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of ointment, of pure nard, very costly; and breaking the alabaster flask, she poured it over His head" (v. 3). This woman truly loved the Lord. God's house, the church, is composed of those who love Him. His house is composed of cleansed lepers and those who anoint Him.

SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY TO LOVE THE LORD

The house of Simon in Bethany is a miniature of the church life. According to this miniature, the church life is composed of cleansed lepers who love the Lord Jesus. Those who love Him, as did Simon and as did the woman who anointed Him, take Him as their full replacement. In their heart there is no room for the temple. They would not even be distracted by caring for the poor (v. 5).

Some who were present "were indignant among themselves, saying, Why has this waste of the ointment been made? For this ointment could have been sold for over three hundred denarii and given to the poor; and they were scolding her" (vv. 4-5). Those who were indignant regarded the woman's love offering to the Lord a waste. Throughout the past nineteen centuries, thousands of precious lives, heart treasures, high positions, and golden futures have been "wasted" upon the Lord Jesus. To those who love Him in such a way, He is altogether lovely and worthy of their offering. What they have poured upon Him is not a waste, but a fragrant testimony of His sweetness.

According to verses 6 and 7, the Lord Jesus said to those who were scolding the woman, "Let her alone; why are you causing her trouble? She has wrought a good work upon Me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want you can do them good; but you do not always have Me." The Lord's word, "You do not always have Me," indicates that we must love the Lord and seize the opportunity to love Him.

Today many Christians care more for works of charity than for Christ. A charitable concern for the poor often

replaces Christ. But in Mark 14 the Lord Jesus would not allow the concern for the poor to be a replacement of Himself. Here it seems that He does not care for the poor, but cares only for Himself. He seems to be saying, "Do not trouble this one who loves Me. She has done a good work on Me. If you want to take care of the poor, wait for another time and go to another place. The poor are always with you. But this is the unique time for you to take Me as your replacement and to pour out everything upon Me."

ANOINTING THE LORD FOR BURIAL

In verse 8 the Lord went on to say, "She has done what she could; she anointed My body beforehand for the burial." She anticipated the need, or took occasion, to anoint the Lord's body for burial. This indicates that she received the revelation of the Lord's death by the Lord's words. Hence, she seized the opportunity to pour the best she had upon the Lord. To love the Lord with our best requires a revelation concerning Him.

In verse 9 the Lord continues, "And truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, that also which she did shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." In the foregoing verse the Lord referred to His burial. The word "burial" implies His death and resurrection for our redemption. Hence, the gospel in verse 9 should refer to the gospel of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

The story of the gospel is that the Lord loved us, and the story of the woman who anointed the Lord is that she loved Him. We must preach both--the Lord loving us and our loving the Lord. One is for our salvation, and the other is for our consecration.

In foregoing messages we have seen that when the Lord Jesus was on the Mount of Olives with four of His disciples, He spoke to them concerning the beginning of birth pangs (13:8). These birth pangs are for the delivery of the new man, a delivery that involves a long process. How can this man be delivered, be brought forth? We have

seen that the new man can be brought forth only through the death and resurrection of Christ. Through His death and resurrection He becomes everything in the new man.

After the Lord spoke to His disciples concerning things to come, especially concerning the birth pangs, he entered into Simon's home in Bethany, where a feast had been prepared for Him. While He was feasting, a woman who loved Him poured out the best thing she had upon Him. This indicates that He was everything to her. The Lord said that this woman had done what she could, anointing His body beforehand for burial.

What the Lord says in verse 8 is crucial, for it indicates that this woman had certainly received the Lord's word concerning His death and resurrection. I do not believe that Peter received this word, but she received it. She knew that the One she loved would soon be killed and that she would not have another opportunity to anoint Him. Therefore, while He was still present, she seized the opportunity to pour out her ointment upon Him. In doing this, she anointed Him for His burial.

BROUGHT INTO THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

No doubt, this woman had been brought into the death of Christ. Burial, of course, is between death and resurrection. She poured out her best upon the Lord as her all-inclusive replacement, and she did this for His burial. This means that she took His death in order to have the full enjoyment of Him.

If we had only the Gospel of Mark, we would not be able to have an adequate understanding of what it means to be brought into the death and resurrection of Christ. In Acts and in Paul's Epistles we see the development of this matter. When we are in Christ's death and resurrection, we can enjoy Him to the uttermost. We can be like the woman in Mark 14, who entered into the Lord's death and resurrection and thereby enjoyed Him as her full replacement. Within her there was no ground for anything or anyone other than the Lord. Within her there was no

room for Moses or Elijah or the temple, and there was no ground for herself. She had been replaced by this lovable One.

This woman had been fully prepared to take the Lord as her replacement. She had passed through all the steps of the process with the Lord. Whereas we may say that Peter was somewhat coarse, she was thorough and fine. For this reason, she was certainly brought into the Lord's death. She realized that the Lord would be put to death. But this thought concerning the Lord's death did not get into Peter. Because she took in the Lord's word regarding His death, she also seized the opportunity to anoint Him for burial. By this one step she took the Lord's death and was working for His burial. This was the good work she did upon Him. Then a few days later she was among those who entered into the Lord's resurrection. Hence, she was a forerunner, one of the first to enjoy the resurrected Christ. By means of the Lord's preparation, she entered into His death and resurrection.

CHRIST AS OUR REPLACEMENT IN THE CHURCH LIFE

We have seen that in chapter thirteen the Lord was preparing His disciples for His death. He continued this preparation in chapter fourteen. The Lord's preparation began with His unveiling to the disciples how God's economy will produce a new man. The birth of this new man requires the suffering of birth pangs.

In Mark 14 the Lord continued to prepare the disciples by enjoying their love. Entering into a home composed of cleansed lepers, He enjoyed the feast and also the anointing. The feast was a matter of inner satisfaction, and the anointing was a matter of pouring out upon the Lord something with a sweet savor. Therefore, in Simon's house in Bethany the Lord was both satisfied and anointed. He was anointed not by God, but by one of those who loved Him.

In Simon's home in Bethany, the Lord was the replacement for everything. Those who loved Him did not have anything or anyone apart from Him within them or

around them. They had only this wonderful Person, who was everything to them.

We have pointed out that in 14:1-11 we have a miniature of the church life. In particular, we have a miniature of the experience of taking Christ as the all-inclusive replacement. Therefore, in the church life as depicted by this miniature, we have Christ as our replacement. We in the church life are lepers who have been cleansed by Him, and in our hearts there is room only for Him. Within us, around us, and with us there is nothing but the Lord. We take Him as everything through His death and resurrection.

At the beginning of this message we pointed out that in 14:1-11 we have the merging of the conspiracy of the opposers, the love of the Lord's followers, and the plot of Judas to betray Him. Concerning Judas' plot, 14:10 and 11 say, "And Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests that he might deliver Him up to them. And hearing this, they rejoiced and promised to give him money. And he sought how he might opportunely deliver Him up." The money promised to Judas was thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 26:15), the value of a slave (Exo. 21:32). While one of the Slave-Savior's followers expressed her love to Him to the uttermost, another was about to betray Him. One treasured Him, and at the same time another was preparing to deliver Him up.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FORTY-THREE

THE PREPARATION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR FOR HIS REDEMPTIVE SERVICE

(10)

Scripture Reading: Mark 14:12-26

A REPLACEMENT OF THE PASSOVER

After the Lord Jesus enjoyed a feast in Bethany, He partook of the feast of the Passover and then instituted His supper as a replacement of the Passover (14:12-26). The Lord charged two of His disciples to prepare what was needed for the feast of the Passover (vv. 12-16). In the history of God's economy, that was the last feast of Passover, for from that time the feast of Passover was replaced by the Lord's table. This indicates that the old dispensation has been replaced by a new dispensation. Therefore, we today do not have the feast of Passover; instead, we have the Lord's table, the Lord's supper.

As we shall see, the Lord instituted His supper with bread and a cup. This indicates His death, His resurrection, the Lord Himself, and His enlargement, that is, His Body. The Lord, His death and resurrection, and His enlargement will eventually issue in the kingdom of God.

Mark 14:12 says, "And on the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover, His disciples say to Him, Where do You want us to go and prepare that You may eat the Passover?" In the Jewish calendar, which was according to their Scripture, a day began with the evening (Gen. 1:5). In the night, the beginning of the last Passover day, the Slave-Savior first ate the Passover feast with His disciples and instituted His supper for them (vv. 12-25). Then He went with the disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane at the Mount of

Olives (vv. 26-42). There He was arrested and brought to the high priest, where He was judged by the Sanhedrin late in the night (vv. 43-72). In the morning of the same day, He was delivered to Pilate to be judged by him and was sentenced to death (15:1-15). Then He was brought to Golgotha and crucified there beginning from the third hour in the morning, and He remained on the cross until the ninth hour in the afternoon (15:16-41), for the fulfillment of the type of the Passover (Exo. 12:6-11).

According to 14:13-16, the Lord sent two of His disciples and told them to go into the city, where they would meet a man carrying a pitcher of water. They were to follow him, and wherever he entered. they were to say to the owner of the house. "The Teacher says, Where is My guest room, where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?" Then he would show them a large upper room furnished and ready, and in that room the disciples would make the necessary preparations. "And the disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it even as He had told them, and they prepared the Passover" (v. 16).

This account of the preparation for the Passover is mysterious. It reminds us of the Lord's word to two of His disciples concerning the colt on which He rode into Jerusalem (11:1-6). Who provided the large upper room and furnished it and made it ready? Nowhere in the Bible can we find the answer to this question. This may indicate that the Slave-Savior's instituting of His supper was a mysterious matter.

JUDAS ISCARIOT

Mark 14:18 says, "And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, Truly I tell you that one of you will deliver Me up, one who is eating with Me." This was the eating of the Passover feast (v. 16), not the eating of the Slave-Savior's supper, which is in verses 22 through 24. The one who delivered up the Lord Jesus was Judas Iscariot.

Verses 19 and 20 say, "They began to be sorrowful and say to Him one by one, Is it I? And He said to them, One of

the twelve, the one who dips with Me in the dish." After Judas Iscariot was exposed, he left (John 13:21-30) before the Slave-Savior's supper (Matt. 26:20-26). Judas did not participate in the Slave-Savior's body and blood, because he was not a real believer in Him, but a son of destruction (John 17:12), considered by the Slave-Savior even a devil (John 6:70-71). Luke 22:21-23 seems to indicate that Judas left after the Lord's supper. mentioned in the preceding verses (Luke 22:19-20). However, Mark's record shows that Judas was pointed out by the Slave-Savior as His betrayer in 14:18-21 before He instituted His supper in verses 22 through 24. Mark's record is according to historical sequence, whereas Luke's is according to the sequence of morality. The sequence in Matthew's record matches that of Mark.

REMEMBERING THE SLAVE-SAVIOR

Mark 14:22 says, "And as they were eating He took bread, and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them, and said, Take; this is My body." This was the eating of the Slave-Savior's supper after He and His followers ate the Passover feast in verses 16 through 18. He initiated this new practice for His believers' remembrance of Him to replace the Passover feast, the old testament practice of the elect's remembrance of Jehovah's salvation (Exo. 12:14; 13:3).

This new practice of the new testament is to remember the Slave-Savior by eating the bread, which signifies His body given for His believers (1 Cor. 11:24), and drinking the cup, which signifies His blood shed for their sins (Matt. 26:28). The bread denotes life (John 6:35), the life of God, the eternal life, and the cup denotes blessing (1 Cor. 10:16), which is God Himself as their portion (Psa. 16:5). As sinners, their portion should have been the cup of God's wrath (Rev. 14:10). But the Slave-Savior has drunk that cup for them (John 18:11), and His salvation becomes their portion, the cup of salvation (Psa. 116:13) that runs over (Psa. 23:5), the content of which is God as their all-inclusive blessing. Such bread and such a cup are the

constituents of the Slave-Savior's supper, which is a table (1 Cor. 10:21), a feast, set up by Him that His believers may remember Him by enjoying Him as such a feast. Thus they testify of His rich and marvelous salvation to the entire universe, displaying His redeeming and life-imparting death (l Cor. 11:26). His blood separated from His body declares His death.

THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT

Verses 23 and 24 say, "And having taken a cup, He gave thanks and gave it to them; and they all drank from it. And He said to them, This is My blood of the covenant, which is being poured out for many. God made a covenant with redeemed Israel in Exodus 24:3-8 (Heb. 9:18-21), which became the old testament as a base for Him to deal with His redeemed people in the dispensation of law. The Slave-Savior came to accomplish God's eternal redemption for God's chosen people by His death, according to God's will (Heb. 10:7,9-10), and with His blood instituted a new covenant, a better covenant (Heb. 8:6-13), which became the new testament after His resurrection (Heb. 9:16-17), as a base for God to be one with His redeemed and regenerated people in the dispensation of grace. This new covenant replaced the old covenant and simultaneously changed God's old dispensation to His new dispensation. The Slave-Savior wanted His followers to know this and to live a life based upon this and according to it after His resurrection.

In 14:25 the Lord went on to say, "Truly, I tell you, I will by no means drink anymore of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." Here the Lord is speaking of the manifestation of the kingdom, in which He will drink with us after His coming back.

Verse 26 is the conclusion of the section on the Slave-Savior's instituting His supper: "And having sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." This hymn was a praise to the Father by the Lord with the disciples after the Lord's table.

BECOMING CHRIST'S MYSTICAL BODY

We have seen that as the Lord and His disciples were eating, He took bread. blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them. and said. "Take; this is My body" (v. 22). First the Lord and His disciples ate the Passover; then the Lord established His table with the bread and the cup to replace the feast of the Passover. He did this because He would very soon fulfill the type and become the real Passover to us (1 Cor. 5:7). Now we are keeping the real feast of Unleavened Bread (l Cor. 5:8).

The bread of the Lord's table is a symbol signifying the Lord's body broken for us on the cross to release His life that we may participate in it. By participating in this life, we become the mystical Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27), which is also signified by the bread of the table (l Cor. 10:17). Hence, by partaking of this bread, we have the fellowship of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16).

The Lord was broken on the cross in order to release His life. The release of the Lord's life is in resurrection. Therefore, breaking is a matter of death, and releasing is a matter of resurrection. Through being broken on the cross, the Lord was able to release the divine life from within Him so that we might participate in this life. By participating in the Lord's divine life, we become the mystical Body of Christ, His enlargement. This means that by enjoying the bread we become Christ's mystical Body.

As His enlargement, Christ's mystical Body is also signified by the bread on the table, as indicated in I Corinthians 10:17. Hence, by partaking of this bread we have the fellowship of the Body of Christ.

THE BLOOD, THE COVENANT, AND THE CUP

The Lord's blood redeemed us from our fallen condition back to God, back to the inheritance we lost through the fall of Adam, and back to God's full blessing. Concerning the Lord's table (1 Cor. 10:21), the bread signifies our participation in life, and the cup, our enjoyment of God's blessing. Hence, it is called the cup of blessing (1 Cor. 10:16). In this cup are all the blessings of God and even

God Himself as our portion (Psa. 16:5). In Adam our portion was the cup of God's wrath (Rev 14:10). Christ has drunk that cup for us (John 18:11), and His blood has constituted the cup of salvation for us (Psa. 116:13), the cup that runs over (Psa. 23:5). By partaking of this cup we also have the fellowship of the blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16).

Mark 14:25 speaks of the fruit of the vine. The fruit of the vine within the cup of the Lord's table is also a symbol. It signifies the Lord's blood shed on the cross for our sins. His blood was required by God's righteousness for the forgiveness of our sins (Heb. 9:22).

Mark 14:24 says that the Lord's blood is the blood of the covenant. The Lord's blood, having satisfied God's righteousness. enacted the new covenant. In this new covenant, God gives us forgiveness, life, salvation, and all spiritual, heavenly and divine blessings. When this new covenant is given to us, it is a cup (Luke 22:20), a portion for us. The Lord shed the blood. God established the covenant, and we enjoy the cup, in which God and all that is of Him are our portion. The blood is the price Christ paid for us, the covenant is the title deed God made to us, and the cup is the portion we receive from God.

Concerning the Lord's table, we have the blood, the covenant, and the cup. When we come to the Lord's supper, we see a cup on the table. That cup is a covenant and is also related to the blood. Therefore, the blood, the covenant, and the cup are one. The blood is the price paid by Christ, the covenant is the title deed of our inheritance, and the cup is the portion we receive and enjoy. Christ paid the price, God made the covenant, and we enjoy the portion.

THE DISCIPLES ENJOYING THE LORD'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION, HIMSELF AND HIS MYSTICAL BODY

By instituting His table the Lord Jesus was indicating to His followers that they would enter into His death and resurrection. The Lord served them not only with His body and blood, but also with His death, resurrection, Himself,

and His enlargement, His mystical Body. At His table He served His disciples with Himself, with His death and resurrection, and with His mystical Body as His enlargement. This means that the disciples should enjoy His death, His resurrection, the Lord Himself, and His enlargement.

I doubt that the disciples were clear concerning the significance of the Lord's supper when the Lord Jesus instituted it. They heard the words spoken by the Lord, but they probably did not understand them. According to what the Lord Jesus prophesied in the Gospel of John, when the Spirit of reality came, He led them into all reality (John 16:13), including the reality of the supper instituted by the Lord. Then the disciples certainly recalled the Lord's words. They may have said, "On the night the Lord was arrested, He instituted a table with the bread and the cup. We did not understand the significance of this at the time. Now we know that the Lord's intention was to bring us into a full realization of His all-inclusive death, His wonderful resurrection, Himself, and His mystical Body as His enlargement."

THE PRODUCING OF THE NEW MAN

The Lord's death, resurrection, the Lord's Himself, and His enlargement are for the producing of the new man. This new man is the development of the seed of the kingdom in chapter four. The full development of the new man will be the kingdom. Instead of reading the Bible in a superficial way, we need to be enlightened to see this vision.

Today the Lord Jesus is still bringing us into the reality of His table. Before He entered into death, He instituted the table with His death, resurrection, Himself, and His enlargement, which are signified by the broken bread and the cup. The bread signifies His mystical Body. The Lord's blood has become a cup as the portion for us covenanted by God and paid for by Christ. Week after week we review this story at the Lord's table.

When we come to the Lord's table, we are not celebrating a religious communion or performing a so-called mass. On the contrary, at His table we have a revelation of the Lord's death, resurrection, the Lord Himself, and His mystical Body as His enlargement. As we participate in His death and resurrection, as we take Him as our all-inclusive replacement, He becomes everything to us for the producing of the new man. Eventually, this new man will become the kingdom of God. When this process has been fulfilled, the Lord Jesus will come back to receive this new man and to have the kingdom. May we all see such a marvelous vision!

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FORTY-FOUR

THE PREPARATION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR FOR HIS REDEMPTIVE SERVICE

(11)

Scripture Reading: Mark 14:1-26

In this message I would like to give a further word on 14:1-26. In particular, we need a further word concerning the Lord's instituting His supper as part of the preparation of His disciples to enter into His death and resurrection.

APPRECIATING THE LORD'S PRECIOUSNESS

Mark 14:1-42 is concerned with the Lord's preparation of His disciples for His death. In this section of the Gospel of Mark concerned with the Lord's preparation, there are two feasts in addition to the feast of the Passover. The first feast was prepared for the Lord by those who loved Him. The second feast was the Lord's supper instituted by Him immediately after the feast of the Passover. The Lord's supper was prepared by Him for His disciples.

Throughout the centuries, much has been said concerning the feast set up by Simon to show his love for the Lord Jesus. During this feast, a woman anointed the Lord as a display of her love. Many messages have been given on the Lord's being anointed by the woman in Mark 14. However, it is much more difficult to get into the depths of the significance of the Lord's table. This matter is very profound, far beyond the ability of the human mind to understand.

The significance of the feast prepared for the Lord by certain of His disciples is shallow compared to the significance of the Lord's table. In the feast prepared by the Lord's disciples, we have the matter of appreciation of

the Lord's preciousness, worthiness, and loveliness. Simon, the leper, having been cleansed by the Lord prepared this feast as an expression of his appreciation of the Lord's mercy, grace, and preciousness. The anointing of the Lord Jesus was also an expression of appreciation of the Lord's loveliness and worthiness. However, in these matters there is little that could be regarded as deep. It seems that nothing initiated by us has much depth.

A SYMBOL, OF THE NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY OF GOD

The supper instituted by the Lord Jesus, on the contrary, is extremely deep. This feast is a sign, a symbol, of the entire New Testament economy of God. God's economy in the New Testament age is involved with the Lord's table.

I do not believe that any of the Lord's disciples understood the significance of His table when it was instituted. Peter, for example, participated in that table, but he certainly did not see the significance of it.

The Bread and the Cup

When the Lord Jesus instituted His supper, "He took bread, and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them, and said, Take; this is My body" (14:22). Then He took the cup, gave it to them, and said, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is being poured out for many" (v. 24). Hence, the Lord's table includes a loaf of bread and a cup.

According to biblical usage, bread signifies life. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). This indicates that in the Bible bread is a matter of life.

Furthermore, according to biblical usage, a cup signifies a portion of blessing. Hence, the cup is called the cup of blessing. The bread is of life, and the cup is of blessing.

To be sure, this life is the divine life, and this blessing is the divine blessing. Actually, both the life and the blessing are the Triune God, God Himself in Christ through the Spirit. Do you know what eternal life is? Eternal life is the Triune God. Do you know what the

divine blessing is? The divine blessing also is the Triune God. Both the divine life and the divine blessing, therefore, are actually the Triune God Himself.

The Triune God Becoming Our Life and Blessing

How is it possible for the Triune God to be our life and blessing? It is not a simple matter for something to become our life. For example, the food we eat and digest becomes our life supply. In order for anything to be our life or life supply, that thing must be organic. If you swallow a stone, that stone cannot become your life supply, because a stone is not living and organic. Only something organic can be digested by us and then assimilated into us to become our life supply. In a similar way, in order for the Triune God to be our life supply and even our life, He must come into us to be digested and assimilated by us. To be sure, the Triune God is living and organic.

According to chapter six of the Gospel of John, Christ is a loaf, the bread of life, for us to eat. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the living bread which came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever," (v. 51). Then He went on to say, "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me shall also live because of Me." (v. 57). Any believer who eats the Lord Jesus as the bread of life will live by Him. When we eat this bread of life, He comes into us to be digested by us and to be assimilated into us organically. This is the only way the Triune God can become our life. The Triune God becomes our life supply and our life by entering into us organically to be assimilated into the very fibers of our spiritual being.

Remembering the Lord by Eating Him

Taking in the Lord to digest and assimilate Him that He may become life to us is signified by the eating of the loaf on the table. Whenever we come to the Lord's table, we see a loaf. That loaf is not merely for display; it is for us to eat. When the Lord Jesus instituted His supper, "He

took bread, and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them, and said, Take; this is My body" (Mark 14:22).

According to Luke 22:19, the Lord Jesus said, "This is My body which is given for you; do this unto the remembrance of Me." This verse speaks of remembering the Lord. For years, I remembered the Lord at His table merely by concentrating on His incarnation, His life of suffering, His death, and His resurrection. I had not been told that the proper way to remember the Lord Jesus is to eat Him. The real remembrance of the Lord is to eat the bread and drink the cup (1 Cor. 11:24, 26), that is, to participate in, to enjoy, the Lord who has given Himself to us through His redeeming death. To eat the bread and drink the cup is to take in the redeeming Lord as our portion, as our life and blessing. This is to remember Him in a genuine way.

THE DEEP SIGNIFICANCE OF EATING THE BREAD AND DRINKING THE CUP OF THE LORD'S TABLE

One day, more than thirty years ago, I was seeking to define the significance of the Lord's table. As I considered the bread and read the verses in the New Testament concerning it, light came to me regarding what it means to remember the Lord at His table. I saw that to remember the Lord is not merely to think about Him, not merely to recall what He experienced. Rather, to remember the Lord is to eat Him. The Lord clearly said, "This is My body which is given for you; do this unto the remembrance of Me." By this we see that the proper remembrance of the Lord is to eat Him, to take Him in as our life supply.

The bread on the table is not for us to analyze or merely think about; the bread is for us to take in, to eat, as our life supply. This bread should be digested and assimilated by us to become our very being. The significance of this is profound.

Eating the bread of the Lord's table indicates that the Lord comes into us as our life supply and then actually becomes us. If we consider the matter of eating, we shall realize that the food we eat eventually becomes us. We

may say not only that the food becomes us, but even that we become the food. Not only is there an organic union between us and the food we eat, digest, and assimilate; we are mingled with the food we assimilate into us.

It is a serious mistake to say that mingling is not scriptural. How could anyone reasonably deny the fact that we are mingled with the food we eat, digest, and assimilate? In fact, assimilating food into our being goes beyond mingling. We do not have the words to describe this. However, we do know that we are mingled in a deep way with the food we eat. In a similar way, when we take in the Triune God as our food, we are truly mingled with Him. In order for the food we eat to become our life, it must be mingled with us. The principle is the same with taking in the Triune God as our food.

We have pointed out that eating food involves something much more than an organic union between us and the food. Actually, eating, digesting, and assimilating food involve an intrinsic mingling of the food with our being. What we eat actually becomes part of us. Hence, this is not only a mingling; it is also a becoming. The food we digest and assimilate becomes part of our very being. For this reason, after we have thoroughly digested and assimilated our food, it is impossible for it to be located within us, because it has become a part of us. We use this matter of assimilating food to illustrate the deep significance of eating the bread of the Lord's table.

A Picture of the Lord

We have seen that the cup of the Lord's table signifies His blood. In the Old Testament there was a prohibition against drinking blood (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:10). In God's economy there is only one kind of blood that is good for us to drink, and that is the blood of the Lord Jesus. In principle, drinking the blood is the same as eating the loaf: whatever we drink saturates us and becomes our being.

A Picture of the Lord's Blood Separated from His Body

The body of the Lord Jesus is signified by the loaf, the

bread, and His blood is signified by the cup with its content. Here is a picture of the Lord's blood separated from His body. This separation signifies death. Hence, in 1 Corinthians 11:26 Paul says, "As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you declare the Lord's death until He comes." The Greek word rendered "declare" means that we proclaim, announce, display, the Lord's death. To take the Lord's supper is to declare and display the Lord's death.

In order for the Lord Jesus to become our food, entering into us as our life supply, it was necessary for Him to pass through death. If He had not been crucified, He could not be our food.

Much of the food we eat day by day must first be put to death. For example, before you can eat a chicken, that chicken must be slain. Eating a chicken requires the death of the chicken. In like manner, in order for us to eat Him, the Lord Jesus had to die. Whenever we eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord's table, we declare the Lord's death.

EXPERIENCING AN INWARD RESURRECTION

We have seen that the Lord's table signifies the Lord Himself, His death, His resurrection, and His mystical Body as His increase. How is the Lord's table related to His resurrection? We may say that whenever we eat the Lord and digest and assimilate Him as our life supply, we experience an inward resurrection. We may use eating physical food as an illustration. Often before dinner time I am tired and weak. But after eating a nourishing meal, I am revived. I would even say that I am "resurrected." The food I eat contains a life element that causes me to be revived. In a similar way, when we eat the Lord Jesus, He becomes the resurrection life within us.

THE FULL GROWTH OF THE NEW MAN

The bread of the Lord's table also signifies Christ's mystical Body as His enlargement. This enlargement is for the producing of the new man. In addition, it is also a

matter of the development of the seed, the gene, of the kingdom.

In chapter four of Mark we have the seed of the kingdom, but eventually we shall have the full development, the manifestation, of the kingdom, and its full development will be the full growth of the new man. This means that eventually the new man will be the kingdom of God.

Furthermore, the kingdom of God is certainly not a matter of organization. No, in its totality the kingdom of God is an organism, the new man, produced by Christ's replacing us through His death and resurrection. How marvelous! If we see this, we shall realize that as the Lord was instituting His supper in Mark 14, He was preparing the disciples to receive His death and resurrection.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FORTY-FIVE

THE PREPARATION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR FOR HIS REDEMPTIVE SERVICE

(12)

Scripture Reading: Mark 14:27-42

WARNING THE DISCIPLES

In 14:27-42 the Lord Jesus warned His disciples of their stumbling and charged them to watch and pray. In verse 27 He said to them, "You will all be stumbled, because it is written, I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered." Then the Lord told them that after He was raised, He would go before them into Galilee (v. 28).

When Peter heard the Lord's word concerning the disciples being stumbled, he said to Him, "Even if all shall be stumbled, yet I will not!" (v. 29). Then, also as part of His preparation of His disciples for His death, the Lord went on to say to Peter, "Truly I tell you, that you today, in this night, before a cock crows twice, will deny Me three times." The Greek verb rendered "deny" is a compound that signifies utterly deny, as in verses 31 and 72. But Peter, being rather rough, confident, and bold, said emphatically, "If I must die with You, I will by no means deny You! And all said similarly" (v. 31).

PRAYING IN GETHSEMANE

After warning the disciples of their stumbling, the Lord Jesus went with them to a place named Gethsemane (v. 32). Gethsemane means the place of the oil press. The Lord was pressed there to flow out the oil, the Spirit.

Taking with Him Peter, James, and John, He "began to be awestruck and distressed" (v. 33). Regarding

"awestruck," C. E. B. Cranfield says that the Lord was "in the grip of a shuddering horror in the face of the dreadful prospect before Him."

The Lord said to Peter, James, and John, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death; remain here and watch. And going forward a little, He fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass away from Him." The Slave-Savior's sorrow and His prayer in verse 35 are the same as in John 12:27. There He said that He came for this hour; that is, He knew that the Father's will was that He should die on the cross for the fulfillment of God's eternal plan.

According to verse 36, the Lord Jesus prayed, "Abba Father, All things are possible to You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will." The Triune God determined in His divine plan in eternity past that the Second of the divine Trinity should be incarnated and die on the cross to accomplish His eternal redemption for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose (Eph. 1:7-9). Hence, the Second of the divine Trinity was ordained to be the Lamb of God (John 1:29) before the foundation of the world, that is, in eternity past (1 Pet. 1:19-20); and in the eyes of God, as the Lamb of God, He was slain from the foundation of the world, that is, from the existence of God's fallen creatures (Rev. 13:8). From the time of man's fall, lambs, sheep, calves, and bulls were sacrificed by God's chosen people as types (Gen. 3:21; 4:4; 8:20; 22:13; Exo. 12:3-8; Lev. 1:2), pointing to Him who was to come as the real Lamb foreordained by God. In the fullness of time, the Triune God sent the Second of the divine Trinity, the Son of God to come in incarnation to take a human body (Heb. 10:5) that He might be offered to God on the cross (Heb. 9:14; 10:12) to do the will of God (Heb. 10:7), that is, to replace the sacrifices and offerings, which were types, with Himself in His humanity as the unique sacrifice and offering for the sanctification of God's chosen people (Heb. 10:9-10). In His prayer here, immediately before His crucifixion, He prepared Himself to take the cup of the cross (Matt. 26:39, 42), willing to do this unique will of the

Father for the accomplishment of the eternal plan of the Triune God.

In verse 38 the Lord Jesus charged the three disciples, "Watch and pray that you may not come into temptation; the spirit indeed is ready, but the flesh is weak." The Greek word translated "ready" may also be rendered "willing." In spiritual things our spirit is often ready, willing, but our flesh is weak.

EXPOSING OUR SITUATION

Why is it that after the Lord Jesus instituted His supper, He warned the disciples of their stumbling and charged them to watch and pray? The reason is that whenever the Lord reveals something concerning Himself in God's economy, He exposes our real situation. Consider the case of Peter in chapter eight. Peter received the revelation that Jesus is the Christ. After Peter received this revelation, the Lord exposed him as being Satan. Furthermore, the Lord went on to expose Peter's self, his soul life.

The institution of the Lord's table reveals the Lord's death, His resurrection, the Lord Himself, and His enlargement, His mystical Body. Immediately after this revelation, Peter and the other disciples were exposed. Their natural man, self, self-will, mind, and thought were all exposed. Although they experienced the Lord's institution of His table, they did not realize how much they were in themselves and how much they were according to the natural concept. Therefore, the Lord Jesus exposed them. This exposure is the practicality of being brought into the Lord's death.

BROUGHT INTO THE LORD'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION

As we read chapters fourteen and fifteen of the Gospel of Mark, we see that Peter was brought into the Lord's crucifixion. When Peter boasted that he would never deny the Lord Jesus, he had not yet been crucified. He claimed that even if all the others were stumbled, he would not be stumbled. He went on to say, "If I must die with You, I

will by no means deny You" (14:31). However, very shortly after making this boast, he fully denied the Lord Jesus. After denying Him, "Peter remembered the word Jesus had said to him, Before a cock crows twice, you will deny Me three times. And thinking upon it, he wept" (14:72). In a very real sense, this was Peter's crucifixion. He wept because he had been crucified.

Although Peter denied the Lord, he did not give up. Rather, he went on to enter into the Lord's resurrection.

Perhaps you are wondering what indication there is in the Gospel of Mark that Peter entered into Christ's resurrection. Consider the word of the angel to the women who came to the tomb early in the morning on the day of the Lord's resurrection: "Do not be amazed; you are seeking Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He was raised! He is not here! Behold, the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, even as He told you" (16:6-7). Here we see that the angel specifically names Peter. This indicates that Peter was brought into the resurrection of Christ.

We should not read the Gospel of Mark merely as a book of stories. We need to see the revelation in this book. The Gospel of Mark reveals that the Lord Jesus did not intend to go through death and resurrection alone. Instead, it was the Lord's intention to bring His followers with Him into death and resurrection. If we see this revelation, we shall be assured that, as those who love the Lord Jesus, He will bring us through His death and into His resurrection.

When we come to the end of the Gospel of Mark, we see that all the Lord's followers were brought not only into His death and resurrection but also into His ascension. In His ascension they were sent out to preach the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth. Praise the Lord that His disciples were brought into His death, resurrection, and ascension!

EXPOSURE AND CRUCIFIXION

Although Peter was present when the Lord instituted

His supper, he did not understand the significance of it. Immediately after the supper, the Lord warned His disciples about being stumbled. This warning was an indication that the disciples were still in the flesh. Even though the Lord had instituted the supper and they had all partaken of it, they were nevertheless in the flesh. Immediately Peter behaved himself in a natural way, boasting that he would not be stumbled or deny the Lord.

After warning His disciples concerning their stumbling, the Lord Jesus brought three of them--Peter, James, and John--with Him to Gethsemane. The Lord charged them to "remain here and watch" (v. 34). However, when He came to them, He found them sleeping and said to Peter, "Simon, are you sleeping? Are you not strong enough to watch one hour?" (v. 37). Peter, the leader of the disciples, took the lead to sleep. He did not have the strength to do anything except sleep.

Peter also behaved in a natural way when the Lord Jesus was arrested. He drew his sword and "struck the slave of the high priest, and took off his ear" (v. 47). Peter again caused trouble. At the time the Lord Jesus was being arrested, it was necessary for Him to perform a miracle to heal the ear of the high priest's slave (Luke 22:50-51).

According to Mark 14:66-72 Peter utterly denied the Lord Jesus. One of the servant girls of the high priest said to Peter, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus!" (v. 67). But Peter denied this, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are saying" (v. 68). Shortly thereafter Peter denied the Lord Jesus twice more. Through this exposure Peter was put on the cross. The Lord Jesus was crucified, and Peter also was crucified. His exposure was his crucifixion.

A REPRODUCTION OF CHRIST

According to the Gospel of Mark and the book of Acts, Peter not only passed through the death process, but also entered into the Lord's resurrection and ascension. Therefore, when he stood up to preach the gospel on the day of Pentecost, Peter was a different person. He was a

crucified, resurrected, and ascended person, a reproduction of the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ. Peter was a duplicate copy of this Christ. Having been brought into the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, Peter was also saturated with Christ. He was one with Christ, and Christ had even become him. For this reason, we may say that Peter was a duplication of Christ on the day of Pentecost.

The record in the Gospel of Mark indicates that Peter passed through a lengthy process in order to become a reproduction of Christ. This process began in chapter one, when Peter, a fisherman, was called by the Lord Jesus. After calling him, the Lord brought Peter into a process that took more than three years to complete. As a result, on the day of Pentecost Peter was a person who had been brought into the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

Perhaps at that time Peter could understand the significance of the Lord's table. The Lord had instituted the table as part of His preparation of the disciples, as part of the process to bring them into a full realization of His death and resurrection.

We need to see that the Lord intends to bring all of us into His death and resurrection. Through His death and resurrection we may enjoy Him as our replacement. As we enjoy Christ as our replacement, He becomes us and we become one with Him. The result is that we become His reproduction, His duplication. This is the vision conveyed to us in the Gospel of Mark.

GOD'S ECONOMY TO PRODUCE THE NEW MAN

We have seen that God's economy is to produce the new man. The way to produce the new man is to replace us with Christ.

In the preaching of the gospel Christ as the universal replacement is ministered to others. However, when we present Christ as the all-inclusive replacement, there will always be conflict and persecution. Because Satan has usurped the old creation, and because Satan instigates

those of the old creation to oppose the things of the Lord, the things of the old creation hinder us in allowing Christ to become our replacement.

First, Christ replaces all the old things of Judaism. We have seen from chapters nine and thirteen that Christ replaces Moses and Elijah and also the temple. Furthermore, Christ replaces the things in the Gentile world. He replaces culture, customs, habits, and the old way of living.

Because Christ is such a replacement, conflict is unavoidable. However, this conflict serves a positive purpose. Through the conflict we are put to death and ushered into resurrection. This means that, eventually, all that the enemy can do through persecution and conflict only helps release the flow of resurrection life. Hallelujah for the flow that produces the new man that will become the kingdom of God! This new man is produced by the death and resurrection of Christ. Through the Lord's death and resurrection we enjoy Him as the all-inclusive, universal replacement for the producing of the new man.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FORTY-SIX

THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF GOD'S REDEMPTION

(1)

Scripture Reading: Mark 14:43--15:15

In this message we shall begin to consider the death and resurrection of the Slave-Savior for the accomplishment of God's redemption (14:43--16:18).

PREPARED TO DIE

We may say that Christ's death began from the time He was arrested. Before Judas came with those who arrested the Lord Jesus, the Lord was praying in Gethsemane concerning His death. As we have pointed out, the Lord came purposely to Judea from Galilee to be crucified. Therefore, actually He was not delivered by Judas; instead, He delivered Himself to those who came to arrest Him.

While the Lord was still in Galilee, He knew that it was necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem in order to be put to death on the day of the Passover. After coming to Jerusalem, He prepared the environment, His disciples, and even His opposers for His death. The opposers plotted to kill Him. Mark 14:1 says that the chief priests and scribes were seeking how to seize Him by craftiness and kill Him. They said, "Not at the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people" (14:2). However, in order to fulfill the type of the Passover lamb, the Lord was crucified on the day of the Passover, even though His opposers sought to avoid this. The Lord Himself prepared what was necessary for Him to be put to death at the proper time.

During the last feast of the Passover, the Lord Jesus told His disciples that one of them would betray Him:

"Truly I tell you that one of you will deliver Me up, one who is eating with Me" (14:18). Then Judas was exposed. No matter how evil Judas was, because he was still a human being, he was ashamed to remain with the Lord and His disciples. After Judas left, he went to the high priest and led a company to the place where they arrested the Lord Jesus.

Once Judas had left, the Lord instituted His supper. He knew that in a few hours He would be arrested, judged, sentenced to death, and crucified.

After instituting His supper, the Lord brought His disciples to a garden. He went to the best place for Him to be arrested. This indicates that He presented Himself to those who arrested Him.

DOING GOD'S WILL

In Gethsemane the Lord Jesus prayed, "Abba Father, All things are possible to You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will" (14:36). Throughout the centuries, many Bible teachers have spoken concerning the Lord's prayer about God's will. But not many have seen what specifically God's will is in 14:36.

If we would know what the will of God is in this verse, we need to consider Hebrews 10, where we are told that the Lord Jesus came to do God's will. It is commonly thought that this means that the Lord Jesus came to do everything according to God's will in a general way. But from the context of Hebrews 10 we see that God's will specifically denotes the replacing of the offerings. God's will was to send Christ to earth to carry out the replacement of the offerings with Himself.

In the Old Testament there were many offerings or sacrifices. God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to replace all these. It was God's will that Christ should die as the replacement for all the offerings. The Lord Jesus knew that it was God's will for Him to die as the replacement of the offerings. This was the reason He prayed, "Not what I will, but what You will."

After His prayer in Gethsemane, the Lord Jesus was ready to be arrested, tried, sentenced, and put to death. Everything and everyone had been prepared, and He had had thorough prayer with the Father. By means of that prayer, He had the confirmation that it was God's will for Him to die to replace all the offerings. Therefore, after that prayer, He was ready to be arrested by the chief priests, elders, and scribes.

ARRESTED AND JUDGED

Mark 14:43-52 tells us how the Lord Jesus was arrested. In verse 49 He said to those who came to seize Him, "Daily I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me--but that the Scriptures may be fulfilled." The God-forsaking and God-offending opposers, afraid of the people who had warmly welcomed the Slave-Savior (11:7-11) and who were gladdened by His speaking (12:37), dared not arrest Him in the daytime or in a public place like the temple. Instead, these opposers arrested Him subtly in the deep night (14:1), as though arresting a robber (14:48).

Mark 14:53--15:15 describes how the Slave-Savior was judged. First He was judged by the Jewish leaders representing the Jews (14:53-64). Then He was judged by the Roman government representing the Gentiles (15:1-15).

Mark 14:53 says, "And they led Jesus away to the high priest, and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes come together." The Slave-Savior was arrested as a robber (v. 48) and brought to the slaughter as a lamb (Isa. 53:7).

In 14:55-60 we see that the Lord Jesus said nothing in answer to those who were falsely testifying against Him. "He was silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest questioned Him and said to Him, Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" (v. 61). The befuddled high priest of the traditional, God-forsaking and God-forsaken religion called God "the Blessed" in order to show

how much he revered and honored God. Although concerning His behavior the Slave-Savior would not answer His fault-finders' false accusation, yet concerning His divine Person, His deity, He was not silent. Rather, in verse 62 He answered strongly and definitely, affirming His deity in His humanity by stating that as the Son of Man He will sit at the right hand of God.

Verses 63 and 64 say, "And the high priest, having torn his garments, says, What further need do we have of witnesses? You heard the blasphemy! How does it appear to you? And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death." The blind opposers condemned the Slave-Savior for being blasphemous in affirming His deity, not realizing that they themselves were blaspheming God, who was right then the very One whom they were slandering and mocking.

Verse 65 says, "And some began to spit at Him, and to cover His face, and to beat Him with their fists, and to say to Him, Prophesy! And the deputies, slapping Him, took Him." This was the Jews' despising and rejecting of the Slave-Savior to the uttermost, as prophesied in Isaiah 53:3.

DELIVERED TO PILATE

Mark 15:1 goes on to say, "And immediately in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole Sanhedrin, and having bound Jesus, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate." Under God's sovereignty, the Slave-Savior was judged not only by the Jewish leaders as a sheep before the shearer (Isa. 53:7) in 14:53-65, but also by the Roman governor, as a criminal before the accusers (14:64) in 15:1-15. He was judged both by the Jewish leaders and by the Roman governor so that He might die to serve sinners with His life as a ransom (10:45), not only for the Jews, represented by the Jewish leaders, but also for the Gentiles, represented by the Roman governor.

SENTENCED TO BE CRUCIFIED

Mark 15:15 tells us that Pilate, seeking to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas to them and delivered up Jesus

to be crucified. This exposed the darkness and injustice of man's politics to the uttermost. It was a fulfillment of the prophecy concerning the Slave-Savior's suffering in Isaiah 53:5 and 8.

The Jewish death penalty was by stoning (Lev. 20:2,27; 24:14; Deut. 13:10; 17:5). Crucifixion was a heathen practice (Ezra 6:11), adopted by the Romans for the execution of slaves and heinous criminals only. To crucify the Lord Jesus was not only a fulfillment of the Old Testament (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13; Num. 21:8-9), but also a fulfillment of the Lord's own word concerning the mode of His death (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32), which could not have been fulfilled by stoning.

In 14:43--15:15 we have a record of the experience both of the Lord Jesus and of Peter. These experiences were taking place at the same time. While the Lord Jesus was being judged, Peter also was judged. The fact that the Lord was judged by the Jewish leaders and the Roman governor is a strong sign that He was tested by the entire world. He was judged by the Jews according to their law and by the Gentiles according to Roman law.

With the Lord Jesus, of course, there was nothing deserving judgment. Peter, on the contrary, was exposed as being fully wrong. The account in the Gospel of Mark merges the judgment of the Lord Jesus by the Jews and the Gentiles with the exposure and judgment of Peter.

We need to see that both Peter and the Lord Jesus were crucified. We may say that Peter was ordained and appointed to be our representative.

Everything that happened related to the crucifixion of Jesus was a fulfillment of either the types or the prophecies in the Old Testament. We have pointed out that, as a fulfillment of the type of the Passover lamb, the Lord Jesus was crucified on the day of the Passover. He was arrested during the night. According to the Jewish calendar, a day begins not in the morning but in the evening. The Lord Jesus partook of the Passover feast in the evening of the day of Passover. This means that He ate the Passover at the beginning of the day of the Passover. Then He instituted His supper and went to Gethsemane to

pray. Late in the night the Lord was arrested, brought to the court of the high priest, and judged. Then in the morning He was brought to Pilate. It was early in the morning that the Lord Jesus was sentenced to death. Immediately after He was sentenced, He was taken to Golgotha, and beginning at nine o'clock in the morning, He was crucified.

The Lord's opposers did not give the people an opportunity to do anything against them. The opposers arrested the Lord Jesus secretly, and the Lord cooperated with them. The Lord purposely went to Gethsemane, and Judas knew that He would be there. Hence, late at night, while the people were sleeping, Judas led a company to Gethsemane to arrest the Lord Jesus. In a quick way, without the people knowing anything, the Lord was judged by the Jewish leaders. Then He was judged by Pilate and sentenced to death. In order to satisfy the crowd, Pilate made a quick decision to crucify the Lord Jesus.

THE SON OF MAN

We have pointed out that while the Lord Jesus was being falsely accused, He was silent. But when He was questioned concerning His Person, whether He was the Christ, the Son of the Blessed, He answered, "I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (14:62). Although He was asked whether He was the Son of the Blessed, that is, the Son of God, the Lord referred to Himself as the Son of Man. The Lord is the Son of Man, not only on earth before His crucifixion, but also in the heavens on the right hand of God after His resurrection (Acts 7:56), and even at His coming back on the clouds. To accomplish God's purpose the Lord had to be a man. Without man, God's purpose could not be carried out on earth.

In 14:62 the Lord Jesus seemed to be saying to the Jewish leaders, "You ask Me whether I am the Christ, the Son of the Blessed. I say, Yes, I am. I am also the Son of Man, and you will see the Son of Man sitting on the right

hand of Power. You speak of the Blessed, but I speak of Power."

Both "Blessed" in verse 61 and "Power" in verse 62 refer to the almighty God. The Lord's use of the word "Power" indicates that the Jewish leaders were not the government, but that He is the government. The Lord went on to indicate to them that He would come back as the Son of Man. The Lord also seemed to be saying, "You revere God as the Blessed. But I tell you, He is the Power to govern all things. You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven."

When Pilate was examining the Lord Jesus, he did not care whether or not He was the Son of God. Instead, Pilate questioned Him, saying, "Are you the King of the Jews?" (15:2). To this question the Lord answered, "You are saying it." This means that the Lord admitted to Pilate that He was the King of the Jews. Therefore, He was both the Son of God and the King of the Jews. Because of this, He was sentenced to death. This means that He was crucified as the Son of God and as the King of the Jews.

PASSING THROUGH THE PROCESS OF DEATH

In chapter fourteen, while the Lord Jesus was passing through the judgment at the hands of men, Peter failed. In his failure he passed through the experience of the Lord's death. All the close followers of the Lord were also brought into His death.

We should not think that the Lord Jesus was finished with Peter because of his failure. No, Peter's failure was his crucifixion, and this crucifixion was the entrance into the Lord's death.

Peter needed to be crucified, to be brought into the death of Christ, because he was so natural. Being bold, he always took the lead. Certainly it is necessary for such a person to be crossed out, and Peter was in fact crossed out. Although he did not realize it at the time, he entered into the Lord's death. No doubt, later, after the Lord's

resurrection and ascension, Peter came to realize that he had entered into the Lord's crucifixion.

For years I did not understand why the record concerning the judgment of the Lord Jesus is merged with the account of Peter's experience. I thought that this was merely intended to be an exposure of Peter. Now I see that not only was Peter being exposed, but He was passing through the process of death with the Lord Jesus. Because Peter is our representative, this means that we all entered into the Lord's death with Him.

The Lord Jesus went through death in a triumphant way, but Peter went through death in the way of failure. This failure exposed Peter's natural being and caused it to be dealt with.

The Lord Jesus was not the only one who passed through the process of death. All of us, represented by Peter, have passed through this process with the Lord Jesus. Do you not think that you are a Peter? We all are Peters needing to be exposed, judged, and crucified.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FORTY-SEVEN

THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF GOD'S REDEMPTION

(2)

Scripture Reading: Mark 15:16-41

In this message we come to 15:16-41, a section that speaks of the crucifixion of the Slave-Savior.

THE MOCKING OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR

Mark 15:16 says, "And the soldiers led Him away into the courtyard, which is the Praetorium. and they called together the whole band of soldiers." The Praetorium was the governor's official residence.

Verse 17 says, "And they clothed Him in purple, and having woven a thorny crown, they placed it upon Him." Thorns are a symbol of the curse (Gen. 3:17-18). The Lord Jesus became a curse for us on the cross (Gal. 3:13). In 15:17 a thorny crown, signifying royalty, was used as a mockery of the Slave-Savior (v. 20).

In verses 18 and 19 the soldiers continued their mockery of the Lord Jesus: "And they began to salute Him, Hail, King of the Jews! And they kept beating His head with a reed and spitting at Him, and kneeling down, they worshipped Him." After they had mocked Him, "they stripped Him of the purple and put His own garments on Him. And they led Him out that they might crucify Him" (v. 20). The Lord here, as the Passover Lamb to be sacrificed for our sins, was brought like a lamb to the slaughter, fulfilling Isaiah 53:7-8.

CRUCIFIED AT GOLGOTHA

Verse 21 goes on to say, "And they compelled a certain passerby, coming from the country, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, that he might carry His cross." Cyrene was a Greek colonial city, the capital of Cyrenaica in North Africa. It seems that Simon was a Cyrenian Jew.

According to 15:22, "They bring Him to the place called Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, Place of a Skull." Golgotha is a Hebrew name (John 19:17) which means skull. Its equivalent in Latin is *Calvaria,* anglicized into Calvary (Luke 23:33). It does not mean a place of dead men's skulls, but simply skull.

Verse 23 continues, "And they tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh, but He did not take it." This wine mingled with myrrh (and also with gall--Matt. 27:34) was intended as a stupefying draught. But the Lord would not be stupefied; He would drink the bitter cup to the dregs.

Verse 24 says, "And they crucify Him, and divide His garments, casting a lot for them, what each should take." Here we see that the Lord suffered being robbed by sinners to the uttermost. This was a fulfillment of Psalm 22:18, and it also exposed the darkness of Roman politics.

Mark 15:25 says, "Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him." The third hour was nine o'clock in the morning.

MISTREATED BY MAN AND JUDGED BY GOD

Verses 29 through 31 tell us that those passing by "blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross! Likewise also the chief priests with the scribes, mocking with one another, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save!" Those who blasphemed the Lord Jesus twisted His word, "(You) destroy this temple," in John 2:19. Those who blasphemed Him also said that He saved others, but could not save Himself. If the Lord had saved Himself, He could not have saved us.

According to 15:33, "And when the sixth hour had come, darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour." The sixth hour is our twelve noon, and the ninth is our three o'clock. The Lord was crucified beginning from the third hour, our nine o'clock. He was suffering on the cross for six hours. In the first three hours, He was persecuted by men for doing God's will; in the last three hours, He was judged by God for the accomplishment of our redemption. It was during this time that God counted Him as our suffering Substitute for sin (Isa. 53:10). Hence, darkness came over all the land because our sin and sins and all negative things were dealt with there, and God forsook Him (v. 34) because of our sin.

In 15:16-32 we see how the Slave-Savior was mistreated by man. He was mocked, beaten, blasphemed, and crucified. All these were actions of His persecutors.

Verse 33 says that at the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land. At exactly noontime darkness came over the whole land and remained until the ninth hour, until three o'clock. This darkness was caused by God, and it was an indication that God had come in to judge the One who was hanging on the cross.

We have seen that the Slave-Savior was on the cross for six hours, from nine o'clock until three o'clock. The first three hours were the time of man's persecution. We may say that during those hours the Lord Jesus was a martyr. Then at noon, with darkness coming upon the whole land, God came in. This darkness was a sign of God's judgment of sin. Whereas man persecuted the Slave-Savior during the first three hours of His crucifixion, God came in during the second three hours to judge Christ as our Substitute. It was in these hours that God put all our sins upon Him and considered Him a sinner as our Substitute. Therefore, during the first three hours of His crucifixion, the Lord Jesus was a martyr. But during the second three hours, He was the Redeemer. As a martyr He suffered persecution under the hand of man. As our

Redeemer He suffered judgment for us under the hand of God. The darkness was a symbol that God had come in to judge Christ as our Substitute for our sins.

Mark 15:34 says, "At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, My God, why did You forsake Me?" God forsook Christ on the cross because He took the place of sinners (1 Pet. 3:18), bearing our sins (1 Pet. 2:24; Isa. 53:6), and being made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). We shall consider this verse in more detail in the following message.

Verses 35 and 36 continue, "And some of those standing by heard it and said, Behold, he is calling Elijah. And someone ran and filled a sponge with vinegar, and putting it on a reed, gave it to Him to drink, saying, Let him be, let us see if Elijah comes to take him down." This vinegar was offered to the Lord for quenching His thirst (John 19:28-30), but it was offered in a mocking way (Luke 23:36).

The wine mingled with gall and myrrh, in Matthew 27:34 and Mark 15:23, was offered to the Lord before His crucifixion as a stupefying draught, which He would not drink. But the vinegar in Mark 15:36 was offered to Him at the end of His crucifixion in a mocking way.

Verse 37 goes on to say, "But Jesus, letting out a loud cry, expired." This means that the Lord stopped breathing. Matthew 27:50 tells us that at this point the Lord cried out with a loud voice and "dismissed the spirit." This meant the Lord gave up His spirit (John 19:30), indicating that the Lord voluntarily yielded up His life.

THE VEIL OF THE TEMPLE TORN IN TWO

After the Lord Jesus expired, "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (15:38). This signifies that the separation between God and man was abolished because the flesh (signified by the veil) of sin taken by Christ (Rom. 8:3) had been crucified (Heb. 10:20). The fact that the veil was torn from the top to the bottom indicates that the rending of the veil was God's doing from above.

The temple was twenty cubits high. It would have been impossible for man to tear the veil from the top to the

bottom. It was God who rent that veil.

The veil in the temple was a sign of the flesh Christ had put upon Himself. The tearing of the veil signifies that the humanity taken on by Christ had been crucified. If we study the Bible carefully, we shall realize that cherubim were embroidered on the veil, and cherubim are signs of God's creatures (Ezek. 1:4-14; Rev. 4:6-9). Hence, the cherubim on the veil signify that the creatures were related to the humanity of Jesus. When the Lord put on our humanity, He put on a humanity that bore the creatures. This gives us a strong basis to say that when Christ crucified His humanity, He terminated the creatures.

THE ONES PRESENT AT THE LORD'S CRUCIFIXION

Mark 15:39 says, "And the centurion standing by opposite Him, seeing how He expired, said, Truly this man was God's Son!" The centurion realized that this man was not ordinary. Rather, He was truly God's Son.

Verses 40 and 41 tell us of the women who were present: "And there were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were both Mary the Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the little and of Joses, and Salome, who when He was in Galilee, followed Him and ministered to Him, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem." Mary the Magdalene was the one from whom seven demons had been cast out. Mary the mother of James the little was the mother of the Slave-Savior (Matt. 13:55). The word "little" here means either small in stature or young in age. James the little was the one who wrote the Epistle of James. Salome was the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John (Matt. 27:56).

In Mark's account of the crucifixion there is no mention of any brothers being present. He speaks only of the sisters. We may say that these sisters are our representatives. When Christ was crucified, a group of sisters was standing by.

BURIED WITH HONOR TO ENJOY HIS SABBATH

Mark 15:42-47 speaks of the burial of the Slave-Savior.

Verse 42 says, "And when evening had already come, since it was the day of preparation, which is the day before the Sabbath, Joseph, the one from Arimathea, an honorable member of the Council, who was also himself awaiting the kingdom of God, coming with daring, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus." After the Lord accomplished His redemptive death, His situation of suffering immediately changed into an honorable one. Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man (Matt. 27:57), and Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews (John 19:39; 3:1), came to care for the Lord's burial by having His body bound with myrrh and aloes and buried in a new tomb. In human honor of such a high standard the Lord rested on the Sabbath day (Luke 23:55-56), waiting for the time to resurrect from among the dead.

In 15:43 Joseph is called "the one from Arimathea." The definite article here indicates a man well known. Having purchased a piece of linen, Joseph took the Lord Jesus down from the cross, wrapped Him in the linen, laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb (v. 46). This was for the fulfillment of Isaiah 53:9.

As we read 15:42-46, we see that the Lord Jesus was given an excellent burial. He was buried in newly bought linen and laid to rest in a newly hewn tomb. The Lord Jesus was put in such a tomb in order to enjoy His Sabbath.

As we have pointed out, God created the old creation within six days and then rested on the seventh day. In the New Testament the Lord accomplished His full redemption, His redemptive work, within six days, and then He rested on the seventh day, the Sabbath.

Mark 15:47 says, "And Mary the Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses beheld where He was laid." This indicates that both Mary the Magdalene and Mary the mother of the Lord Jesus saw where he was laid.

Although the Lord could rest on the Sabbath, having accomplished the work of redemption, the disciples were not able to rest. I do not believe that these two Marys had any rest either. I doubt that they had full rest until they

had passed through the day of resurrection and had come to the day of Pentecost. On the day of resurrection and the day of Pentecost they received the all-inclusive Spirit, and this Spirit applied to their living Christ's death and resurrection. Then they were able to realize the significance of the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FORTY-EIGHT

THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF GOD'S REDEMPTION

(3)

Scripture Reading: Mark 15:16-41

We have seen that the Lord Jesus was on the cross for six hours, from nine o'clock in the morning until three o'clock in the afternoon. During the first three hours He was persecuted by man. But during the last three hours, He was judged by God as the Substitute for our sins. Mark 15:33 indicates that at the sixth hour, at noon, "darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, My God, why did You forsake Me?" (v. 34). In this message we need to pay particular attention to this verse.

GOD'S FORSAKING OF THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST

As we consider the Lord's crying out in verse 34, we need to ask an important question: Did God leave Christ? The Lord said that God forsook Him, and to forsake means to leave. Therefore, in some way God left Him.

The Lord Jesus said in John 5:43 that He came in the name of the Father: "I have come in the name of My Father." Furthermore, the Father was always with Him: "And He who sent Me is with Me" (John 8:29). Shortly before He died the Lord again said, "I am not alone, because the Father is with Me" (John 16:32). The Father was not only with the Lord Jesus, but was also in Him, and the Lord was in the Father: "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me?... Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me" (John 14:10a, 11a). Regarding His relationship with the Father,

the Lord also said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). The Lord Jesus and the Father were always one. Furthermore, whenever someone saw the Lord, he saw the Father. This was the reason the Lord Jesus could say, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

From these verses we see that the Lord came in the name of the Father, that the Father was with Him, that He was in the Father and the Father in Him, that He and the Father are one, and that when anyone saw Him, he saw the Father. These verses prove that the Lord was never separated from God the Father. Nevertheless, at the ninth hour the Lord Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why did You forsake Me?" No doubt, this indicates that God left Him. But in what sense did God leave the Lord Jesus? How are we to understand this matter, inasmuch as it involves a major problem related to the Trinity?

Does God's forsaking of Christ mean that the One who remained on the cross was merely a man and no longer had the divine nature? If this were the situation, then the Lord's redeeming power would not be eternal, for there would not be the divine, eternal element in it. We must be very careful, therefore, in answering the question concerning what it meant for God to forsake the crucified Christ.

It is very difficult to explain God's forsaking of the Lord Jesus. If we would understand this properly, we need a thorough consideration of what the Scriptures reveal concerning the Trinity.

CONCEIVED OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

When the Lord Jesus was conceived, He was conceived of the Holy Spirit in a virgin (Matt. 1:20). His conception was divine, for it was of the Holy Spirit, that is, of God. His wonderful conception was a conception of God in man. This conception involved both divinity and humanity

Unlike the Lord Jesus, we all were conceived of our father with our mother. What was involved in our conception was merely and solely humanity. But the conception of the Lord Jesus was the conception of God in

a human virgin, a conception that involved both divinity and humanity. Therefore, the Lord Jesus was born as a man with two natures: the human nature and the divine nature. This gives us the basis to say that He was a God-man. He was born of God in man. From God He received the divine element, and from Mary He received the human element. These two elements--divinity and humanity--constitute Jesus a God-man.

At the age of thirty the Lord Jesus was baptized. Immediately after He came out of the water, a voice from heaven said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I delight" (Matt. 3:17). At the same time the Spirit of God descended as a dove and came upon Him (Matt. 3:16). Was the Lord not born of the Spirit? Was the Spirit not one of the essences of His being? Before the Lord Jesus was baptized, did He not already have the Holy Spirit within Him? The answer to all these questions is yes. The Lord had been born of the Spirit, the Spirit was one of the essences of His being, and He did have the Holy Spirit within Him. Because He had been conceived of the Holy Spirit in a virgin, His being was constituted of two essences, divinity and humanity. Why then, since He already had the Holy Spirit within Him, was it necessary for the Holy Spirit to descend upon Him? This is a crucial question.

THE SPIRIT DESCENDING UPON THE LORD JESUS

In chapter three of Matthew we see that the Spirit descended upon the Lord Jesus as a clear, distinct unit. However, it cannot reasonably be denied that the Lord Jesus already had the Holy Spirit within Him. Matthew 1:20 says that "that which is begotten" in Mary "is of the Holy Spirit." Not only was the Holy Spirit within the Lord Jesus; the Spirit was one of the essences of His being. Therefore, we need a way to reconcile two important facts: first, that the Lord Jesus had the Holy Spirit within Him as one of His essences; second, that the Holy Spirit descended upon Him after He was baptized. Since the Holy Spirit was already a part of His being, why was it that the Spirit of God descended upon Him?

Throughout the history of Christianity there has been a shortage of the proper understanding of the Trinity. In the art gallery of the Vatican there is a painting that is supposed to portray the Trinity. In this painting an old man with a beard signifies God the Father; a young man signifies the Son; and a dove soaring in the air signifies the Holy Spirit. That painting may be based on the concept of the Trinity expressed in the Nicene creed. This understanding is partially right, for to some extent it may have been based on Matthew chapter three. In this chapter we have the Son standing, the Father speaking from the heavens, and the Holy Spirit descending as a dove. These three--the Son, the Father, and the Spirit--as presented in Matthew 3, are not only distinct but seem to be at some distance from one another.

As we consider the Trinity as depicted in Matthew 3, we need to realize what is said concerning the Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus in Matthew 1. We have emphasized the fact that Matthew 1:20 tells us that the Lord Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Matthew 1 is a balance to Matthew 3. If we had only the revelation of the Trinity in Matthew 3, we may think that the Trinity is a matter of tritheism, of three Gods: one in the heavens, one on the earth, and one in the air. However, chapter three of Matthew comes out of chapter one. In Matthew 1 the emphasis is not on the three but on the one. Hence, when we put chapters one and three of Matthew together, we see that God is triune, three-one.

Actually, it is not possible for us fully to reconcile the two aspects of the Trinity, the aspect of the one in Matthew 1 and the aspect of the three in Matthew 3. The reason we cannot reconcile these aspects is that the Trinity is a mystery. If we could understand the Triune God fully, He would no longer be a mystery. Furthermore, in the words of Martin Luther, if we could fully understand the Triune God, this would mean that we are the teachers of God.

Today some falsely accuse us of teaching heresy

concerning the Trinity. If someone accuses you in this way you may want to ask him how he would reconcile the revelation concerning the Triune God in chapters one and three of the Gospel of Matthew.

The crucial point for us to see regarding Matthew 1 and 3 is that when the Holy Spirit descended as a dove upon the Lord Jesus, He was already human and divine. He already had the divine nature and the human nature, for the Holy Spirit was one of the essences of His being.

CHRIST PRESENTING HIMSELF THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

The book of Hebrews reveals that when the Lord Jesus died, He presented Himself as the all-inclusive offering to replace all the offerings in the Old Testament. According to Hebrews 9:14, Christ "through the eternal Spirit offered Himself spotless to God." Although Christ is both human and divine, He presented Himself to God as the all-inclusive offering not only by Himself, the divine-human One, but also through the eternal Spirit.

The Lord's offering Himself to God through the eternal Spirit can be compared to His ministering on earth by the Spirit. Before the Spirit descended upon Him, He was already both divine and human. Although He was divine and human, when He was about to begin His ministry, God anointed Him with the Spirit. This was the Spirit who descended upon Him. But before the Spirit came upon Him, He already had within Him the essence of God's divinity. However, for His ministry He was anointed with the Holy Spirit. During the three and a half years of His ministry, He did not act merely by Himself as the One who is both human and divine, but also by the anointing Spirit. He moved and ministered by this Spirit. Especially as He was presenting Himself to God on the cross as the all-inclusive offering, He presented Himself through the eternal Spirit.

THE ANOINTING SPIRIT LEAVING THE LORD JESUS

When the Lord Jesus cried, "My God, My God, why did You forsake Me?" it was during the time He was bearing

our sins (1 Pet. 2:24), being made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21) and taking the place of sinners (1 Pet. 3:18). This means that God judged Him as our Substitute for our sins. In the sight of God, Christ became a great sinner. Concerning this, 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "Him who did not know sin He made sin on our behalf." When did God make Christ sin for us? Was it during the whole period of the thirty-three and a half years of the Lord's life on earth? No. If the Lord Jesus had been made sin by God during all of His life, then God could not have been with Him, and God could not have had His delight in Him. I believe that it was during the last three hours Christ was on the cross, from twelve o'clock until three o'clock in the afternoon, the hours when darkness came over the whole land, that God made Him sin. God made Christ not only our Substitute; God even made Him sin on our behalf. Because Christ was our Substitute and was made sin in the sight of God, God judged Him. I believe that it was during this time, at about the ninth hour, that the anointing Spirit left the Lord Jesus.

We have pointed out strongly that before the Holy Spirit, the anointing Spirit, descended upon the Lord Jesus, He already had the divine essence within Him as one of two essences of His being. Now we need to see that the divine essence never left Him. Even when He was on the cross crying out, "My God, My God, why did You forsake Me?" He still had the divine essence. Then who left Him? The anointing Spirit through whom He presented Himself to God left Him. After God accepted Christ as the all-inclusive offering, the anointing Spirit left Him. But although the anointing Spirit left Him, He still had the divine essence.

THE ETERNAL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE LORD'S DEATH

The death of the Lord Jesus was not merely the death of a man; it was the death of a God-man. For this reason, His death has eternal effectiveness. The Lord's death has eternal power for our redemption. Otherwise, it would not be possible for one man to die for so many people. An

individual person is limited because a human being is not eternal. If the Lord had died merely as a man, His death would have been limited in its effectiveness. He could have been a Substitute for one person, but not for millions of persons. However, the Lord's death was the death of a God-man and therefore was an eternal death accomplishing eternal redemption, redemption with eternal power and effectiveness.

Before the Holy Spirit descended upon the Lord Jesus, the Lord already had the divine essence. When He was baptized, He was baptized as a God-man. After His baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him as the God-man to anoint Him for His ministry. For three and a half years He ministered by this Spirit. Then on the cross He presented Himself as the God-man to be the all-inclusive sacrifice through the eternal Spirit. After God had counted Him as a sinner to be our Substitute, even making Him sin for us, and had accepted His offering, God as the Holy Spirit who had come upon Him forsook Him. Nevertheless, the Lord was still a God-man and died as such. This means that even though God as the Spirit left the Lord, the Lord died not merely as a man but as a God-man. Therefore, there is in His death a divine and eternal element. His death has accomplished eternal redemption with eternal power and effectiveness.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FORTY-NINE

THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF GOD'S REDEMPTION

(4)

Scripture Reading: Mark 15:16-41

In this message we shall consider what was accomplished through Christ's redeeming death. However, before we come to this matter, I would like to say a further word concerning the Trinity.

THE THREE-ONE GOD

In chapter three of Matthew we see the Three of the Trinity as distinct units: the Father in the heavens, the Son on earth, and the Spirit descending as a dove from the air. But in chapter one of Matthew there is a definite indication that these Three are one.

According to Matthew 1, Christ was conceived of the Holy Spirit. This corresponds to John 1:14, a verse that tells us that the Word became flesh. According to the Gospel of John, the Word is the Son of God. When the Lord Jesus was conceived of the Spirit in Mary's womb, that was the incarnation of the Son of God, the Word becoming flesh. Therefore, 1 Timothy 3:16 speaks of the greatness of the mystery of godliness, which is God manifested in the flesh.

Matthew 1:18 and 20, John 1:14, and 1 Timothy 3:16 all refer to the same matter. The conceiving of the Lord Jesus of the Holy Spirit is the incarnation of the Son of God, and the incarnation of the Son of God is God manifested in the flesh. When we put these verses together, we have the Holy Spirit for the conception of Jesus, the Son for the incarnation, and God for the

manifestation. This indicates that the Spirit, the Son of God, and God Himself are one.

On the one hand, the Three of the Trinity are three; on the other hand, the Three are one. This is the reason we speak of God as triune, as three-one. Our God is the Triune God, the three-one God.

Because Christ was conceived of the Holy Spirit, He is a God-man. With Him there is the mingling of divinity with humanity. Hence, when He was baptized, He was baptized as a God-man. In the same principle, when He died on the cross, He died as a God-man.

THE BLOOD OF JESUS, GOD'S SON

First John 1:7 says that the blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanses us from every sin. The name "Jesus" denotes the Lord's humanity, which was needed for the shedding of the redeeming blood, and the title "His Son" denotes the Lord's divinity, which was needed for the eternal efficacy of the redeeming blood. Thus, the blood of Jesus, the Son of God, indicates that this blood is the proper blood of a genuine man for redeeming God's fallen creatures, with divine surety as to its eternal efficacy, an efficacy which is all-prevailing in space and everlasting in time.

Man's sin needs human blood for its cleansing. The blood of Jesus is the blood of a genuine man. However, the very Jesus who shed His blood for our redemption is the Son of God. He has both humanity and divinity His humanity qualified Him to die for us. Because He was a man, He had the blood to shed for the cleansing of our sins. Nevertheless, He is also the Son of God. His divinity insures the eternal effectiveness of His redeeming blood. Therefore, His humanity qualifies Him to be our Redeemer and our Substitute; His divinity gives eternal power to this qualification. If Christ were not a man, He could not be qualified to be our Substitute. Praise the Lord that He was qualified by His humanity to be our Substitute and that His genuine human blood has the qualification to cleanse our sins! This qualification needs something to insure its effectiveness, and this assurance is the Lord's divinity. His

divinity insures the eternal effectiveness of His qualification.

First John 1:7 indicates that the One who died on the cross and shed His blood was the man Jesus, and that this One is the Son of God, the divine Being. He died on the cross as a God-man, the One with both the human nature and the divine nature. As the God-man, He was crucified as our Redeemer.

What the Lord has shown us concerning these matters from His holy Word is somewhat different from traditional teachings. For this reason, there is a measure of conflict between our teaching and the traditional teaching. Concerning this, you need to exercise your discernment to see which teachings are based on the pure Word of God and which are based on traditional doctrine that has been passed on from generation to generation.

WHAT CHRIST'S DEATH ACCOMPLISHED

The Problem of Sins

Let us now consider what the death of Christ accomplished. First, Christ's death solved the problem of our sins, the problem of our offenses, transgressions, and sinful deeds. His death has solved the problem of our sins, and it has solved this problem eternally. Concerning this, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:3, "For I delivered to you, among the first things, that which also I received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." Furthermore, 1 Peter 2:24 says that Christ "Himself carried up our sins in His body onto the tree."

The Problem of Sin

Second, the death of Christ, an all-inclusive death, has dealt with sin. Although it is easy to explain what sins are, it is difficult to define sin. Sins refer to deeds, offenses, trespasses, and transgressions. But what is sin? Romans 8:3 says that God sent His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin and condemned sin in the flesh. In order to condemn sin,

Christ came in the likeness of the flesh of sin. John 1:29 says, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

According to the Bible and also according to our experience, we have seen that sin is actually the sinful nature of Satan. Satan is the source of sin. Sin is Satan's invention, and Satan himself is the element of sin. Actually, in the sight of God, sin is Satan.

According to the book of Romans, sin is something living, something that can make us do things that we do not want to do, something that can dwell in us, deceive us, and even kill us (Rom. 6:14; 7:8, 11, 17). What is this thing living within us that does all these things? It is Satan.

At the time of man's fall, Satan's sinful nature was injected into mankind. This means that when man ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he took into him the sinful nature of Satan.

In the universe there is something that is called sin in the Scriptures. Sin is not merely objective, outside of us; it is also subjective, within us, in our flesh. Therefore, outwardly we have sins, offenses, trespasses, and transgressions. Inwardly we have the basic problem of sin. Praise the Lord that Christ's all-inclusive death has not only solved the problem of our sins, but has also judged and condemned sin!

Romans 8:3 reveals that when Christ was dying on the cross, sin in the flesh was condemned. We may use the condemnation of an unsafe building as an illustration. When a building is in such pitiful condition that it must be torn down, the government may condemn that building. In a similar way, sin in the flesh has been condemned through Christ's all-inclusive death. By His eternal death, the death of a God-man, sin has been condemned.

Our Old Man

The third matter dealt with by Christ's death is our old man. Romans 6:6 says, "Our old man has been crucified with Him." Similarly, Galatians 2:20 says, "I have been crucified with Christ." Because the marvelous death of the God-man was all-inclusive, it included us. We were put

into Christ by God, and we were in Him when He was crucified. Hence, we are included in His all-inclusive eternal death.

The Old Creation

Because our old man was crucified with Christ, the entire old creation was crucified also. As human beings, we are the leading ones of the old creation and represent the old creation. When man, the representative of the old creation, was crucified, the entire old creation was crucified.

Satan

In addition, the eternal death of Christ has destroyed Satan. Concerning this, Hebrews 2:14 says, "Since therefore the children have partaken of blood and flesh, He also Himself in like manner shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who has the might of death, that is, the Devil." This indicates that in His humanity and through His death in the flesh, Christ destroyed Satan, the one who has the power of death. This means that Satan has been crucified. Whether we understand this or not, it is nevertheless a fact that through the death of Christ Satan was crucified.

The World System

The Bible reveals that Satan has formed a satanic system called the world. Through the world, the satanic cosmos, Satan has systematized fallen mankind under his usurping hand. But this evil world system has been judged.

Because the world system is connected to Satan, when he, the ruler of the world was judged, the world was judged as well. Regarding this, the Lord Jesus said, "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the ruler of this world be cast out" (John 12:31). The ruler of this world was cast out when Satan was destroyed on the cross. Simultaneously, the world system related to Satan was judged.

This judgment can be compared to the crucifixion of the old creation when our old man was crucified. When the old man was crucified, the entire old creation was crucified.

Likewise, when Satan was destroyed through Christ's death, the world was judged.

The Ordinances

Another matter dealt with by Christ's all-inclusive death is mentioned in Ephesians 2:15: "Having abolished in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances, that He might create the two in Himself into one new man, making peace." Here we see that when Christ was crucified, His eternal death abolished, annulled, the different ordinances of human life and religion. Furthermore, the differences among the races and the differences of social rank have been abolished by the eternal death of Christ.

The Release of the Divine Life

In addition to dealing with so many negative things, the death of Christ also has a positive aspect. In John 12:24 the Lord Jesus speaks concerning this: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." This refers to Christ's death. His all-inclusive death released the divine life that was within Him, and this life has produced many grains.

On the negative side, Christ's all-inclusive death has solved the problems of sins, sin, the old man, the old creation, Satan, the world, and the ordinances. On the positive side, Christ's eternal death released the divine life from within Him.

THE DETERMINED COUNSEL OF GOD

If we see the significance of the all-inclusive death of Christ, we shall see that His death was a greater event than that of the creation of the universe. Regarding the death of Christ, the Triune God determined in His divine plan in eternity past that the Son, the Second of the divine Trinity, should be incarnated and die on the cross to accomplish eternal redemption for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. In the words of Peter spoken on the day

of Pentecost, Christ was "delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23).

Because of this determined counsel of God, the Second of the divine Trinity was ordained to be the Lamb of God (John 1:29) before the foundation of the world, that is, in eternity past (1 Pet. 1:19-20). In the sight of God, He as the Lamb of God was slain from the foundation of the world, that is, from the existence of God's fallen creatures (Rev. 13:8).

From the time of man's fall, lambs, sheep, and calves were used by God's chosen people as types (Gen. 3:21; 4:4; 8:20; 22:13; Exo. 12:3-8; Lev. 1:2). These types point to Christ who was to come as the real Lamb foreordained by God. In the fullness of time the Triune God sent the Second of the divine Trinity, the Son of God, to come through incarnation to take a human body (Heb. 10:5) that He might be offered to God on the cross (Heb. 9:14; 10:12) to do the will of the Triune God (Heb. 10:7), that is, to replace the sacrifices and offerings, which were types, with Himself in His humanity as the unique sacrifice and offering for the sanctification of God's chosen people. Therefore, it was the will of God for Christ to die an all-inclusive eternal death.

How great is the death of Christ! This death has cleared up all the negative things in the universe and has released the eternal life to produce the new man, who will be the ultimate consummation of the seed of the kingdom, the kingdom gene, an ultimate consummation that will be God's eternal kingdom.

THE ETERNAL DEATH OF THE GOD-MAN

We need to be impressed with the fact that the death of Christ recorded in Mark 15:16-41 is an exceedingly great matter. We need to realize that the death of Christ was the eternal death of the God-man. The One who died as our Substitute was not merely a man; He was the God-man Therefore, His death is an eternal death. This eternal death is greater than God's work of creation.

When we read the account of Christ's death in the Gospel of Mark, we should not read it in a superficial way. Rather, we need to realize that the One who died according to the record in Mark was a God-man and that His death was not common or ordinary. This extraordinary death, an eternal death, was the death of the God-man. Therefore, Christ's death cleared away all the negative things and released the divine life to produce the new man. Eventually, this new man will become the eternal kingdom of God as the full development of the gene of the kingdom.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FIFTY

THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF GOD'S REDEMPTION

(5)

Scripture Reading: Mark 16:1-18

In chapter sixteen of the Gospel of Mark we have three matters: the resurrection of the Slave-Savior (vv. 1-18), the ascension of the Slave-Savior for His exaltation (v. 19), and the Slave-Savior's universal spreading of the gospel through His disciples (v. 20). In this message we shall begin to consider the Slave-Savior's resurrection.

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION AS PRESENTED IN ACTS

Since the Gospel of Mark in a very real sense may be called the Gospel of Peter, let us consider Peter's words concerning Christ's resurrection as recorded in the book of Acts. In his gospel messages in chapters two, three, four, and five of Acts, Peter speaks concerning the Lord's resurrection. Actually, the resurrection of Christ was the center of Peter's gospel messages.

Impossible for Him to Be Held by Death

In Acts 2:23 and 24 Peter says, speaking of Christ, "This man, delivered up by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you, through the hand of lawless men, nailed to the cross and killed; whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death, since it was not possible for Him to be held by it." In Peter's very first gospel message, preached on the day of Pentecost, he testified that the crucified Jesus was raised up by God. Peter testified that Christ could not be held by death. Since Christ Himself is resurrection (John 11:25), it was

impossible for Him to be held by death. How can resurrection be held by death? This is impossible.

In Acts 2:32-36 Peter speaks concerning both the resurrection and ascension of Christ. Regarding the Lord's resurrection, he says in verse 32, "This Jesus God raised up, of which we all are witnesses." Here Peter seems to be saying, "We were present when the Lord Jesus was crucified, and we saw Him after His resurrection. Therefore, we are eyewitnesses of His resurrection."

In verse 33 Peter continues, "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, He poured out this which you both see and hear." This verse speaks of Christ's ascension.

In verse 36 Peter refers to both resurrection and ascension: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified." It is in resurrection and ascension that Jesus has become the Lord and the Christ.

The Author of Life

In Acts 3:15 Peter told the people that they had killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. The Greek word rendered "Author" means origin, originator, chief leader. Here it denotes Christ as the origin or originator of life, hence, the Author of life. Peter was telling the people that they had killed the Author of life, the One whom God had raised from the dead. Here Peter seems to be saying, "We are eyewitnesses of the One who is the origin, the source, of life. You killed this One, but death could not hold the One you have killed. God has raised up from the dead this One who is the source of life."

The Cornerstone for God's Building

In Acts 4:10-12 Peter again preaches concerning the resurrected Christ: "Let it be known to you all, and to all

the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, in this name this man stands before you well. This is the stone which was despised by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is no salvation in any other; for neither is there another name under heaven given among men in which we must be saved." Here we see that the crucified Jesus, the One whom God raised up from the dead, is the cornerstone rejected by the Jewish leaders.

If we read these verses carefully, we shall see that salvation is in the resurrected Christ. Furthermore, this salvation is for God's building. The Savior in resurrection is the cornerstone for God's building, which is also in resurrection. By this we see that the Lord's resurrection is not only for our salvation but also for God's building. Both our salvation and God's building are in the resurrected Christ.

Exalted to Be Leader and Savior

In Acts 5:30 and 31 Peter says, "The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you slew, hanging Him on a tree. This One God has exalted to His right hand as a Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." God has exalted Christ to be the Leader and Savior. We need to see that Jesus is the Lord, the Christ, and the cornerstone for God's building. He is also the Leader and our Savior for our salvation. Furthermore, He gives repentance and forgiveness. All of this takes place in resurrection. In his gospel messages Peter testifies that the Lord Jesus is the One in resurrection.

THE EXPRESSION OF THE PNEUMATIC CHRIST

According to the book of Acts, Peter also pointed out that Christ, the resurrected One, has been exalted and is now in the heavens. Furthermore, Christ has poured out Himself as the Spirit upon His believers, God's chosen ones, to make them the members of His Body. This is for the composition of the new man.

The new man is the expression of the resurrected Christ. The resurrected Christ is everything to the new man; He is the content and reality of the new man. As we have seen, this new man is actually the kingdom of God, where God rules, reigns, and acts to fulfill His desire. Hence, the kingdom of God is the sphere of God's reign for His expression. This is in resurrection.

In the book of Acts Peter says that the Christ whom he saw and followed is now in resurrection and ascension. It is not possible to divide the Lord's ascension from His resurrection. Both resurrection and ascension are very much involved with the Spirit. Today the Spirit is the reality of the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ. When we have this Spirit, we have Christ. In particular, we have the pneumatic Christ. Having this pneumatic Christ, we also have the reality of His resurrection and ascension.

CHRIST'S ALL-INCLUSIVE DEATH

If we have an understanding of the New Testament as a whole, we shall realize that the New Testament reveals to us a Person who is the Triune God incarnated to be the God-man. This God-man went to the cross and died a marvelous all-inclusive death. That event was greater than the event of God's creation. The Lord's all-inclusive death took away our sins, condemned sin, crucified our old man, terminated the old creation, destroyed the Devil, Satan, judged the satanic cosmos, and abolished the ordinances among the different races and social classes. By this we see that the Lord's death has taken care of every negative thing in the universe once for all.

In the sight of God, all negative things have been cleared up for eternity. Of course, in our experience we still face the matters of sins, sin, the old man, the old creation, Satan, the world, and the ordinances. Nevertheless, the day is coming when in our sight, as well as in God's, these things will be no more.

Praise the Lord for what has been accomplished by the all-inclusive death of Christ! As we read the account of the

Lord's crucifixion in the Gospel of Mark, we need to realize that His death was all-inclusive, terminating all negative things. As we have seen, the Lord's death also released the divine life from within Him.

REGENERATED UNTO A LIVING HOPE

Through Christ's all-inclusive death, God's chosen people are ushered into Christ's resurrection. When Christ was resurrected, God's chosen people were resurrected with Him. Consider what 1 Peter 1:3 says concerning this: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has regenerated us unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead." Here we see that the Father has regenerated us through the resurrection of Christ unto a living hope. This living hope will be fulfilled completely in the New Jerusalem.

Living hope is a hope of life. This is the hope that the life within us will develop until it reaches maturity.

We may use the birth of a child as an illustration of living hope. After a woman gives birth to a child, she will have a hope for that child, a hope for his growth and development. Perhaps the mother of a certain child may hope that he will become a medical doctor or even the president of the country. The basic factor of this hope is the life in the child. Because the child has life, the mother will have hope for his future.

In a similar way, we have been regenerated unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This hope is the hope of life, a life that will grow and develop until it consummates in the New Jerusalem.

This living hope issues from our regeneration. Do you know when you were regenerated? You may answer this question by saying that, in your experience, you were regenerated some years ago. Actually, you were regenerated when Christ was resurrected. It is a divine fact that you were regenerated before you were born. In the sight of God, you had your second birth before you experienced your first birth.

THE FIRSTBORN AMONG MANY BROTHERS

Acts 13:33 indicates that Christ's resurrection was a birth to Him, for in resurrection He was begotten as God's Son. In resurrection and through resurrection the Lord Jesus as a man was born to become God's firstborn Son. The word "firstborn" indicates that the Lord Jesus has brothers. In Romans 8:29 Paul speaks of Christ as the firstborn among many brothers. In resurrection we all have been born with Christ to become His many brothers. How marvelous!

USHERED INTO RESURRECTION

As we read the Gospel of Mark, we need to realize how much the death of the God-man includes and also how much His resurrection comprises. When the process of Christ's death and resurrection was taking place, we, represented by Peter and the other disciples, were involved. In chapter fourteen Peter wept after he denied the Lord Jesus (v. 72). We may say that Peter wept because he was spiritually bankrupt. However, because he was brought into the death of Christ, Peter was ushered by that death into the Lord's resurrection. At least by the time of Pentecost Peter realized this. Instead of weeping, he was proclaiming the gospel to the people of Israel. On the day of Pentecost Peter could have said, "I can tell you good news concerning Christ because I am now in His resurrection. The resurrected One is within me. He is the all-inclusive, compound Spirit saturating me. He is one with me, and I am one with Him." Peter had been brought into the death and resurrection of Christ, the One who had become his all-inclusive replacement.

We have seen that regeneration issues in a living hope, in a hope for the full development of the divine life within us. We have the hope that this life will grow and develop in us to the uttermost. We are in this life, and this life is within us growing and developing. First, this life issues in today's church life, which is the reality of the kingdom. Eventually, with many, this life will reach maturity in the millennium, which will be the manifestation of the

kingdom of God. Ultimately, the divine life within all believers will reach its fullest development in the New Jerusalem, God's eternal kingdom in the new heaven and new earth. This will be the consummate development of the life we received through our regeneration.

No doubt, we lack an adequate realization of the divine life within us. Nevertheless, we have had at least some realization of the fact that we have been regenerated through Christ's resurrection unto a living hope. Many saints can testify that, on certain occasions, they have prayed themselves into an ecstasy. When they were in such a state, they may have found it difficult to say where they were--in the church, the millennium, or the New Jerusalem--for they were beside themselves in the Lord. All of us need to have experiences like this.

Although we are of different nationalities and come from different places around the world, we all have had the real experience of being in resurrection. When we are beside ourselves in the Lord, perhaps not knowing where we are, that is an experience of being in resurrection. Because we have been regenerated, we have been ushered into Christ's resurrection.

How wonderful it would be if we were always in resurrection! However, we may face problems that cause us to feel that we have been buried and placed in a tomb. But we know from experience that when we cry out to the Lord, calling on His name, we once again experience His resurrection. This is the story of our Christian life. Unbelievers, of course, do not have such experiences, because they have not been regenerated. Praise the Lord that He has brought us into His wonderful resurrection!

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FIFTY-ONE

THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR AND HIS UNIVERSAL SPREADING OF THE GOSPEL THROUGH HIS DISCIPLES

Scripture Reading: Mark 16:1-20

Chapter sixteen of the Gospel of Mark covers three matters: the resurrection of the Slave-Savior (vv. 1-18) the ascension of the Slave-Savior for His exaltation (v. 19), and the Slave-Savior's universal spreading of the gospel through His disciples (v. 20).

DISCOVERED BY THREE WOMEN

In 16:1-8 the resurrection of the Lord Jesus was discovered by three women--Mary the Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome (v. 1). In verse 6 an angel said to them, "Do not be amazed; you are seeking Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He was raised! He is not here! Behold, the place where they laid Him." The Slave-Savior's resurrection is proof that God is satisfied with what He accomplished through His death. It is also a confirmation of the effectiveness of His redeeming and life-imparting death (Acts 2:24; 3:15).

According to verse 7, the angel said to the women, "But go, tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, even as He told you." In the angel's message to the three women who discovered the resurrection of the Slave-Savior, the phrase "and Peter" is inserted only in Mark's record. This is probably due to Peter's influence on the contents of this Gospel. In any case, this phrase indicates that Peter's intimate

relationship with the Slave-Savior was particular, so that it was emphasized even by the angel.

GOING INTO GALILEE

In verse 7 the angel said that the Lord Jesus was going before the disciples into Galilee. Just as the Slave-Savior began His ministry from Galilee of the Gentiles (Matt. 4:12-17), not from Jerusalem, the holy city of the Jewish religion, so also after His resurrection He would still go to Galilee, not to Jerusalem. This strongly indicates that the resurrected Slave-Savior abandoned Judaism and was initiating a new era for God's economy of the New Testament.

PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO ALL THE CREATION

In 16:9-11 the Lord Jesus appeared to Mary the Magdalene; in verses 12 and 13, to two of His disciples; and in verses 14 through 18. to the eleven disciples. In verse 15 He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all the creation." This reveals that the redemption of God accomplished by the Slave-Savior through His death and resurrection is not only for man, the leading one in God's creation, but for all the creation. Hence, all things, whether on earth or in the heavens, were reconciled to God, and the gospel should be proclaimed to all creation under heaven (Col. 1:20, 23). Based upon this, all the creation expects to be freed from the slavery of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom. 8:19-22).

BELIEVING AND BEING BAPTIZED

In verse 16 the Lord went on to say to the disciples, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned." To believe is to receive the Slave-Savior (John 1:12), not only for forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43) but also for regeneration (1 Pet. 1:21, 23), so that those who believe may become the children of God (John 1:12-13) and the members of Christ (Eph. 5:30) in an organic union with the Triune God (Matt. 28:19). To be baptized is to affirm this, by being

buried to terminate the old creation through the death of the Slave-Savior and by being raised up to be the new creation of God through the Slave-Savior's resurrection. Such a baptism is much more advanced than the baptism of repentance by John (Mark 1:4; Acts 19:3-5).

To believe and to be so baptized are two parts of one complete step for receiving the full salvation of God. To be baptized without believing is merely an empty ritual; to believe without being baptized is to be saved only inwardly without an outward affirmation of the inward salvation. These two should go together. Moreover, water baptism should be accompanied by the Spirit baptism, even as the children of Israel were baptized in the sea (water) and in the cloud (Spirit)--1 Corinthians 10:2 and 12:13.

Mark 16:16 does not say "who does not believe and is not baptized shall be condemned." This indicates that condemnation is related only to not believing; it is not related to not being baptized. Believing itself is sufficient for one to receive salvation from condemnation; yet it needs baptism as an outward affirmation for the completion of one's inward salvation.

In 16:17 and 18 the Lord Jesus continues, "And these signs will accompany those who believe: in My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it shall by no means harm them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will be well." Here we see that speaking with new tongues is only one of the five signs that accompany saved believers. It is not the unique sign, as stressed by some believers. According to the divine revelation in the Acts and in the Epistles, what the Lord says here does not mean that every saved believer should have all five signs. It means that each saved believer may have some of these signs, not necessarily all.

THE ASCENSION OF THE SLAVE-SAVIOR FOR HIS EXALTATION

Aspects of the Ascended Christ

In verse 19 we have the ascension of the Slave-Savior:

"So then the Lord, after speaking to them, was taken up into heaven and sat at the right hand of God." The Slave-Savior's ascension for His exaltation by God was a sign of God's acceptance of all He had done for God's eternal plan according to God's New Testament economy (Acts 2:33-36). In this exaltation God crowned Him with glory and honor (Heb. 2:9), gave Him the name that is above all names (Phil. 2:9), and made Him the Lord of all (Acts 2:36) and the Head over all things (Eph. 1:22), that He may have all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18) to rule over the heavens, the earth, and the nations so that they may work together for the universal spreading of His gospel.

Through His ascension Christ has been exalted to the highest, He has been made the Lord, the Christ, the Head of the church, and the Head over all things to the church. Furthermore, He has been enthroned, crowned with glory and honor and given a name that is above all names.

Experiencing the Ascended Christ

In order to experience Jesus as the Lord. the Christ, the Head of the church, the Head over all, and the One enthroned, crowned, and given a name above all names, we need to be in resurrection. When we are in the reality of resurrection, we are in the life-giving Spirit. In the Spirit we experience the resurrected Christ as the Lord, the anointed One, and the Head of everything to the church and the Head directly of the church. In the reality of resurrection, that is, in the all-inclusive Spirit, we realize that this Christ has been crowned with glory and honor, that He has been enthroned, and that He has received the name that is above all names. When we are in such a Spirit, all these aspects of Christ's ascension are not merely doctrines to us--they are realities.

Apart from the life-giving Spirit making Christ's ascension real to us, we may think that the ascended Christ has nothing to do with us in our daily living. But every aspect of Christ's ascension should be part of our daily experience.

If we would experience Christ's ascension, we need to walk according to the Spirit. When we walk according to the Spirit, we are walking in Christ's resurrection and ascension. This causes us to be a different kind of person. This is the reason I have been strong to say that the Christian life is not a matter of doctrine. What we need for the Christian life is to walk according to the life-giving Spirit who dwells in our spirit.

In 1964 I was invited to speak to a certain group of Christians in Dallas. During my message I pointed out that what we need is not doctrine but the Spirit. Some who cared absolutely for doctrine were offended, and after the meeting they tried to argue with me. But today I would even be stronger in saying that we need more of the Spirit. Instead of dead doctrine, we need the life-giving Spirit.

We can be in the Spirit because through the resurrection of Jesus Christ we have been regenerated, reborn (1 Pet. 1:3). We can also be in ascension. In our experience, the heavens come to us, because the all-inclusive Spirit brings the heavens to us. Therefore, when we are in the Spirit, we are in the heavens.

THE THE SLAVE-SAVIOR'S UNIVERSAL SPREADING OF GOSPEL THROUGH HIS DISCIPLES

Concerning the Slave-Savior's universal spreading of the gospel through His disciples, 16:20 says, "But those went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the accompanying signs." This preaching of God's gospel to all the creation (v. 15) by the resurrected and ascended Slave-Savior, as the Slave of God, through His believers, began from Jerusalem and has been proceeding to the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8) continuously and universally for the past centuries. It will continue to proceed until the Slave-Savior comes to set up the kingdom of God on earth (Luke 19:12; Dan. 7:13-14).

Preaching Everywhere

In 16:15 the Lord said to His disciples, "Go into all the

world and preach the gospel to all the creation." Then verse 20 tells us that they went out and preached everywhere. This indicates that we also should go forth to tell the nations, and even all the creation, of the wonderful Slave-Savior, His all-inclusive death, and His marvelous resurrection.

Many Gospel Preachers

We have seen that in chapter one of the Gospel of Mark there was only one preacher of the gospel. But when we come to the end of this Gospel, there are many preachers. Who can say how many gospel preachers there are today? Furthermore, the preaching in chapter one of Mark was mainly to the Jews, but the preaching at the end of chapter sixteen is to all the creation, that is, at least to all the different peoples on earth. In order to preach the gospel to all the creation, we may need to be beside ourselves in the Lord. If you have never been zealous in preaching the gospel to all kinds of peoples, this may mean that you may have never been beside yourself in the Lord Jesus.

On the day I was saved I was called by the Lord. I knew that it was my destiny to preach the Lord Jesus. However, my understanding at the time was that I would preach Him in the villages of my homeland. Now I am in this country preaching the Lord to those from every continent.

Oh, let us tell everyone about the wonderful Lord Jesus! Let us tell all people about the Lord's all-inclusive death and marvelous resurrection! Let us not be silent; let us preach the gospel, present the truth, and minister life.

Preaching the Gospel for the Producing of the New Man

Having passed through the Gospel of Mark, we may say that we have experienced the different kinds of healings: the healings of our ears, tongue, and eyes. Now we are qualified to speak for the Lord. I hope that through this Life-study of Mark we all shall be ushered into Christ as our entire, universal, all-inclusive replacement. Then we shall be able to testify with Paul, "It is no longer I who

live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Having experienced Christ as our replacement, we then shall be able to speak forth to all the nations concerning Him and His death and resurrection.

We thank the Lord for giving us the clear vision that this age is for the producing of the new man through the preaching of the gospel. All things--the world situation, international affairs, the economy, industry, education, and even wars--are for this. According to Revelation 6, the first of the four horses is the white horse of gospel preaching. This means that the white horse is taking the lead, and the other horses are following. Gospel preaching must take the lead. This age is for the preaching of the gospel to produce the new man. Now that we have seen this vision, let us go forth to preach Christ to all the creation!

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FIFTY-TWO

A LIFE FULLY ACCORDING TO AND FOR GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

(1)

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:1, 9-11, 14-15; 9:2-9; 16:14-20

With this message we begin a series of supplementary messages to the Life-study of the Gospel of Mark. These messages will be concerned with the life of the Slave-Savior as a life that is fully according to and for God's New Testament economy.

In the Gospel of Mark we see a Person, the God-man, who lived a life that was fully according to and for God's New Testament economy. If we would understand this life, we need to know what God's New Testament economy is. In other words it takes the entire New Testament to explain the life the Lord Jesus lived. This means that it takes all the other twenty-six books of the New Testament to define the Gospel of Mark. If we make a thorough study of the New Testament with respect to God's economy, we shall see that there is no defect, deficiency, or shortcoming in the life of the Lord Jesus. The life He lived was absolutely according to and for God's economy. In His life there is nothing contrary to this economy.

Although we may love the Gospel of John and the Gospel of Matthew, in these Gospels we do not have a complete biography of the Lord's life. This complete biography, presented in its historical sequence, is found in Mark. In this Gospel we have a complete record of a life, the life of the Lord Jesus, that is according to and for God's New Testament economy. In this life there is no deficiency with respect to God's economy.

Mark is the base of Matthew, John, and even Luke,

because Mark is a biography of the life of the Lord Jesus arranged according to historical sequence. If we want to understand a certain matter in the other Gospels, we need to come back to the Gospel of Mark.

At this point I would like to call your attention to the chart printed with this message. In this chart we can see how in the Gospel of Mark the record of the Lord's life progresses step by step until we come to the highlight. Then we are brought into the Lord's all-inclusive death and wonderful resurrection so that we may enjoy Him as our replacement. The result of taking Christ as our replacement is the new man. The new man is the reality of the kingdom of God, which issues first in the church, then in the millennium, and ultimately in the New Jerusalem.

Although the Gospel of Mark is short, it is all-inclusive. It contains all the factors of the New Testament. These factors are elements of the life of the Slave-Savior, a life fully according to and for God's New Testament economy.

LIVING IN A NEW DISPENSATION

As the One who lived according to and for God's New Testament economy, the Lord Jesus lived in a new dispensation, having the old dispensation terminated. This is clearly revealed and portrayed in chapter one (1:1-8). John the Baptist was born a typical Old Testament priest, yet he lived in the wilderness in a way that was uncultured. His appearance and his food were very different from that of the priests. John's work and his way of speaking were also uncultured. Whenever a person repented, John put that one into the water, baptizing him. All this was an indication that the old dispensation had been terminated. This was the situation and atmosphere when the Lord Jesus began His ministry. This indicates that His ministry was fully in the New Testament dispensation. Therefore, with His life we cannot find anything of the old dispensation.

HAVING HIMSELF BURIED

When the Lord Jesus was about to begin His ministry,

He had Himself buried baptized, by John the Baptist 1:9-11). He had no sin or oldness vet He was still baptized. His baptism was a testimony to the universe that He rejected Himself, that He put Himself aside in order to live by God.

LIVING AND MOVING BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Immediately after His baptism, the Lord Jesus was thrust into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit (1:12-13). From that time onward, He fulfilled His ministry by living, moving, and working in the Holy Spirit.

To Preach the Gospel

As the One living and moving by the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus preached the gospel (1:14-20). In His preaching He sowed the incarnated God as the seed for the kingdom of God. He sowed into men's hearts a seed that would grow and develop into the kingdom of God.

To Teach the Truth

In the Holy Spirit the Lord Jesus taught the truth (1:21-22). For Him to teach the truth was to enlighten darkened mankind and to disperse man's darkness.

To Cast Out Demons

The Lord Jesus also cast out demons (1:23-28). This casting out of demons was for the purpose of spreading the kingdom of God.

To Heal the Sick

In His ministry the Lord Jesus healed the sick (1:29-39). To heal the sick is to enliven the dead, to make the dead alive.

To Cleanse the Leper

According to the Gospel of Mark, the Lord cleansed the leper (1:40-45). To cleanse the leper is to sanctify the enlivened one. The Lord did this by forgiving sins, feasting

with sinners, being their joy in righteousness and life, satisfying them, and liberating them.

Binding Satan and Plundering His Kingdom

While the Lord Jesus was carrying out such a gospel service, He was also binding Satan and plundering his kingdom. Satan had no ground in Him. In 3:22-30 we see that the Lord bound Satan and plundered his house by the Holy Spirit.

Denying the Natural Relationship

In 3:31-35, we see that the Lord Jesus denied the natural relationship. Instead of remaining in the relationship of the natural life, He chose to be in the relationship of the spiritual life. This was the reason He could say. "Whoever does the will of God. this is My brother and sister and mother" (3:35). The natural relationship was not given any ground in His living.

Suffering the World's Rejection and Hatred

As the One who lived fully according to and for God's New Testament economy, The Lord Jesus suffered the world's rejection and hatred. In 6:1-6 He was despised by the Nazarenes. Elsewhere in this chapter we see that He suffered the world's rejection.

Exposing Man's Inward Evil Condition

In 7:1-23 the Lord Jesus exposed man's inward condition, the evil condition of man's heart. He said, "That which goes out of a man, that defiles a man" (v 20). Then He spoke concerning wicked things that proceed from within and defile a man (vv. 21-23).

Being the Life Supply to the Seeking One

After exposing the condition of man's heart, the Lord Jesus presented Himself as the life supply to a seeking one (7:24-30). In 7:27 He referred to Himself as the children's bread, that is, as our life supply. Hence, He presented Himself as the bread of life.

Healing the Organs of the Enlivened Ones

In 7:31-37 the Lord Jesus healed a deaf and dumb man. and in 8:22-26 He healed a blind man. In these instances the Lord healed specific organs of those who had been enlivened by Him.

Being the Universal and Entire Replacement through His All-inclusive Death and Wonderful Resurrection

In 8:27--9:13 the Lord Jesus is revealed as our universal and entire replacement. It is through His all-inclusive death and wonderful resurrection that we can take Him as such a replacement.

Accomplishing His All-inclusive Death

The Gospel of Mark presents the Lord Jesus as the One who accomplished an all-inclusive death. In His death He bore our sins, condemned sin, crucified the old man, terminated the old creation, destroyed Satan, judged the world, abolished the ordinances, and released the divine life.

Entering into His Wonderful Resurrection

After the Lord accomplished this all-inclusive death, He entered into His wonderful resurrection. In and through His resurrection He regenerated His followers and germinated the new creation.

Remaining in His All-surpassing Ascension

After His resurrection, the Lord Jesus "was taken up into heaven and sat at the right hand of God" (16:19). He now remains in His all-surpassing ascension to execute what He has accomplished through His death and resurrection.

Bringing His Followers into His Death and Ushering Them into His Resurrection to Enjoy Him in His Ascension

In previous messages we have pointed out

emphatically that the Lord Jesus did not enter into His death, resurrection and ascension alone. Rather He brought His followers into His death, and then He ushered them into His resurrection. As those who have been ushered into the Lord's resurrection His followers may now enjoy Him in His ascension as their life and life supply, the Lord of all, God's Christ, the Head of all to the church, the Head of the Body, the glorified One, the enthroned One, the One who is above all, and the One who fills all in all.

Bringing Forth the New Man as the Reality of the Kingdom of God

Through His death, resurrection, and ascension, and by bringing His followers into that death, resurrection, and ascension, the Lord Jesus has brought forth the new man as the reality of the kingdom of God. First. this new man issues in the church. Then, in the coming age, the new man will develop into the millennium. Ultimately, in the new heaven and the new earth, the new man will consummate in the New Jerusalem. This will be our eternal destiny, and this is also the conclusion of the Scriptures.

The Gospel of Mark is not merely a storybook. This Gospel conveys a heavenly vision, a vision that should direct our steps, control our living, and bring us into God's consummation. This vision is able to keep us in God's economy so that we may live the church life with the goal of reaching the millennium and the New Jerusalem.

Such a vision from God will always direct our steps and control our living. This was true even in the Old Testament, where we are told that without vision the people will perish (Prov. 29:18a). Under the heavenly vision we are directed toward God's destination, and our life is controlled according to God's economy.

If we would know the truth, we need to see the vision of God's economy. I can testify that years ago I was caught by this vision. Because we have seen it, we can press on in spite of suffering, defamation, and all kinds of trouble.

This vision has become the principle that directs our steps and that governs our way. Why do we take the way

of the Lord in His recovery? We take this way because we have been caught by the vision of God's economy. Because we have seen this vision, throughout the years heavenly light has been flooding into the Lord's recovery. The reason for this light is that we are under this vision. Whenever we come to the Word of God, the light shines because we are in this directing, controlling, governing vision.

My burden in this message is that we would see that the Gospel of Mark reveals a life that is fully according to and for God's New Testament economy. This life is not merely righteous, holy spiritual. and victorious. Many Christians know that we should live a righteous, holy, spiritual, and victorious life. But have you ever heard of a life lived according to God's New Testament economy? The Gospel of Mark presents the Person of the God-man, the One who lived, acted, moved, and worked step by step according to God's economy.

The author of the Epistle of James, on the contrary was not fully according to and for God's New Testament economy. Instead, James continued to live according to certain Jewish traditions and practices

The Gospel of Mark records how the Lord was examined by different parties. But no one could find fault with Him. As we consider the Gospel of Mark, we also are not able to find any fault, defect, or deficiency in the Lord's living related to God's economy. The chief priests, scribes, elders, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians tried to find fault with the Lord Jesus according to Jewish law and practice, and according to Roman politics. Let us examine Him according to the measure of the New Testament economy, of a standard that is much more strict. If we were to examine the Lord in this way, we would not find any shortcoming with Him. He not only fulfilled the law--He fulfilled God's economy.

Actually, the life of the Lord Jesus recorded in Mark is a complete, whole, perfect, and entire pattern of God's New Testament economy. For this reason, if we would understand what is revealed in Matthew, Luke, or John,

we need to consider the pattern presented in Mark. This pattern will then become a key that opens the other three Gospels.

Among today's Christians there is a great deal of debate and division. This is the result of being in darkness and of not having the vision of God's New Testament economy. The spiritual sky above many believers is dark. Their talk and study are in darkness. How much we need our spiritual sky to be clear! I hope that this Life-study of the Gospel of Mark will cause heavenly light to shine upon you, light that will grow until it shines in full (Prov. 4:18).

Praise the Lord for the clear view concerning God's New Testament economy! This view should become our vision to direct, control, keep, and preserve us and also carry us on. Furthermore, this vision should become the yardstick, the standard, by which we measure matters related to the Christian life. If we have this vision, we shall see that it is not sufficient simply to be righteous, holy, spiritual, and victorious. James was such a godly person, yet he was short with respect to God's New Testament economy. May we all see the vision of God's New Testament economy and see in the Gospel of Mark a portrait of a life fully according to and for God's economy.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FIFTY-THREE

A LIFE FULLY ACCORDING TO AND FOR GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

(2)

Scripture Reading: Gal. 2:11-21; Mark 1:1

In the foregoing message we pointed out that in the Gospel of Mark we see a life that is fully according to and for God's New Testament economy. The term "God's New Testament economy" is familiar to most of us. However, in order to be refreshed in our understanding. let us consider, in a simple, basic way, what God's New Testament economy is.

GOD'S ECONOMY

God's New Testament economy is to work Himself into His chosen people to make them members of Christ so that Christ may have a Body for His expression. In this description of God's economy we see a few important matters: that God wants to work Himself into His chosen people; that God wants to make His people members of the Body of Christ, the church; and that the Body of Christ is for Christ's expression. In the Gospel of Mark we see a life that is fully according to and for this New Testament economy of God.

TWO KINDS OF LIVES

As we have pointed out, if we compare the Epistle of James and the Gospel of Mark, we shall see that these books present two kinds of lives. In the Epistle of James we see something of the life of James, and in the Gospel of Mark we see the life of the Lord Jesus. Each of these books helps us to understand the other. Without Mark we might

not be clear concerning the Epistle of James. Likewise, without James we might not have such a clear understanding of the Gospel of Mark. It is when we compare these two books and see the two lives revealed in them that we have the proper understanding of both the Epistle of James and the Gospel of Mark.

REPUTATION AND INFLUENCE OF JAMES

Because the Epistle of James emphasizes practical Christian perfection, many Christians have a deep appreciation of this book. As we have pointed out in the Life study of James, James does emphasize Christian perfection, and he emphasizes this in practice, not in doctrine. Therefore many godly, devoted. and pious believers love the book of James. James tells us to pray for wisdom so that we may behave properly. He also encourages us to restrict our speaking, to bridle our tongue, so that we may live a godly life. In every chapter of his Epistle, he brings forth certain matters related to godliness.

In church history as well as in the Bible James was known for his godliness. He spent much time in prayer, and he was highly regarded among Christian Jews in ancient times. According to chapters fifteen and twenty-one of Acts and chapter two of Galatians, James was highly regarded by the saints. For example, Galatians 2:12 refers to some who "came from James." According to this verse, when these came to Antioch. Peter "shrank back and separated himself, fearing those of the circumcision." This is an illustration of the influence of James. Even Peter, the leading apostle, was under his influence.

Geographically, Jerusalem was in the south, and Antioch was in the north. Many Bible teachers regard these two cities as two great centers. There was a church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), and also one in Antioch (Acts 13:1).

From reading the book of Acts it may seem that the church in Jerusalem had a Jewish appearance and the church in Antioch had a Gentile appearance. Some may think that since Jerusalem was in Judea and Antioch was

in the Gentile world, it was necessary for the church in Jerusalem to have a Jewish appearance and the church in Antioch to have a Gentile appearance. Perhaps you would say, "How could the church in Jerusalem, a city of the Jews, not be Jewish in its appearance? And how could the church in Antioch not be Gentile in its atmosphere? Surely the churches in Japan have a Japanese appearance and the churches in America, an American appearance." This may be logical from the human point of view. But the New Testament reveals that the church is neither Jewish nor Gentile. First Corinthians 10:32 speaks of three categories of people: the Jews, the Gentiles (Greeks), and the church. This indicates clearly that the church is something apart from both the Jews and the Gentiles. God has called His chosen ones out from both the Jews and the Gentiles to be the church. Therefore, the church should be neither Jewish nor Gentile. If the church has either a Jewish or a Gentile appearance, then to some extent the church has lost its character or at least some of its characteristics.

If we read carefully Acts 15 and 21 and Galatians 2, we shall see that at the time of Peter, Paul, and James. Jerusalem exerted a considerable influence over Antioch. This means that the church in Jerusalem exercised influence over the churches in the Gentile world. James might have been concerned that the churches in the Gentile world did not practice the Mosaic law. This might have been the reason that he sent certain brothers from Jerusalem to Antioch. Those brothers might have gone to Antioch to observe the situation among the believers there.

Before certain ones went to Antioch from James, Peter was behaving himself properly as a brother and a member of the Body of Christ. In particular, he ate with the Gentiles. As Paul says of Peter, "before some came from James, he ate with those of the nations" (Gal. 2:12). However, when the brothers came from James, Peter was frightened and took the lead to pretend, that is, to behave as a Jew once again. Paul's word for this pretending was hypocrisy: "And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy" (Gal. 2:13).

Some may question what was wrong with Peter's behavior. It may appear that there was nothing wrong. But to those who know God's New Testament economy it is clear that Peter made a serious mistake. His behavior in shrinking back and separating himself from the Gentile believers involved a mixture that was damaging to God's New Testament economy.

TAKING GOD AS LIFE AND LIVING HIM

God's New Testament economy is not a matter of keeping the law or practicing rituals. Neither is God's economy a matter merely of doing good according to human ethics or philosophy. God's New Testament economy is a matter of God working Himself into His chosen people so that they may have Him, the Triune God--the Father, the Son, and the Spirit--as their life. When God's people have His life, they are automatically able to live this life. To live God's life simply means to live by God and even to live God Himself. Hence, the economy of God is neither a matter of keeping the Jewish law nor of doing good according to human philosophy; it is a matter of having God as life and then living Him. It is extremely important that we all see this.

From the time of the apostles until today, there has been much debate concerning biblical teachings and theology. Much of this debate has been the result of one thing--missing the mark of God's New Testament economy. Throughout the centuries, Christian teachers have been fighting over doctrines and practices, but the focus of God's New Testament economy has been neglected. What a great loss it is to miss God's New Testament economy!

Certain Christians, especially so-called holiness people, argue about the proper style of dress. For example, they may debate about the length of the sisters' skirts or sleeves. This is a very simple illustration of how the saints have been distracted from God's New Testament economy.

We believe that if the saints see that in His economy God desires to work Himself into His chosen people so that

they may have Him as their life and live Him, there will be no need to argue concerning anyone's manner of dress.

We have seen that the New Testament economy of God is not a matter of keeping laws or observing rituals. Neither is it merely a matter of doing good in an ethical way. God's New Testament economy is that we take Him as our life and live Him.

If we read carefully Galatians 2:11-21, we shall see that the atmosphere in Antioch changed after certain ones came from James. Before those brothers came, Peter and the other believers in Antioch were in a particular kind of atmosphere, the atmosphere of enjoying God's New Testament economy. But then, due to the influence of James, the spiritual atmosphere changed, and the spiritual sky became cloudy. Something had come in to obscure God's New Testament economy.

The situation in Antioch was so serious that Paul opposed Peter to his face (Gal. 2:11). Paul went on to give Peter a very good lesson. According to Galatians 2:14, Paul said to Peter in front of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the nations and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the nations to live like Jews?"

Paul's words spoken on that occasion continue through Galatians 2:21. You may have quoted Galatians 2:20 many times, especially the words, "I have been crucified with Christ," without realizing what the context of this verse is. The context begins with verse 11 and included Paul's open rebuke of Peter. Paul's rebuke emphasizes the fact that we who believe in Christ should have only one kind of life, and this life is to live Christ. It is neither a matter of eating with Gentiles or not eating with them. On the contrary, it is a matter of having been crucified with Christ and of Christ living in us. Therefore, Paul could say, "Since I have been crucified with Christ and Christ lives in me, it is no longer I who live in this matter of eating. The question is not whether or not I eat with the Gentiles. The question is whether or not Christ lives in me."

HOW TO MEASURE THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

James was a godly person, very strong in practical Christian perfection. But if we measure him according to God's New Testament economy, we shall see the defects in his living. In his Epistle James does not say anything about Christ living in us. In fact, he does not even speak of the divine life. Instead, James refers us to Old Testament people and Old Testament practices. Much of what he writes is based on the Old Testament. In his Epistle we do not find many New Testament terms. Even when he does use a New Testament expression, he immediately reverts to and Old Testament practice.

We should not measure the Epistle of James according to the natural concept, the ethical concept, or the religious concept. Instead, we need to measure this Epistle according to God's New Testament economy. We know that God's economy is to work Himself into us as our life so that we may live Him as the members of the Body of Christ. When we use this to measure the Epistle of James, we shall be able to see where this book stands in relation to the rest of the New Testament.

For a few centuries the status of the Epistle of James was uncertain. It was not until the Council of Carthage in A.D. 397 that this book was finally and officially recognized as part of the New Testament. One reason for the debate concerning the Epistle of James is that with respect to God's New Testament economy this book is neither black nor white but gray. This means that this Epistle is a mixture of the Old Testament and the New Testament. In certain aspects the book of James has the "coloring" of the New Testament. An example of this is the word concerning the Father of lights begetting us so that we may be the firstfruits of His creatures (1:18). Other examples are what James says concerning the implanted word, the law of freedom, and the Spirit dwelling in us (1:21, 25; 4:5). These matters all belong to God's New Testament economy, but they are found in an Epistle that bears a strong Old Testament flavor and color. This was the reason we pointed out that in this book we see a life

that is not fully according to and for God's New Testament economy.

THE LIFE REVEALED IN MARK

When we turn from the Epistle of James to the Gospel of Mark, we see a life that is not at all gray. On the contrary, the life revealed in Mark, the life of the Lord Jesus as the Slave-Savior, is absolutely "white." This means that the Lord's life revealed in Mark is fully according to and for God's New Testament economy.

Although the Gospel of Mark records a life that is absolutely according to and for God's New Testament economy, we still need spiritual sight in order to see what is revealed in this Gospel. If we do not have this spiritual sight, we may regard the Gospel of Mark merely as a book of stories. Without such a sight, we shall not realize that it is a biography of a life that is fully according to and for God's New Testament economy. Actually, the life presented in Mark is the reality, substance, and pattern of God's New Testament economy.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FIFTY-FOUR

A LIFE FULLY ACCORDING TO AND FOR GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

(3)

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:1, 10-11; 9:1-9; Acts 21:18-24

THE SUBSTANCE OF GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

In the foregoing message we pointed out an important difference between the Epistle of James and the Gospel of Mark. In James we see something of a life that is not fully according to and for God's New Testament economy. In Mark we see a life that is fully according to and for God's New Testament economy. In fact, the life presented in the Gospel of Mark is the reality, substance, and pattern of God's New Testament economy.

Perhaps you are wondering what our reason is for saying that in the Gospel of Mark we see a life that is the substance of God's New Testament economy. We say this because the life the Lord Jesus lived was the expression of God. According to the Gospel of Mark, there is no indication that the Lord Jesus was living merely in a way to keep the law, that He did certain things simply because they were required by the law. Furthermore, the Gospel of Mark does not indicate that the Lord Jesus only lived a good life. How, then, did the Lord live? The Lord Jesus lived God, and He expressed God. Whatever He did was God's doing from within Him and through Him. This means that all that the Lord Jesus did was not merely the keeping of the law or the doing of good in an ethical sense. The Lord Jesus was a Person who lived God and expressed Him in all that He said and did.

LIVING IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

I can assure you that there has never been another life like that of the Lord Jesus. The biographies of other people may indicate that they were good or that they tried to keep the law of God. But the Lord Jesus is the only One who lived God and expressed Him in a full way. Of course, the Lord never broke the law, and He never did anything wrong. Nevertheless, the crucial matter regarding His life was not that He kept the law or that He did good. The crucial point is that He lived God and expressed Him. The Lord's living was not in the kingdom of law-keeping or of doing good. He lived altogether in another kingdom, the kingdom of God.

Do you live in the kingdom of God? We may say that we live in the kingdom of God, but we may live in another realm in a practical way day by day. Instead of living in the kingdom of God, we may live in the kingdoms of law, ethics, or morality. Throughout the centuries, many saints have lived in these kingdoms and not in the kingdom of God.

Especially since the time of John Wesley, there has been much talk among Christians concerning holiness. Some regard holiness as a matter of so-called sinless perfection. Others think that holiness is related to regulations concerning such matters as the style of dress. Regulations such as these are not in the kingdom of God. They belong to another kingdom, perhaps the kingdom of good.

Those who live in the kingdom of God have God as their life, and they live Him. God lives in them, through them, and out of them. As a result, they live a life that expresses nothing other than God Himself. God is the real holiness, morality, and ethics. Therefore, to have God as life and to live Him is to live in a way that is higher than human morality or ethics.

THE LIFE THAT PRODUCES THE BODY OF CHRIST

Only the kind of life that lives God and expresses Him produces the Body of Christ. Any other way of living

always damages the Body. Throughout its history the church has been divided not mainly by evil things, but primarily by good things that are not God Himself. If all Christians would care only for God Himself and for having Him as life and living Him, there would not be any divisions among believers.

The reason there would be no divisions if we all cared only for God Himself is that God is one. In Ephesians 4:4-6 Paul speaks of the one Body, the one Spirit, the one Lord, and the one God and Father. If we see the oneness in Ephesians 4, we shall know how to keep the oneness of the Body of Christ, a oneness that is actually the Triune God Himself. If we all have God as our holiness, righteousness, and everything to us, there will not be any divisions among us. However, if we have something other than God there will be divisions. Anything that we have other than God Himself is a factor of division.

It is God's intention in His recovery to bring us back to His New Testament economy. The pattern for God's New Testament economy is found in the life of the Lord Jesus, as presented in the Gospel of Mark. Not even the writings of Paul present us a complete pattern, because at least once Paul himself was distracted from the New Testament economy of God. Hence, not even Paul is a complete pattern of God's economy.

JAMES AND CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

In chapter twenty-one of Acts we see a situation in which Paul was distracted from God's New Testament economy. He was convinced by some in Jerusalem to return to the law and fulfill certain of its requirements. This took place after Paul had written the Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians. In those Epistles Paul spoke strongly against continuing to keep the law in the Old Testament manner.

After writing those books, Paul went to Jerusalem for the last time. Acts 21:18 says that Paul went in "to James, and all the elders were present." According to verse 20, they pointed out to Paul "how many thousands there are

among the Jews who have believed, and are all zealous for the law." They had been instructed concerning Paul that he was "teaching all the Jews throughout the nations apostasy from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children, nor to walk according to the customs" (v. 21). Then James and the others went on to give Paul this advice: "Therefore do what we tell you: Four men are with us who have a vow on themselves; take these and be purified with them, and pay their expenses that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things of which they have been instructed concerning you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the law" (vv. 23-24).

Acts 21:18 does not say that Paul went in to see the elders and James was present. This verse says that Paul went in to James and the elders were present. This indicates that James was the central figure in the church in Jerusalem and that he exercised a strong influence.

How could James have become such a strong and central influence among the believers? It probably was because he was so godly and pious, and he emphasized practical Christian perfection. Nothing attracts people more than one's perfection. Even one as spiritual as Paul was not as attractive as James in this regard. If James were with us today, no doubt we would be attracted by his Christian perfection.

As an illustration of how people are attracted to what they consider perfect, let me relate something Brother Nee told me in 1932. Brother Nee wore his hair a little longer than was customary among the Chinese at that time. One day he said to me, "Brother Lee, if I were to cut my hair shorter, more of the people would receive my ministry." Because the Chinese people at the time were very conservative, they were not willing to accept anything they regarded as modern. To them, a gentleman should wear his hair quite short. Certain ones would have been open to receive Brother Nee's ministry if he met their standard of perfection in this matter.

Christians are easily attracted to those who seem to

practice Christian perfection. For example, suppose a certain brother is gentle, humble, and meek, and always speaks in a kind, loving way. Would you not be attracted to him? Would it not be easy for you to be influenced by him? I use this as an illustration to point out how people are attracted by perfection.

If we see that perfection attracts people, we shall be able to understand the nature of James' influence in Jerusalem. James was godly, righteous, and, in a certain sense, holy. He certainly had a measure of practical Christian perfection. Nevertheless, with James we do not see the life of someone living in the kingdom of God.

THE ONE WHO LIVED GOD AND EXPRESSED HIM

In the entire New Testament there is only one person who lived fully, wholly, and absolutely according to the New Testament economy of God, and this person was the Lord Jesus.

When I was young, I was taught to take Jesus as my example and to follow Him. To a certain extent, I taught others to do the same thing. However, for years I wondered how we could take Jesus as our example and follow Him. Do you know how to take Jesus as your example? Do you know how to follow Him? When I asked certain Christian teachers and pastors about this, they pointed out that the Lord Jesus was gentle and that He was never angry.

Eventually I learned from reading the Scriptures that at least on one occasion the Lord Jesus was angry. This was the occasion when "He found in the temple those selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers sitting there. And having made a whip of cords, He drove them all, both the sheep and the oxen, out of the temple, and He poured out the coins of the moneychangers and overturned the tables" (John 2:14-15). This made me question what I had been taught about the way to follow the Lord Jesus. I began to lose my trust in what I now realize is a natural understanding and teaching about taking Jesus as our example.

In the Gospel of Mark we see that the Lord Jesus did

not live a life merely of human morality or of keeping the law. Instead, He lived God the Father as His life. This kind of living is much superior to a life of living the law or human morality.

God's desire is that He be expressed from within us. He does not want to see us merely living a life that is moral or a life that is according to the law. He wants to see Himself expressed from within us as we take Him as our life and live Him. In Mark we have the portrait of a life not of the law nor merely of morality, but of the One who lived God and expressed Him.

In a forthcoming message we shall see that as the One who lived God and expressed Him, the Lord Jesus had God the Father as His inner divine essence, and God the Spirit outwardly as His power. He, therefore, lived His life by the divine essence that was within Him and by the divine power that was upon Him. This means that He lived a life of God. This kind of living is revealed in the Gospel of Mark.

All the while He was on earth, the Lord Jesus lived a life of God. With Him, the things of the Old Testament had passed away. His life was altogether new, for He had God the Father within Him and God the Spirit upon Him. His life, therefore, was absolutely related to God Himself and was fully according to God's New Testament economy. Hallelujah for such a life! This life is the reality, substance, and pattern of God's New Testament economy. It is the life that produces the members of Christ to form His Body to express the Triune God.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FIFTY-FIVE

A LIFE FULLY ACCORDING TO AND FOR GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

(4)

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:1, 4, 9-10

In this message we shall continue to see from the Gospel of Mark a life that is fully according to and for the New Testament economy of God.

It is not an easy matter to study the Gospel of Mark. Because we may be led astray in understanding this book, it is quite difficult to study it. In the past many of us were misled in our efforts to understand this Gospel. Some regard the Gospel of Mark merely as a biography of the Lord Jesus. Others consider this Gospel simply a book of stories concerning Jesus. Of course, it is not wrong to say that the Gospel of Mark is a biography or a book of stories. This book is a biography of the Lord, and it does contain many stories concerning His life. But if we get into the depths of the Gospel of Mark, we shall see that this Gospel is more than a biography or a book of stories. The Gospel of Mark presents a life that lives fully according to God's New Testament economy.

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

In this message we need to pay particular attention to 1:1: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." This verse is not the title of a biography or of a book of stories. Here we have three main terms: the beginning, the gospel, and Jesus Christ.

The word "gospel" is used in 1:1 in a new way, in a way not employed previously. From Adam until Jesus Christ

there was nothing in man's culture or civilization to correspond to what is denoted by the word "gospel" in the New Testament.

Both John 1:1 and Mark 1:1 use the word "beginning." John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Here "beginning" denotes eternity past. John's use of this word is very mysterious. Mark, on the contrary, speaks of the beginning of the gospel. The Gospel of Mark is unique among the four Gospels in opening with the clear expression "the beginning of the gospel."

We need to be deeply impressed with the opening word of the Gospel of Mark. The phrase "the beginning of the gospel" indicates that this book is not merely a biography of a Nazarene named Jesus Christ. Neither is this merely a book of stories. Rather, this book speaks concerning the beginning of the gospel. At least to a certain extent or in a certain sense, we may regard the entire hook of Mark as the beginning of the gospel.

The Continuation of the Gospel

If Mark is the beginning of the gospel, where is the continuation of the gospel? The continuation of the gospel is seen on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the chosen and prepared disciples. Peter, James, John, and the other disciples had been chosen by God and personally called by Jesus Christ. After they had been called, they were prepared by the Lord. During the ten days before Pentecost, the one hundred and twenty were praying. Do you know where they were in those days? They were in the heavens, in the Lord's ascension. They had been brought into the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. On the day of Pentecost they received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, on that day there was the continuation of the gospel. Hence, Mark is the beginning of the gospel, and Acts is the continuation of the gospel. This continuation has not yet ended. This means that we today are still in the continuation of the gospel.

The Termination of the Old Things

The word "beginning" in Mark 1:1 implies the termination of many things. Consider what was present at the time of 1:1: culture, the Gentile nations, the chosen people of God, the promise, the law, the Old Testament, the temple, the system of priestly service, the proper way to worship God according to His ordinances. By this we see that there were many good, positive things, even a number of things that had been ordained by God. The old Testament was given by God. All the laws ordinances, rituals, forms, practices, regulations, and services in the Old Testament had been ordained by God. The temple, the priesthood, and the system of worship certainly were sanctioned by God. Now, in 1:1, among all these good, positive things, we read of the beginning of something else--the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ implies the termination of many things that had been in existence for thousands of years. In fact, this beginning implies the termination of everything other than God Himself. Certain things had been going on for hundreds, even thousands, of years. Now suddenly there was a new beginning, a beginning that terminated all things other than God.

There has been a difference of opinion among Bible expositors concerning the time of the beginning of the gospel. Some say that the time of the beginning of the gospel was when John the Baptist came out to minister. Others say that the time of this beginning was when Jesus began to preach. Still others claim that the time was the day of Pentecost.

It is a difficult matter for readers of the New Testament to understand that the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ involves the absolute termination of the old things. As we consider this matter, we need to remember that the Gospel of Mark reveals Jesus Christ as the entire, universal, all-inclusive replacement.

Consider what happened on the Mount of Transfiguration (9:2-13). The Lord Jesus took Peter, James, and John and brought them up into a high mountain. Then

"He was transformed before them; and His garments became brilliant, exceedingly white, such as no fuller on earth could whiten them" (9:2-3). Then Elijah and Moses appeared to them (v. 4). Being very excited, even beside himself, Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. And let us make three tabernacles--one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (v. 5). In a way, Peter's word was somewhat reasonable, for the Lord Jesus and two great persons from the Old Testament were present on the mountain. Actually, what Peter spoke was nonsensical. Suddenly "a cloud came overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, This is My Son, the Beloved. Hear Him!" (v. 7). When the disciples looked around, "they no longer saw anyone with them, except Jesus only" (v. 8).

We may say that both Moses, who represents the law of the old Testament, and Elijah, who represents the Old Testament prophets, were replaced by Christ. According to Jewish custom, God's people considered the Old Testament as having two major sections: the Law and the Prophets. Hence, for Moses and Elijah, the representatives of the Old Testament, to be replaced actually means that all Old Testament things have been replaced by Christ.

On the negative side, the beginning of the gospel means a termination, and this termination includes us. This all-inclusive termination includes culture, the nations, Israel, the law, the prophets, the Old Testament practices and way of worship, the temple, the altar, the priesthood, and the system of offerings. Now when we read Mark 1:1 we need to have the understanding that the beginning of the gospel means the termination of the old things.

THE TRIUNE GOD WORKING HIMSELF INTO US AS LIFE

Chapter one of the Gospel of Mark indicates that culture, religion, ethics, and the human effort to be moral, holy, scriptural, and victorious need to be terminated. However, in the more than nineteen centuries from the time the Lord Jesus was on earth, the situation among Christians has been full of culture, religion, ethics, and

the endeavor to be holy, scriptural, and victorious. Actually, in the experience of the saints there has been very little of Christ. But many books have been written on the subjects of holiness, spirituality, and victory.

We cannot deny that the Epistle of James is a good book. This Epistle helps us to be longsuffering and to have endurance. James speaks of the longsuffering of the prophets and of the endurance of Job. In his Epistle he teaches us how to pray as Elijah did. James' writing contains a wisdom similar to that found in the proverbs of Solomon. All this is very good. Nevertheless, for God's New Testament economy all such matters need to be terminated and replaced by Christ. As we have emphasized in this message, the beginning in Mark 1:1 implies such a termination.

If brother James were with us today, we should ask him if he realized that the things of the Old Testament should he terminated. As the leading elder in Jerusalem, he addressed his Epistle not to the church or the New Testament saints but to the twelve tribes. We also wonder why in his Epistle James did not teach us to pray in the New Testament way.

James has been a pattern of godliness, devotion, holiness, ethics, spirituality, and victory. Many believers throughout the centuries have taken James as their pattern for these things.

I would ask you to consider whether you still hold the concept that, as a Christian, you need to try in yourself to improve, to love God more, and to behave in a manner that will glorify God. When I mention these things, some may say in their hearts, "What is wrong with trying to improve and seeking to love God more and to live for His glory? Are you opposed to the improvement of character? Do you not care that the believers love God and glorify Him? Are you teaching us not to care for ethics? What kind of teaching are you promoting?" Of course, we are not denying the importance of good character and behavior; neither are we saying that we should not be ethical or moral or that we should not love God and glorify Him. As far as human living in society is concerned, we all must care for

morality, ethics, behavior, and character. But the crucial point is that God's New Testament economy involves something much higher than this. God's New Testament economy is a matter of the Triune God working Himself into us as life so that we may live Him and thereby become members of the Body of Christ for His expression.

CHRISTIAN VIRTUES AS THE PRODUCT OF THE DIVINE LIFE

Perhaps I can illustrate the difference between human ethics and a life that is according to God's New Testament economy by telling you about the teaching of certain missionaries in China years ago. Some missionaries clearly said that the Bible and Confucius teach the same thing. They pointed out that both the Bible and Confucius teach the honoring of parents and the submitting of wives to their husbands. These missionaries also said that both the Bible and Confucius teach humility, honesty, integrity, faithfulness, and other such virtues. I first heard this when I was in elementary school. Later, as a teen-ager, I began to say to myself, "Since the Bible and Confucius teach the same thing, why was it necessary for the missionaries to come to China? If there is no difference between the teaching of the Bible and the teaching of Confucius, then there is no need for the missionaries to teach us the Bible."

By the Lord's mercy, I was saved at the age of nineteen. I was still bothered by the question concerning the difference, if any, between the teachings of the Bible and those of Confucius. I still wanted to know the difference between the human virtues taught by Confucius and the virtues of Christians taught in the Bible. For a number of years I did not know the difference. After nearly ten years of studying the Bible, my eyes were opened to see the all-inclusive Christ. I began to see Christ as the center and circumference of God's New Testament economy. Then I began to differentiate between the human virtues taught by Confucius and the Christian virtues taught by the Bible. I came to realize that the human

virtues taught by Confucius are the product of human effort. Those virtues do not have anything of God essentially. But the genuine Christian virtues taught by the Bible are not the result of human effort. On the contrary, Christian virtues are the product of the divine life lived out through the believers. Furthermore, the Christian virtues are related essentially to the divine nature. What a difference there is between human virtues as the product of human effort and Christian virtues as the product of the divine life and nature within us!

We may illustrate the difference between the human virtues taught by Confucius and the Christian virtues taught by the Bible by comparing brick with gold. As we examine brick, we may find nothing wrong with it. But if we compare brick with gold, we shall see that there is a tremendous difference between the two. In a similar way, there is a great difference between human virtues and Christian virtues produced by the divine life and nature.

It is tragic that most Christians, including Christian teachers, have not had a clear view of the difference between mere human virtues and genuine Christian virtues. The virtues taught by Confucius and other philosophers are nothing more than human. Those human virtues do not have anything of the divine essence. They have nothing to do with God's life and nature, much less with God Himself.

The Christian virtues taught by the Bible are very different from mere human virtues. The difference is that the nature of Christian virtues is the nature of God. Concerning this, Peter says in his second Epistle that we have become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). Therefore, Christian virtues are the product not of outward effort but of an inward nature, the divine nature that we have received through regeneration. The Christian virtues are related essentially to the divine life, the divine nature and God Himself.

Humanly speaking, for the good of society, we all must care for ethics, morality, behavior, and character. For the sake of a proper human living in society we must emphasize these things. Nevertheless, with respect to

living God and expressing Him, mere human virtues are of no avail. Rather, they become a frustration to living and expressing the Lord.

If we would live God and express Him, we need to see that it is necessary even for the natural human virtues to be terminated. This termination is necessary for the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The beginning of the gospel implies the termination of all things other than God Himself.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FIFTY-SIX

A LIFE FULLY ACCORDING TO AND FOR GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

(5)

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:1, 4, 9-10

In the foregoing message we considered the significance of the phrase "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ" in 1:1. Let us now go on to consider the word "baptism" in verse 4.

TERMINATION FOR A NEW BEGINNING

Verse 4 says, "John the baptizer came in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins." Here we see that John came forth to preach the baptism of repentance. To baptize a person is to bury him in water. Such a burial is a matter of termination. The best way for something to be terminated is for it to be buried. When those who came to John were baptized, they were buried, terminated.

John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Whoever came to John in genuine repentance would then be baptized by him. The repentant ones were buried in baptism by John.

In 1:1 we have a beginning, and in 1:4, a termination. If there is no termination, there cannot be a new beginning. Why were we baptized after we believed in the Lord Jesus? We were baptized in order to bury our old life, including ourselves. Whenever a person repents and believes in the Lord, we should terminate the old life and old self of that one by baptizing him, by burying him. This termination is for a new beginning.

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD JESUS

Mark 1:9 speaks of the baptism of the Lord Jesus: "And it came about in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John." The Lord Jesus was willing to be baptized; He was willing to be buried.

Why was the Lord Jesus baptized? Although in one sense with Him there was nothing that needed to be buried, in particular nothing old, the Lord was nevertheless a man, and as a man He was part of the old creation. If the Lord Jesus did not have anything to do with the old creation, how could He be the Savior of the old creation?

According to John 1:1 and 14, the Word, which was God, became flesh. The word "flesh" is a negative term in the Scriptures. God did not create a flesh; God created a man. Why, then, does the Gospel of John not say that the Word became man? John 1:14 clearly says not that the Word became a man, but that the Word became flesh. When Jesus came from Nazareth to John, He had a body of flesh.

Concerning this matter, Paul was very careful. In Romans 8:3 he says that Christ came in the likeness of the flesh of sin. Fallen man had become the flesh of sin. But the Lord Jesus had only the likeness of the flesh of sin; He did not have sin. Just as the brass serpent lifted up in the wilderness for the redemption of the fallen Israelites had only the likeness, the form, of a serpent but not the nature of a serpent, so the Lord Jesus had only the likeness of the flesh of sin, not the nature of the flesh of sin.

By the time the Lord Jesus became a man, mankind had fallen. However, within the Lord Jesus there was no sin. Although there was no sin in Him, yet His humanity was still in the likeness of the flesh of sin.

On the one hand, the Lord Jesus was the Son of God. This is a matter of His deity. On the other hand, He was the Son of Man. This is a matter of His humanity, With respect to His deity, there was no need for the Lord Jesus to be baptized. But with respect to His humanity, to His

being a man among men, there was the need for Him to be baptized. The Lord Jesus as a man needed to he terminated, to be buried.

Of course, the Bible does not say that at the time of His baptism the Lord Jesus repented. Because He had nothing of which to repent, there was no need for Him to repent. The Lord did not have sin, and He never sinned. Because He had neither sin nor sins, He did not need to repent. Nevertheless, He had a humanity that was related to the old creation, and for this reason He needed to be baptized. In His baptism the Lord was willing to have Himself put aside.

THE SPIRIT UPON THE LORD JESUS

Mark 1:10 tells us what happened when the Lord Jesus came up out of the water: "And immediately, coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens being parted, and the Spirit as a dove coming down to Him." Before this time, the Lord Jesus already had God the Father within Him as the essence of His being. After His baptism, God the Spirit descended upon Him. Therefore, within Him the Lord Jesus had the divine essence, and upon Him He had the Spirit of God. As the One with the Father within Him as His essence and the Spirit upon Him as the power for His move and work, He began to minister. In His move, His work, the Lord Jesus was not a person merely of morality or ethics, and He was not a person of religion. Rather, the Lord Jesus was a person absolutely of God.

After His baptism, with the Spirit upon Him, the Lord Jesus was a person absolutely of God inwardly and outwardly. Inwardly He had God the Father as His essence; outwardly He had the Spirit of God as His power to move, act, minister, and preach. In this way He became not a person of culture, religion, or merely ethics or morality, but a person of God.

WHOLLY IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In His move on earth, what did the Lord Jesus do? Did He teach ethics or morality? Did He emphasize religion,

culture, or education? Did He tell people to keep the Ten Commandments given by God? These are not the things the Lord Jesus did in His move. He was altogether in another kingdom, the kingdom of God. He was not in the kingdom of law, morality, ethics, religion, or culture. He was wholly in the kingdom of God.

What is the kingdom of God? We may be so bold as to say that the kingdom of God is actually God Himself. Let us use the animal kingdom as an illustration. The animal kingdom, of course, is composed of animals. If there were no animals, there would not be an animal kingdom. The principle is the same with the kingdom of man. The kingdom of man is mankind. In a similar way, the kingdom of God is God Himself.

The Lord Jesus was a man of God. Whatever He did, whatever He preached and taught, the way He behaved and ministered--everything was in the kingdom of God.

Confucius taught ethics, and he was in the kingdom of ethics. Ethics is good, but it is not the kingdom of God.

Moses emphasized the keeping of the law, and he was in the kingdom of law. This kingdom is also good, but it is not the kingdom of God.

Aaron the high priest taught the people the proper way to worship God. Thus, Aaron was in the kingdom of the priesthood. This too was good, but it is not the kingdom of God.

When the Lord Jesus came out to minister, He did not teach ethics, the keeping of the law, or the priestly service of God. He lived, moved, and acted in the kingdom of God. As we have seen, the kingdom of God is God Himself.

THE CONTENTS OF THE LORD'S GOSPEL SERVICE

In 1:14-45 we see the contents of the Lord's gospel service: preaching the gospel (vv. 14-20), teaching the truth (vv. 21-22), casting out demons (vv. 23-28), healing the sick (vv. 29-39), and cleansing the leper (vv. 40-45). These are not matters of ethics, morality, culture, philosophy, or religion. These are the ways the Lord Jesus served God. He served God by preaching the gospel,

teaching the truth, casting out demons, healing the sick, and cleansing the leper.

The Bible does not say that the work of the Lord Jesus was to preach the gospel, teach the truth, cast out demons, heal the sick, and cleanse the leper. Instead, the New Testament indicates that this was His move. After He was baptized and after the Holy Spirit descended upon Him, He moved in the way of preaching, teaching, casting out demons, healing the sick, and cleansing the leper. When He moved into Galilee, He preached. When He came to Capernaum, He taught. He also cast out an unclean spirit, and later He healed Peter's mother-in-law. Furthermore, in His move in His ministry He met a leper and cleansed him.

NO DISTINCTION BETWEEN LIFE AND WORK

Was all this the Lord's work, His move, or His life? Actually, it is difficult to say, for His life was His work, and His work was His move. The Lord Jesus was continually living, working, and moving. Day and night He lived, and day and night He worked and moved. His work was His living, and His move was His being. For this reason, we cannot say how much the Lord Jesus worked. He worked everywhere and all the time because His work was His life, His life was His move, and His move was His work. With Him there was no difference between His life, His work, and His move.

With the Lord Jesus every aspect of His life was the same. We, however, may divide up our life between work, school, family, and church. We can easily point out how many hours we work each day. But can you say how many hours the Lord Jesus worked every day? What time was set apart for His meals? The point here is that the Lord Jesus was always living, working, and moving. His preaching and teaching were part of His living. Casting out demons, healing the sick, and cleansing the leper were also part of the living of the Lord Jesus. With Him there is no distinction between life and work.

We may think that the Lord Jesus was able to live such a life, but we cannot. Today we all should live a life

of preaching, teaching, casting out demons, healing the sick, and cleansing the lepers. The common practice of hiring preachers to work as professionals is not right according to the Scriptures. Every believer should live a life of preaching, teaching, casting out demons, and healing the sick. If we live in this way, wherever we go, our life will be our preaching, for we live a preaching life. Likewise, we shall also live a life of casting out demons. Many indulge in certain evil, worldly things because they have been possessed by demons.

My point in speaking concerning this is that the Lord Jesus lived a life of God, and this is a life of preaching, teaching, casting out demons, healing the sick, and cleansing the lepers. It is not a life of culture, religion, philosophy, or mere ethics or morality. The life that is the life of God automatically preaches, teaches, casts out demons, heals, and cleanses. If we all live this kind of life, the situation in our locality will be different after a period of time. However, the matter we are emphasizing is the life itself, the life of God fully according to and for His New Testament economy.

THE RESULT OF LIVING ACCORDING TO GOD'S ECONOMY

We have seen that the contents of the Lord's gospel service include preaching the gospel, teaching the truth, casting out demons, healing the sick, and cleansing the leper. In 2:1--3:6 we see the ways of carrying out the gospel service: forgiving sins (2:1-12), feasting with sinners (2:13--17), causing His followers to be merry without fasting (2:18-22), caring for His followers' hunger rather than for religion's regulation (2:23-28), and caring for the relief of the suffering one rather than for the ritual of religion (3:1-6). All these matters should be found in our living as Christians today. If you live a life of God, after a period of time certain of your colleagues may experience the forgiveness of sins. Then these ones will enjoy the Lord as a feast, having the Lord Jesus as righteousness for their covering and as life for their filling and satisfaction. Then

such ones will have freedom. Before you came in contact with them, they were under condemnation and had no real joy, satisfaction, or freedom. But as a result of your gospel preaching, not merely by words but by life, the truth shines into them and they have the forgiveness of sins. This is the result of our living a life fully according to the New Testament economy of God.

A life that is fully according to and for God's New Testament economy is very different from religion, which emphasizes human effort. God's economy is altogether a matter of life.

ASPECTS OF A LIFE ACCORDING TO GOD

In 3:7-35 we see five auxiliary acts for the gospel service: avoiding the crowd's pressing (vv. 7-12), appointing the apostles to preach (vv. 13-19), not eating because of urgent need (vv. 20-21), binding Satan and plundering his house by the Holy Spirit (vv. 22-30), and not remaining in the relationship of the natural life but of the spiritual life (vv. 31-35). If we live a life according to God's New Testament economy, we shall stay away from the crowd and then pray in order to know God's will concerning others' living the way we are living. Furthermore, we shall care for God's need, not for our eating. We shall also bind the enemy and plunder his house. At the same time, we shall deny the natural relationship and remain in the relationship of the spiritual life. All these are aspects not of a life of ethics, morality, religion, or culture, but of a life that is of God and according to God. Such a life is outside religion, culture, and ethics. This is a life that lives out God as everything.

We need to be impressed with the fact that the Gospel of Mark is not merely a book of stories or a biography. The Gospel of Mark is a book that presents a life of God, a life that lives God and expresses Him. This is a life fully according to and for the New Testament economy of God.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FIFTY-SEVEN

A LIFE FULLY ACCORDING TO AND FOR GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

(6)

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:14-15; 4:3, 26, 29; 1 Pet. 1:23; 1 John 3:9; 1 Cor. 3:9; Rev. 14:14-16

In this message we shall consider a matter that is very mysterious. A mystery is something that cannot easily be understood. The mystery we shall consider in this message is the mystery of the Lord Jesus as the Sower, the seed, and the kingdom. The Sower, the seed, and the kingdom are all part of a wonderful, all-inclusive Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. As we shall see, in the Gospel of Mark the Sower is a person, the seed is a person, and the kingdom is a person.

THE LORD'S LIFE AND WORK

In Luke 17:20 the Lord was "questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God comes." In His answer He said to them, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, Look, here! Or, There! For behold, the kingdom of God is among you." When considered along with Luke 17:22-24, these verses prove that the kingdom of God is the Savior Himself, who was among the Pharisees when He was asked by them concerning the kingdom. Because the Lord Himself is the kingdom, wherever He is, there is the kingdom of God.

After the Lord Jesus was baptized, the Spirit descended upon Him. Then the Lord went forth in His move to work, to minister. We have seen that with Him there was no difference between life and work. His life was His work, and His work was His life. We may say that the Lord Jesus lived His work; He lived a ministry. The Lord

lived a life of preaching, teaching, casting out demons, healing the sick, and cleansing the lepers. With Him there was just one thing--His life, which was His work, His move, and His ministry. Whatever the Lord did, whatever He spoke, and wherever He went were all part of His life.

As the Lord Jesus moved on earth, living a life of God, He preached the gospel to the miserable people, He taught the truth to those in darkness, He cast out demons from the possessed ones, He healed the sick, and He cleansed the leper. This is portrayed in chapter one of the Gospel of Mark. Then in Mark 2 and 3 we see that the Lord Jesus brought people into the forgiveness of sins and into joyfully feasting with Himself as their righteousness to cover them outwardly and as their life to fill them inwardly. Then He became their satisfaction and liberation,

A MAN SPEAKING IN THE HOLY OF HOLIES

In chapter four of Mark the Lord Jesus went to the seashore. Mark 4:1 says, "And again He began to teach beside the sea; and a very great crowd was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat to sit in the sea, and all the crowd were on the land facing toward the sea." Here the boat signifies the church, the land signifies the Jewish nation, and the sea signifies the Gentiles.

For the Lord Jesus the boat in Mark 4 became His Holy of Holies. When some hear this, they may say, "How can you say that a boat became the Holy of Holies for the Lord Jesus? The Holy of Holies must be in the temple." To this I would say that whether a certain place is the Holy of Holies does not depend on the place itself; rather, it depends on God. If God is in a certain place, that place is the Holy of Holies. This means that, since the Lord Jesus is the very God, the boat in which He was speaking in Mark 4 was the Holy of Holies. When the Lord was speaking from the boat, it was actually God who was speaking. In the Old Testament God spoke in the Holy of Holies, from the covering of the ark. By the time of Mark 4, that Holy of Holies had been passed over by God, and

the new Holy of Holies was the boat where the Lord Jesus was.

If you do not believe this, it may be an indication that you still have not been terminated. If you have been terminated, you will see that in Mark 4 the disciples were with the Lord Jesus in the boat that was the Holy of Holies. Remember, the One in this boat speaking the word was actually the very God. The God who spoke in the Holy of Holies was now speaking in the boat. In this Holy of Holies a Man was speaking, and this Man was the speaking God.

THE LORD'S SOWING OF THE SEED

We have seen that in His gospel service, the Lord Jesus preached, taught, cast out demons, healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, and brought those whom He touched into the forgiveness of sins, and into a condition of feasting with Him, with joy, satisfaction, and freedom. It may have been that those who touched Him wondered what had actually happened to them. In chapter four we have a definition of what the Lord Jesus was doing in chapters one through three.

In 4:1, after ministering in the three foregoing chapters, the Lord Jesus got into a boat and taught the people "many things in parables" (v. 2). The first parable was the parable of the sower 14:1-20), which opens with the words, "Behold, the sower went out to sow" (v. 3). This indicates that in the first three chapters of the Gospel of Mark whatever the Lord did was a sowing of the seed. For example in 1:14-20 the Lord Jesus preached the gospel, saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has drawn near. Repent and believe in the gospel!" (v. 15). Since He preached the gospel, we may regard the Lord merely as a preacher. But the parable of the sower indicates that the Lord was a Sower. This means that in preaching the gospel He was not merely a preacher but also a Sower. There is a great difference between a sower and a preacher. Apparently the Lord Jesus was a preacher; actually He was a Sower.

The situation is the same regarding teaching the truth, casting out demons, healing the sick, and cleansing the leper. Apparently the Lord was a teacher; actually He was a Sower. Likewise, apparently He was One casting out demons, healing the sick, and cleansing the leper. But in doing all these things, He was actually a Sower. When He preached the gospel, taught the truth, cast out demons, healed the sick, and cleansed the leper, He was a Sower sowing the seed.

A SOWING LIFE

Mark 4 reveals that the life that lives according to God's New Testament economy is a sowing life. The Lord Jesus as the Sower sowed Himself as a seed into the people who were touched by Him. We may take the case of the healing of Peter's mother-in-law as an illustration. When the Lord Jesus came to Peter's mother-in-law, He healed her. Concerning this 1:31 says, "And coming to her, He raised her up, holding her hand; and the fever left her, and she served them." Do you think that here the Lord was doing nothing more than healing? To be sure, He was doing much more. That healing was actually a sowing. When the Lord healed Peter's mother-in-law, something of Himself was sown into her. Of course. at the time she probably was not conscious of anything being sown into her. Nevertheless, it is a fact, a reality, that something out from the sowing Savior had been imparted to her.

The Lord was also sowing the seed when He touched the leper and cleansed him (1:40-45). The leper said to the Lord, "If You art willing, You can cleanse me!" (v. 40). Moved with compassion, the Lord touched him and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed! And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed" (vv. 41-42). When the Lord Jesus touched the leper and cleansed him, do you not believe that something from Him was sown into the one who was cleansed? As the Lord was cleansing the leper, He was sowing Himself into him.

The cleansed leper and Peter's mother-in-law probably were not conscious of the fact that something had been

sown into them by the Lord. However a great change took place in their being. After Peter's mother-in-law was healed, she served, and after the leper was cleansed, he moved in a different way. This indicates that something of the Lord had been sown into them, even though they were not conscious of it and could not explain what had taken place. In chapter four of the Gospel of Mark the Lord reveals that what was imparted to those with whom He had come in contact was the seed sown into them by Himself as the Sower. The Sower, therefore, is the wonderful Person of the Lord Jesus.

THE SEED OF THE KINGDOM

In the parable of the sower there is no mention of the kingdom of God. But in the parable of the seed (4:26-29) the Lord Jesus speaks clearly of the kingdom. In verse 26 He says, "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed on the earth." This reveals that the kingdom of God is a seed.

Do you know of any Christian writings which point out that the kingdom of God is a seed? Most Bible teachers, when they come to the matter of the kingdom of God, would say that the kingdom is either a dispensation for God to exercise His government, or a sphere for God to exercise His authority to accomplish His purpose. Some would say that the kingdom of God was first among the children of Israel. However, when the Jews rejected the Lord Jesus, some say that the kingdom was suspended and will continue to be suspended until the coming age, the age of the kingdom. Furthermore, these teachers would say that the present age is not the kingdom age but is merely the church age. They say that the coming age, the age of the millennium, will be the age of the kingdom, which will be followed by the eternal kingdom in the new heaven and the new earth. Although I do not say that teachings such as these do not have ground in the Scriptures, I would call your attention to the fact that this is not what is taught concerning the kingdom in 4:26-29. Here the Lord's word reveals that the kingdom of God is a seed.

THE GOSPEL AND THE KINGDOM

The Gospel of Mark opens with these words: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." What is the gospel? Perhaps you would say the gospel is the glad tidings, the good news. This, of course, is correct. But what is the good news? When I was young, I was taught that the good news is what is spoken of in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that every one who believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." There can be no doubt that this certainly is good news. However, in the Gospel of Mark we do not read anything about God loving the world. Instead, 1:1 speaks of the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Then we are told in 1:14 that the Lord Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God. In His preaching He declared, "Repent and believe in the gospel!" There is not a word here that the Lord Jesus preached about God's love or that He said the time had come to believe in Him that we might have eternal life. In 1:15 the Lord Jesus said that the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has drawn near. Therefore, we need to repent and believe in the gospel.

If we read 1:14 and 15 carefully, we shall realize that the gospel is actually the kingdom of God. Verse 14 says that the Lord Jesus preached the gospel of God, and verse 15 says that the Lord declared that the kingdom of God had drawn near. Because the kingdom of God had drawn near, people should repent and believe in the gospel. Here we see that the gospel and the kingdom of God are synonymous. The kingdom is the gospel, and the gospel is the kingdom.

If the kingdom of God were only a sphere for God to exercise His authority or a dispensation for Him to administer His government, it is not likely that such a kingdom could be a gospel to us. But in Mark it is revealed that the kingdom of God is the gospel. When the Lord Jesus preached the gospel of God, He preached the kingdom of God.

A DEFINITION OF THE KINGDOM

What is the kingdom of God? Strictly speaking, the

kingdom of God is a Person, and this Person is the Son of God incarnated to be the Son of Man with the name Jesus Christ. First this wonderful Person came as the Sower. Second, He is the seed sown by Himself as the Sower. When the Sower sows the seed into us, this is the kingdom. We may say that, according to 1 Corinthians 3:9, the kingdom is God's farm. Therefore, the kingdom is the Sower sowing the seed into human beings. Today this kingdom is the farm of God, and this farm is the proper church life.

What is growing on God's farm? God's farm grows Christ. This is the concept not only of the Gospel of Mark, but also of other books in the New Testament. For example, in his first Epistle Peter says, "Having been regenerated, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the living and abiding word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23). Here we see that we have been born of God because we have the seed of God within us.

In the last book of the New Testament, Revelation, we have the harvest of the seed sown in the Gospels. In the Gospels the Lord Jesus was the Sower. But in Revelation 14 He will come as the Reaper. What was sown by the Lord in the Gospels grows in the Epistles. Eventually, it will ripen in Revelation 14, and there will be the harvest. Consider Revelation 14:14 and 15: "And I saw, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud One sitting like the Son of Man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, Send forth Your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe." This harvest will be the aggregate of the mature believers. Eventually, these believers will be kings with the Lord Jesus.

We have been emphasizing the fact that in the Gospel of Mark we see a life that lives according to God's New Testament economy. Whatever the Lord Jesus did in preaching, teaching, casting out demons, healing the sick, and cleansing the leper was according to the New

Testament economy of God. Now in chapter four of Mark we see that this life is a sowing life. The life that is according to and for God's New Testament economy is a life of sowing.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FIFTY-EIGHT

A LIFE FULLY ACCORDING TO AND FOR GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

(7)

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:1, 14-15; 4:1-20, 26-29

In the Gospel of Mark we see a Person living a life according to God's New Testament economy. This book does not reveal anything other than the Lord Jesus as this wonderful Person.

MATTERS THAT OCCUPY OUR ATTENTION

Let us now list a number of matters that have occupied people's attention throughout human history: culture, religion, ethics, morality, the improvement of character, philosophy, being scriptural, being spiritual, being holy, and being victorious. These ten items cover the thoughts, ideas, and concepts of all people, including Gentiles, Jews, and Christians. People everywhere have their minds occupied with culture, religion, ethics, morality, the improvement of character, and philosophy. In addition, Christians may be occupied with being scriptural, spiritual, holy, and victorious. Many books have been written by Christian teachers on how to be scriptural, spiritual, holy, and victorious.

According to the Gospel of Mark, the Lord Jesus did not teach culture, religion, ethics, morality, improvement of character, or philosophy. Neither did He help people to be more scriptural, spiritual, holy, or victorious. As we pointed out in a foregoing message, the Lord Jesus did not live in the kingdom of law or that of ethics; He lived altogether in another realm--the kingdom of God.

THE SOWER SOWING HIMSELF AS THE SEED OF LIFE

As the One who lived in the kingdom of God, how did the Lord Jesus live? What did He do? In chapter four of Mark we see that the Lord was a Sower and that He sowed Himself as the seed into people. In particular, He sowed Himself into Peter and the other disciples.

It was not an easy matter for the Lord Jesus to sow Himself as a seed into human beings. To sow seed into soil is easy, but for the Lord to sow living seed into people was difficult. This difficulty can be illustrated by the problem parents sometimes face in getting medicine into a sick child. Because a child may strongly resist, the parents may have to hold him down and open his mouth in order to put the medicine into him. In a similar way, the Lord Jesus may have had to use angels as helpers in sowing Himself as the seed into us. It may have been necessary for us to be put into a difficult situation before we opened to the Lord to receive Him as the divine seed. Praise Him that in spite of the difficulty, He has been sown into us!

The Gospel of Mark shows the Lord Jesus living and working in such a way as to sow Himself as seed into people. Mark is not a book of culture, religion, ethics, morality, improvement of character, or philosophy. Neither is it a book teaching us to be scriptural, spiritual, holy, and victorious. Instead, the Gospel of Mark is a book presenting the Sower sowing Himself into us as the seed of a life that lives according to God's New Testament economy.

It is possible that the thoughts even of the saints in the Lord's recovery may be occupied with the matters of how to be scriptural, spiritual, holy, and victorious. Do you not want to be holy? Do you not want to be spiritual and victorious? Books written by Christians emphasizing the need to be holy, spiritual, and victorious may quote verses from the Bible to support their teachings. However, the Gospel of Mark does not touch this field at all. This Gospel does not teach us how to be holy, spiritual, and victorious Instead, the Gospel of Mark presents the Lord as the One

sowing Himself into the disciples.

The Lord's close followers spent three and a half years with Him. During those years, He must have taught them many things. It is surprising that in the Gospel of Mark we do not find a hint concerning this. In this book we see that the Lord Jesus was continually sowing Himself into Peter and the other disciples. In chapter one the Lord saw Peter and his brother Andrew fishing. The Lord called them and, attracted by Him, they left all and followed Him (vv. 16-18). It may be that the Lord's sowing of the seed into Peter began at that time.

THE LORD'S SOWING HIMSELF INTO PETER

When was Peter saved? This is a difficult question to answer. Was Peter saved when he was called in chapter one of Mark? If you say that he was not saved then, I would ask, "How could Peter have been called without being saved? The Bible reveals that once we are called, we are saved." However, if we say that Peter was saved when he was called in Mark 1, we may wonder why he did not show any signs of being a saved one. Peter was selfish and natural. He was always in himself, not giving any indication that he had been saved.

Perhaps Peter was saved when his mother-in-law was healed, or when he declared that Jesus is the Christ, or when he saw the Lord Jesus transfigured on the mountain. But in none of these situations does Peter give any indication of being saved.

Peter told the Lord Jesus that even if the others would deny Him, he would never deny Him (14:29, 31). This might be a sign that Peter was saved by that time. However, soon afterward Peter denied the Lord Jesus three times. Then he went out and wept (14:72). Perhaps that was when he was saved. It certainly is difficult to determine the time Peter was saved.

From chapter one of Mark until the time the Lord Jesus in resurrection came to the disciples, breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22) was a long time of sowing. I believe that the Lord's

sowing of Himself into Peter began in Mark 1 when the Lord called him and he followed the Lord. This sowing continued until the resurrected Christ breathed on the disciples who had come together in a closed room. I believe that the Lord's sowing was complete at that time. One proof of this is that in chapter one of Acts Peter is a different person. No longer is he natural. In Acts 1 Peter truly bears the signs of having been saved by the Lord. My point here is that the Lord Jesus as the Sower went through a lengthy process to sow Himself into Peter and the other disciples.

In your experience has it not taken the Lord time to sow Himself into you? In asking this question I am not referring to salvation, regeneration, justification, or reconciliation in a doctrinal way. I am speaking concerning our enjoyment of God's salvation experientially. Some may think that for the Lord to take three and a half years to accomplish the sowing of Himself into Peter was too long. However, to the Lord this is not long at all, for to Him a thousand years are as one day (2 Pet. 3:8).

Instead of emphasizing the Lord's teaching and training of the disciples, the Gospel of Mark gives us a clear view of how the Lord was doing the work of sowing Himself into them. From chapter one through chapter sixteen the Lord was sowing the seed into the "earth" of the disciples. He even brought this earth with Him wherever He went, all the while sowing Himself into it.

CHRIST IN US

The crucial point is that God's New Testament economy is not a matter of improving our culture, religion, ethics, morality, character, or philosophy. Neither is the New Testament economy of God merely a matter of helping us to improve in being more scriptural, spiritual, holy, and victorious. God's New Testament economy is to sow Himself into us so that we may live a life according to His economy.

Is it merely a doctrine to you that God in His economy is sowing a wonderful Person, Jesus Christ the Son of

God, into you? Is the Lord not a real and living Person within you? Some Christians oppose the fact that Jesus Christ actually dwells in the believers. They claim that He is in the heavens and is represented in us by the Holy Spirit. But from the Word of God and our experience we know that Jesus Christ is not only in the heavens but is also in us. He dwells in us as the life that lives according to God's New Testament economy.

FOCUSING ON THE WONDERFUL PERSON OF CHRIST

If we have seen this vision, it will control us and deliver us from culture, religion, ethics, and the other items that may distract us from God's New Testament economy. It took the Lord a long time to rescue me from these things, especially from the preoccupation with being spiritual, holy, and victorious. I believe that many among us still aspire to be scriptural, spiritual, holy, and victorious. Perhaps even today you prayed, "O Lord, give me a victorious day. Yesterday, Lord, I was not victorious. I ask that today I shall be victorious." As long as we who seek the Lord are not rescued from these things, we shall be frustrated in experiencing the wonderful Person of Christ and enjoying the life that is absolutely according to God's New Testament economy.

Often in a wedding ceremony the minister, according to Ephesians 5, will charge the wife to submit to her husband and the husband to love his wife. I do not know of anyone who has succeeded in fulfilling this charge. What husband can say that in himself he is able to love his wife as Christ loved the church, and what wife can claim to be fully submissive to her husband? It is not God's economy that husbands try to love their wives and wives endeavor to submit to their husbands. We wish to emphasize the fact that God's economy is to sow Jesus Christ into our being. When Christ lives in a married brother according to God's New Testament economy, there will be no need for him to try to love his wife, for he will love her spontaneously. Likewise, if Christ lives in a married sister, she will

automatically submit to her husband. The vital matter is to be filled with Christ.

The ten items covered earlier in this message may be divided into two fields: culture, religion, ethics, morality, improvement of character, and philosophy are in one field, and being spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious are in another field. Most of today's Christians are in one of these fields. Therefore, my burden is to direct the way out of both fields into a different field--the Son of God, Jesus Christ. When we are in this field, we are in the kingdom of God.

As an illustration, let me tell you about a certain sister who tried very hard to submit to her husband. Bothered by the fact that she was not able to submit, she spoke with me about her situation. I encouraged her to forget about trying to submit and turn her attention to Christ. I spoke with her about this two or three times, but she still did not receive any help. The last time we talked about this matter, I said to her, "You need to give up the thought of submitting to your husband and pay attention to Christ. You need to praise the Lord." She asked me how she could praise the Lord when she was defeated in her efforts to submit to her husband. I told her that praise should come first and that victory would follow. However, her concept was that victory should come before praise. I went on to speak to her concerning Christ being her Savior in this matter. Eventually, the light shone upon her, and she was helped to focus on Christ and not on submission.

LIVING ACCORDING TO GOD'S ECONOMY

Many saints are still concerned with being spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious. As we have seen, these things are not God's economy. God's economy is to sow into us a Person who is real, living, and present. This is the reason that the New Testament tells us that through resurrection the Lord has become a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). The Lord as the Sower has sown Himself as the life-giving Spirit into us. The life-giving Spirit within us is the seed that has been sown into our being.

Recently we have seen that the Gospel of Mark

presents a life that is fully according to and for God's New Testament economy. This life is not a matter of culture, religion, ethics, morality, improvement of character, or human philosophy. Neither is this life merely a matter of being scriptural, spiritual, holy, and victorious. I believe that the saints in the Lord's recovery will live this kind of life and in the meetings will give testimonies concerning it.

We need to be impressed with the fact that in His economy God does not care for anything other than Jesus Christ. God's New Testament economy is to sow this Person into our being so that we may live a life that is fully according to God's economy. Praise the Lord that the living Person of Christ has been sown into us! Now we can live according to God's New Testament economy. May we all pray concerning this life and have more fellowship regarding it.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE FIFTY-NINE

A LIFE FULLY ACCORDING TO AND FOR GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

(8)

Scripture Reading: Mark 8:27-31; 9:30-31; 10:32-34; John 20:31; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Gal. 2:20

The Gospel of Mark is a biography of a Person who lived according to God's New Testament economy. In order to understand this biography, we need to realize that every event recorded in it is meaningful. We thank the Lord that the remainder of the New Testament, especially the Epistles of Paul, helps us to interpret the details of the Lord's biography in Mark. The messages given in the Life-studies of Paul's Epistles will also help us understand the significance of the Gospel of Mark as a biography of a life fully according to and for God's New Testament economy.

In a previous message we pointed out that in chapter eight of Mark we have a revelation of Christ, His death, and His resurrection. The Epistles of Paul also emphasize Christ with His death and resurrection. In fact, one verse, Philippians 3:10, covers all three: "To know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." Here we see Christ the Person and also His death and resurrection.

In recent messages we have covered the first four chapters of Mark's Gospel. We have seen that when the Lord Jesus was baptized, the Spirit of God descended upon Him. From that time onward, as recorded in chapters one and two, the Lord Jesus lived a life of preaching the gospel, teaching the truth, casting out demons, healing the sick, and cleansing the lepers. He brought forgiveness to people, and He also brought them into the enjoyment of

Himself as righteousness outwardly and life inwardly. In addition He brought them into His satisfaction and into liberation. Furthermore, the Lord Jesus lived in a way to be one with God, to bind God's enemy, and to deny the natural relationship and remain in the relationship of the spiritual life.

In chapter four the Lord reveals the significance of His living in the three foregoing chapters. The significance of the Lord's living is that He is the Sower sowing Himself as a seed into people. The Lord sowed Himself into those who were touched by Him. By His sowing Himself as a seed into others, a kingdom was brought into existence. This kingdom will grow, develop, and ripen into a harvest.

FOUR CASES OF HEALING

In chapters one through three of the Gospel of Mark there are four cases of healing: the healing of Simon's mother-in-law, who was sick with a fever (1:30-31); the cleansing of the leper (1:40-45); the healing of the paralytic who was carried to the Lord (2:1-12); and the healing of the man with a withered hand (3:1-6). These four cases describe our spiritual condition before we were saved. We were those who were sick of a fever, those whose "temperature" was abnormally high. Today every fallen human being is sick with a fever. Before we were saved, we also were lepers; we were unclean, defiled, and contaminated to the uttermost. Furthermore, as unsaved persons, we were paralytics. With respect to God, we were altogether paralyzed. Because we were absolutely paralyzed, we were not able to do anything for God. As paralyzed ones, we could not walk. We also were those with a withered hand. Therefore, we were sick with a fever, we were contaminated lepers, we were paralytics unable to walk, and we were those with a withered hand, unable to work. Although these are separate cases in the Gospel of Mark, spiritually speaking, they describe the condition of every human being. Thus, these cases portray the situation of a particular person.

PETER AS OUR REPRESENTATIVE

Have you ever realized that in the Gospel of Mark there is one who is our representative? The one who represents us is Peter. According to the record in Mark, Peter was the first to be called by the Lord. After he was called, he was always taking the lead. He even took the lead to deny the Lord Jesus. We may even say that, in a sense, Peter was crucified before the Lord Jesus was. Then after the Lord's resurrection Peter's name was mentioned by the angel: "But go, tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you into Galilee" (16:7).

Because in the Gospel of Mark Peter is our representative, all the cases described in this book may be taken as an aggregate and given the name of Peter. It is significant that the first case of healing in this Gospel was the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. In a spiritual sense, all the cases in this book are related to Peter. This means that Peter was sick of a fever and that Peter was the blind Bartimaeus at the gate of Jericho. Peter needed to be healed of his fever and of his blindness.

HEALINGS OF PARTICULAR ORGANS

The four cases of healing in chapters one through three are all in the same category, the category of general healings. After chapter four the Lord Jesus goes on to carry out further healings. But these healings are of particular organs: the hearing organ, the speaking organ, and the seeing organ. In order to contact others, we must have these organs. If we are deaf, dumb, and blind, what contact can we have with others? We could not have any contact at all since we would not be able to hear, speak, or see. As our representative, Peter was healed of his fever, leprosy, paralysis, and withered condition; however, still he could not hear, speak, or see.

After the four cases of general healing, we have in Mark four cases of the healing of specific organs. In 7:31-37 we have the healing of a deaf and dumb man; in 8:22-26, the healing of a blind man in Bethsaida; in 9:14-29, the healing of a boy who had a dumb spirit; and in 10:46-52,

the healing of blind Bartimaeus. In these four cases three particular organs are healed: the hearing organ, the speaking organ, and the seeing organ.

TWO CASES OF BLINDNESS

Let us consider briefly the two cases of the healing of blindness. When they came to Bethsaida, a blind man was brought to the Lord Jesus. "Taking hold of the hand of the blind man, He led him forth outside the village; and having spit in his eyes and laid His hands on him, He asked him, Do you see anything?" (8:23). The man looked up and said, "I behold men; I see them as trees walking" (v. 24). Then the Lord laid His hands upon the man's eyes again, and "he looked intently and was restored, and he saw all things clearly." Is this not a picture of our spiritual condition? When we first saw the Lord, we did not see Him clearly. We did not see spiritual things exactly as they are. Then after further contact with the Lord, we began to see all things clearly.

The second case of the healing of blindness is the healing of blind Bartimaeus. When the Lord Jesus asked Bartimaeus what he wanted Him to do for him, the blind man said, "Rabboni, that I may recover my sight!" (10:51). Then Jesus said to him, "Go, your faith has healed you" (v. 52), and immediately Bartimaeus recovered his sight and followed the Lord on the road (v. 52). This is the last case of healing recorded in the Gospel of Mark.

OUR NEED FOR PARTICULAR HEALING

Spiritually speaking, our relationship with God depends upon the hearing organ, the speaking organ, and the seeing organ. If we cannot hear God's word, if we cannot talk to God, and if we cannot see God's vision, we cannot have any relationship with Him. If such were our situation, we would be like a dumb idol standing before God. Therefore, we need the healing of our hearing, speaking, and seeing organs.

The New Testament reveals that, spiritually speaking, we were dead, but the Lord Jesus has made us alive. When He came to us and sowed Himself into us, we were

enlivened. We were then healed of our fever, leprosy, paralysis, and withered condition.

Praise the Lord that we have been made alive, that we have been regenerated! However, after being regenerated, we may still be deaf, dumb, and blind, in need of the Lord's particular healing. Was this not your experience with the Lord? I can testify that it was my experience. I was regenerated in 1925, but it was not until 1932 that my ears began to hear God's voice, my eyes began to see His vision, and my mouth was opened to speak for God. I praise Him that today, through His mercy, I can hear, speak, and see.

TWO CATEGORIES OF HEALING

We need to have a clear understanding of the two categories of healing in Mark. The four cases in the first category are related to being enlivened. The four cases in the second category are related to the recovery of the crucial organs of hearing, speaking, and seeing, the spiritual organs necessary for contacting God.

In 5:21-43 we have the healing of a woman with a flow of blood and the raising up of a dead girl. The case of the woman with the flow of blood is a case of the leaking out of life. Since this woman's case is merged with that of the girl and since the twelve years of the woman's sickness equal the age of the girl and both are females, these cases may be considered the case of one person. In this view, the girl was born, so to speak, in the woman's death-sickness and died of it. When the woman's death-sickness was healed by the Savior, the girl rose up from death.

In 7:24-30 we have the case of casting a demon out of a Syrophoenician woman's daughter. We are told in 7:26 that "the woman was a Greek, Syrophoenician by race." She was Syrian by tongue, Phoenician by race (see Acts 21:2-3), and--the Phoenicians being descendants of the Canaanites--a Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:22). What made her a Greek--religion, marriage, or something else--is difficult to discover. Although this woman was threefold a Gentile, in the sight of God she was a "little dog" whom

He loved (vv. 28-29).

If we put all these cases together, realizing that they make up a composite portrait of Peter, our representative, we shall see that these cases indicate that Peter was fully healed and recovered. In chapter two of Acts, Peter is not only alive; he is strong in life and in the ability to hear, speak, and see.

THE CONDITION OF MAN'S HEART

In 7:1-23 the Lord Jesus exposes the condition of man's heart. In this section of Mark the Lord is a surgeon who opens our inner being and exposes its true condition. In 7:20 the Lord says, "That which goes out of a man, that defiles a man." Then He lists a number of evil things that proceed "out of the heart of men" (vv. 21-22). After this, He concludes, "All these wicked things proceed from within, and they defile a man" (v. 23). We all need to see man's inward condition. We all need to realize that there is nothing good in the heart of fallen man.

TWO CASES OF FEEDING

After the exposure of the heart, there are two cases of feeding: the feeding of the Gentiles as the "little dogs under the table" (7:27-30) and the feeding of four thousand (8:1-9). In 7:27 the Lord Jesus said to the Syrophoenician woman, "Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." The woman answered, "Yes, Lord, but even the little dogs under the table eat of the little children's crumbs" (7:28). The Jews were regarded as God's children, and here the Gentiles are portrayed as "little dogs," not as wild dogs, but as pet dogs, little dogs under the family table. As the children were eating at the table, the pet dogs were waiting under the table for any crumbs that might fall. Those crumbs became the portion of the pet dogs. Here we see that the Lord is not only the children's bread on the table, but also the crumbs under the table. He is even the portion of the "little dogs," the Gentiles.

In 8:1-9 we have the feeding of the four thousand. After the people ate and were satisfied, "they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets" (v. 8).

THE UNVEILING OF CHRIST WITH HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION

In 8:27--9:1 we have the unveiling of Christ with His death and resurrection. Before that time, the Lord Jesus had not been unveiled to His disciples. They followed Him blindly, without realizing who He is. Then at the end of chapter eight the Lord brought them away from the religious atmosphere of Jerusalem to the clear atmosphere of Caesarea Philippi. On the way "He questioned His disciples, saying to them, Who do men say that I am?" (8:27). They replied, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but others, one of the prophets" (v. 28). Then the Lord questioned them, "But you, who do you say that I am?" (v. 29). Peter took the lead to declare, "You are the Christ!" He saw the vision that Jesus is the Christ. Immediately, the Lord went on to speak to them concerning His death and resurrection. Therefore, here we have the unveiling of the Person of Christ and also the unveiling of His death and resurrection. In these verses we have the crucial revelation of the Person of Christ with His death and resurrection.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE SIXTY

A LIFE FULLY ACCORDING TO AND FOR GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

(9)

Scripture Reading: Mark 8:27-31; 9:30-31; 10:32-34; John 20:31: 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Gal. 2:20

In 8:27--9:1 the Lord Jesus is recognized as being the Christ. Then He goes on to unveil for the first time His death and resurrection. It is very significant that this unveiling comes immediately after the healing of a blind man in Bethsaida (8:22-26). Before the Lord Jesus unveiled Himself, He healed a blind man. This indicates that in order to see Christ and His death and resurrection, we need to be healed of our blindness.

Although the Lord Jesus healed the blindness of His disciples, they still were not able to see who He was. Neither could they understand His death and resurrection.

If we compare 8:27--9:1 to the parallel section in Matthew 16, we shall see three points of difference. First, in 8:29 Peter says, "You are the Christ!" But in Matthew 16:16 he says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Mark does not include here the matter of Jesus being the Son of the living God. Second, in Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus says, "I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." Mark does not record anything about the Lord's building the church upon this rock. Third, Matthew 16:19 says, "I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens, and whatever you bind on the earth shall be what has been bound in the heavens, and whatever you loose on the earth shall be what has been loosed in the heavens." Mark has no record of this. The reason for the differences is that Mark simply

gives us a full biography of the Lord. Mark is not concerned with so many doctrinal points.

ANOINTED TO IMPART THE TRIUNE GOD TO GOD'S PEOPLE

We have seen that in 8:29 Peter received the revelation that Jesus is the Christ. What is the meaning of the title "the Christ"? What is the significance of this anglicized Greek word? We know that in Greek *Christos* means the anointed one. According to the types in the Old Testament, a person was always anointed for a particular purpose. What, then, is the purpose of the Lord's being the Christ, the anointed One? For what purpose was He anointed?

Some may say that the Lord was anointed to accomplish God's purpose, to be a King, and to be a Priest. When I was young, I was taught by the Brethren that the title Christ means that the Lord Jesus was anointed by God to carry out God's commission. The Lord was anointed to accomplish God's purpose and to achieve His goal. This is true, and I certainly believe it. Nevertheless, there is still something lacking in this understanding of the significance of the title Christ.

The Lord Jesus was anointed by God to fulfill God's commission. A crucial part of this commission is to impart the Triune God into God's chosen people. Therefore, as the anointed One Christ had the commission to impart the Triune God into His people.

The Gospel of Mark does not emphasize the Lord's being anointed to be the King, the Priest, or the Prophet. Rather, in this Gospel we see that the Lord Jesus was anointed by God to fulfill the commission to sow God into His people. Hence, the Lord is the Christ, the anointed One to do the work of sowing.

Concerning Christ, the anointed One, Paul says, "But He who firmly attaches us with you unto Christ and has anointed us is God, who has also sealed us and given the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor. 1:21-22). Here we see that God has attached us all to Christ, the anointed One. Here we do not have any indication that the

commission of this anointed One is to be a king or a prophet. The commission of Christ, God's anointed, is to anoint us with God as the element that seals us with Him and becomes a pledge of God as our portion. This commission is not related to the kingship or the priesthood. This commission is to sow the Triune God into our being and thereby to impart the divine life into us. Have you ever realized that the title Christ is for the carrying out of such a commission?

Probably you have heard the teachings that emphasize the fact that, as God's anointed One, Christ was anointed to carry out God's commission, to establish God's kingdom, and to be a King, a Priest, and a Prophet. Probably you have never heard before that Christ was anointed by God with the particular commission of imparting the divine life to us by sowing Himself into our being. Christ was anointed to sow the Triune God as the seed of life into us. According to the New Testament revelation, this is the first aspect of Christ's commission, and we all need to see it. The first aspect of the commission Christ received from the Father was not to be a king or a prophet; it was to be a Sower, the One sowing the Triune God into us.

THE LORD'S PERSON AND COMMISSION

John 20:31 says, "These have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." For years I was bothered by this verse. I could not understand why John 20:31 spoke not only of the Son of God but also of the Christ. I had been taught that Christ was God's anointed One to carry out God's commission to establish the kingdom. Why was it necessary to believe that Jesus is the Christ in order to have eternal life? I thought that as long as I believed in the Son of God, this was sufficient for having eternal life. John 20:31 is a strong verse telling us that we must believe in Christ in order to have eternal life. The New Testament says that we have eternal life by believing in the Son of God (John 3:16). Eventually, I came to understand that the Son of God refers to the Lord's

Person and that Christ refers to His commission. We need to believe that Jesus is the Son of God because His Person as the Son of God is a matter of eternal life. But in order for the Son of God to carry out His commission to impart Himself into us as life, He must be God's anointed One. It is by being the Christ that the Lord Jesus imparts Himself into us as the Son of God so that we may have eternal life.

THE DISCIPLES' UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVENTS RECORDED IN MARK

In the Gospel of Mark the Lord Jesus does not mainly train the disciples or teach them. Instead, He brings them with Him wherever He goes so that they may observe His living. They heard what the Lord said, and they saw what He did. They observed how He dealt with many different cases. At the time, the interpretation of these cases was not given. They were amazed when He went before them to Jerusalem: "Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid" (10:32).

Wherever the Lord Jesus went in the Gospel of Mark, He brought the disciples with Him. They were with Him when He entered Jerusalem, they were with Him when He cleansed the temple, they were with Him when He lodged in Bethany, they were with Him when He ate the Passover feast and established His table, and they were with Him when He was betrayed and arrested.

After the Lord's death, resurrection, and ascension, the disciples came to understand the significance of all that had happened according to the record in the Gospel of Mark. In his first Epistle Peter says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has regenerated us unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). This verse indicates that Peter's eyes were opened and that he was full of understanding of what the Lord had done with him.

After the day of Pentecost, Peter's earlier experiences with the Savior became understandable to him. Perhaps

Peter said to himself, "Now I know why my Lord marched boldly to Jerusalem. Now I see that I was included when He was judged and crucified. When He was crucified and buried, I was crucified and buried with Him. When He was resurrected, I was resurrected with Him. Then He was carrying me; now I carry Him, for He is in me and I am in Him. From the time the Lord called me, He began to put me into Him and also to sow Himself into me. Praise the Lord that now He is in me and I am in Him! The Lord and I are one!"

Some may wonder how we know that Peter and the other disciples later came to have such an understanding of the events recorded in Mark. Our basis for saying this is what is written in the Epistles. The New Testament Epistles are the interpretation of the biography of the Lord Jesus in the Gospel of Mark.

THE BLINDNESS OF THE LORD'S DISCIPLES

In the Gospel of Mark the Lord's disciples were blind and did not understand. In 8:31 He taught them clearly concerning His death and resurrection: "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise." Although He spoke such a clear word, the disciples did not understand Him.

Because the Lord's disciples did not receive the unveiling of His death and resurrection the first time, He spoke to them about it again in 9:31: "For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, The Son of Man is being delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He is killed, after three days, He will rise." Verse 32 says that "they did not understand what He was saying, and they were afraid to question Him."

In 9:33 and 34 we have a further indication of how blind the disciples were and how unable they were to understand His word concerning His death and resurrection. After the Lord and the disciples came into Capernaum, He questioned them, "What were you

reasoning about on the road?" (v. 33). They were silent, "for they had argued with one another on the road who was greater." How blind they were! The Lord had told them definitely that He was to be killed and then would rise after three days, but they did not understand a word. In fact, immediately after He unveiled His death and resurrection to them the second time, they argued with one another regarding who was greater.

In 10:32 the Lord Jesus went up to Jerusalem with His disciples. In 10:33 and 34 we have the third unveiling of the Lord's death and resurrection: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they shall mock Him and spit at Him, and shall scourge Him, and kill Him; and after three days He will rise." Immediately after He spoke this clear word, James and John said to Him, "Teacher, we desire that whatever we ask You, You will do for us" (10:35). When He asked them what they wanted Him to do for them, they said, "Grant to us that we may sit, one on Your right, and one on Your left, in Your glory" (vv. 36-37). When the others heard this, "they began to be indignant about James and John" (v. 41). This indicates that the disciples were not able to understand the Lord's unveiling of His death and resurrection.

OUR NEED TO BE BROUGHT TO THE CROSS

Even though the disciples were so blind and lacking in understanding, the Lord Jesus would not swerve from His goal. It was His intention to bring the disciples with Him to the cross. He knew that when He was crucified, they would be crucified with Him.

The request of James and John to sit at the Lord's right and left in His glory and the indignation of the ten proves that they all were blind and in need of healing. It is significant, therefore, that the very next section in Mark concerns the healing of blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52). Blind

Bartimaeus represents all the disciples, including us. We also are blind and need the Lord's healing. Proof of our blindness consists in the fact that we may listen to message after message without seeing anything. Instead of seeing the Lord's revelation, we may continue to hold on to our concept. We may not know what it means to die with Christ and to participate in His resurrection. Surely we need to be brought to the cross.

Apparently, when the Lord Jesus was crucified, He was crucified alone. Actually, in the sight of God, all the disciples, including us, were crucified with Christ. We know this from what is revealed in the Epistles.

As we consider the disciples, we see that each one was peculiar. If we consider ourselves honestly, we shall realize that we all are peculiar and even abnormal. What shall we do about our situation? We do not need to do anything because the Lord has already done what was necessary. He has brought us into His death. He has crucified us all with Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE SIXTY-ONE

A LIFE FULLY ACCORDING TO AND FOR

GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

(10)

Scripture Reading: Mark 9:1-8; 16:20; Phil. 1:21; Gal. 20: Col. 3:4

The entire New Testament is a book about a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospels are biographies of this Person, and the remainder of the New Testament is the definition and explanation of this Person. We thank the Lord for the biography of the Lord Jesus presented in the Gospel of Mark. However, we need to spend much time in reading the Epistles in order to see the definition of the life recorded in Mark. If we read only the Gospel of Mark, we shall see many of the events that took place during the Lord's life, but we shall not know the meaning of these events. But when we come to the Epistles, we are enlightened concerning these things.

CHRIST WITH HIS DEATH, RESURRECTION, AND ASCENSION

In the Epistles of Paul we have a broad view of Christ with His death and resurrection. In his Epistles Paul indicates clearly that Christ is all-inclusive. For example, Paul tells us not only that Christ is the Head of the universal new man; He also says that Christ is the Body (1 Cor. 12:12). In Colossians 3:11 Paul says that in the new man Christ is all the members and is in all the members. From these verses we see that Christ, the anointed One of God, is all-inclusive.

Paul also reveals clearly that Christ's death is all-inclusive. Paul tells us that we were crucified with Christ

and in Christ (Gal. 2:20). In Romans 6:6 Paul declares that our old man was crucified with Christ. These verses indicate that Christ's death on the cross was not merely the death of an individual. Because Christ is all-inclusive, His death was also all-inclusive. How could such an all-inclusive One die only as an individual and not experience an all-inclusive death? There is no indication in the Gospel of Mark that Christ died an all-inclusive death. But in the Epistles as a God-inspired definition and explanation of Christ with His death and resurrection we see that His death certainly was all-inclusive.

In the Epistles of Paul we also see that we were included in Christ's resurrection and ascension. In Ephesians 2:6 Paul says that God "raised us up together and seated us together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." Therefore. in the sight of God, we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies. As God's chosen people, we all have been put into Christ (1 Cor. 1:30). Since Christ is in the heavenlies, we also are in the heavenlies. We all need to see from the Epistles that Christ and His death, resurrection, and ascension are all-inclusive.

INCLUDED IN THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

According to Mark 10:32, when the Lord Jesus was going to Jerusalem, He brought His disciples with Him. He included them in all that He was doing. Judas was the only disciple who did not continue with the Lord until the end. After the Passover feast, the Lord Jesus exposed Judas, and then Judas left. As a Jew, he had the right to enjoy the Passover feast. But because he had not been chosen by God to remain with the Lord, he had no share in the Lord's supper. All the other disciples experienced the supper and were included in the Lord's death and resurrection.

When the Lord Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, His disciples were with Him. Peter was even so bold as to take out his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant (14:47). In his boldness Peter caused

trouble for the Lord and made it necessary for Him to heal the servant's ear. In a sense, Peter was crucified before the Lord Jesus was. The Lord was crucified at Golgotha, but Peter was crucified in the courtyard of the Praetorium.

The point we are emphasizing here is that the Lord Jesus brought His disciples through all the steps that led to His death and resurrection, and then He included them in His death and resurrection. If we understand the narration of the Gospel of Mark according to what is revealed in the Epistles of Paul, we shall see that not only those disciples but we also were included in the death and resurrection of Christ.

When some hear that we were included in Christ's death and resurrection, they may say, "How is it possible that we were included in the Lord's death and resurrection? We were not even born when these events took place." According to man's way of thinking, we could not have been included. But God's way of thinking, which is according to His eternal view, is different. According to God's understanding, we were crucified and resurrected with Christ even before we were born. Although we cannot understand this according to our natural mind, it is nevertheless a fact.

A BIOGRAPHY OF THE BELIEVERS

When we study the Gospel of Mark, we are actually studying our own biography. This means that the biography of Jesus is also our biography. In the words of a hymn, "He is my history," and "His life is my experience" (*Hymns,* #949). Therefore, the biography narrated in Mark is not only a biography of the individual Jesus but also a biography of the believers.

In particular, the Gospel of Mark is a biography of Peter, our representative. Peter is present in the first chapter of Mark, and his name is specifically mentioned in the last chapter: "But go, tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you into Galilee" (16:7). Furthermore, the cases in this book are a composite portrait of us as represented by Peter. For example, on the Mount of

Transfiguration Peter said, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. And let us make three tabernacles--one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (9:5). Because Peter is our representative, his speaking here is also our speaking. Likewise, when Peter denied the Lord three times, that was also our threefold denial of the Lord. The angel's word concerning Peter in 16:7 is also a word concerning us. As we read this verse, it is correct to insert our name in the place of Peter's name, since we are represented by him.

From the time Peter was called by the Lord Jesus in 1:16 and 17, he was captured by Him and was always with Him. Along with James and John, he was with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration. This indicates that wherever the Lord Jesus went, Peter went with Him, for the Lord brought Peter with Him.

Do you believe that when the Lord Jesus was crucified He left Peter and the other disciples? No, when the Lord Jesus was crucified and buried, Peter, the representative of us all, was crucified with Him. Moreover, the Lord Jesus was not resurrected alone. According to God's point of view, which is beyond the elements of space and time, we all were included in Christ's resurrection.

PUT INTO CHRIST BY GOD

First Corinthians 1:30 says that it is of God that we are in Christ. When were we put into Christ by God? Ephesians 1:4 says that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. This indicates that in eternity God chose us in Christ. That must have been the starting point of God's putting us into Christ. Therefore, we were put into Christ by God when He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

One day the Christ in whom we were chosen by God in eternity came to us and called us. In chapter one of the Gospel of Mark Christ called Peter (1:16-18). Here the Lord seems to be saying, "Peter, I am the Christ in whom you were chosen by God the Father. Now I come to you to carry out the Father's choice. He has already put you into Me. Why do you remain here fishing? Come, follow Me."

The Father had selected Peter in Christ before the foundation of the world. Thus, from God's view in eternity, Peter was already in Christ. But in Mark 1 the Lord came to Peter in order to carry out the Father's choice.

From the time the Lord called Peter, He brought him with Him wherever He went. When the Lord was arrested and judged, Peter also was arrested and judged. When the Lord was crucified, resurrected, and exalted, Peter also was crucified, resurrected, and exalted.

If we had only the Gospel of Mark, it would not be possible for us to have such an understanding of Peter's relationship to the Lord. But in the Epistles we see that Christ died on the cross as an all-inclusive One, as the One who included in Himself all whom God had chosen. Therefore, God's chosen ones were included in Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. We all need to see this.

THE LORD'S CONTINUATION

The life the Lord Jesus lived is now our life. Today we are His expansion, increase, and continuation, and we should continue to live the kind of life He lived.

After Christ's ascension, His disciples continued His life, a life of preaching, teaching, casting out demons, healing the sick, and cleansing the lepers. This is the significance of 16:20: "But those went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the accompanying signs." Here we have the continuation of the life of the Lord Jesus recorded in the Gospel of Mark. This life, a life according to and for God's New Testament economy, has not ceased, for it is continued by those who believe in the Lord.

In the past nineteen centuries, many matters have come in to frustrate, damage, and even replace in the lives of Christians the unique life that is according to God's New Testament economy. These hindering matters include culture, religion, ethics, morality, philosophy, the improvement of character, and the effort to be spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious.

We need to have a clear view of the kind of life we should be living. Are you living a life of culture and religion? A life of ethics, morality, philosophy, and the improvement of character? Are you trying to be spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious? All of us have been distracted from God's economy by certain of these things. Where can you find Christians today who are not living a life of one or more of these ten items?

GOOD THINGS REPLACING THE TREE OF LIFE

All Christians have been frustrated and damaged by the good that is related to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The tree that is versus the tree of life is not merely the tree of the knowledge of evil; it is the tree of the knowledge of both good and evil. In fact, the word "good" is mentioned before evil in Genesis 2:17. This indicates that good things as well as evil things can keep us from enjoying the tree of life. In our experience as Christians, good things may actually hinder us much more than evil things. Those who love the Lord may not touch what is evil, but day by day they may allow something good to replace the tree of life in their experience. Are not culture, religion, ethics, morality, philosophy, and the improvement of character good things? Certainly they are. To be sure, trying to be spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious is good. Nevertheless, anything apart from the life-giving Spirit is a frustration to the life that is fully according to and for God's New Testament economy.

God has put us into Christ not that we may live a life of good things, but that we may live a life that is uniquely, wholly, and absolutely of Christ. God has put us into Christ so that we may live a life of Christ to carry out His New Testament economy.

Although more than nineteen centuries have passed since Christ's ascension, He still has not come back. God's people are not yet ready for the Lord's coming. For centuries those who love the Lord Jesus have been hindered by different kinds of good things. These good

things have occupied those who love the Lord and seek Him. Christians who love God and seek the Lord do not care for worldly things. Once they have been caught by the Lord to love Him and seek Him, they may be hindered by things they think are related to being spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious. Some Christians are preoccupied with ethics, morality, and improvement of character; others are distracted from the Lord by their efforts to be spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious. How few really care for the living Person of Christ Himself!

THE LIFE FOR GOD'S ECONOMY

We have emphasized the fact that the Gospel of Mark presents a portrait of a life that is fully according to and for God's New Testament economy. In eternity past God the Father put us into the One who lived such a life. Now we should be the continuation of this life. This means that the life we live should not be a life of culture, religion, ethics, morality, philosophy, or improvement of character. It should not even be a life of trying to be spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious. The life we live today should be Christ Himself. Only a life that is Christ is fully according to the New Testament economy of God. Any other kind of life, no matter how good it may be, is short of God's economy.

In Galatians, Philippians, and Colossians Paul deals with certain things that hinder us from living Christ. In Galatians and Philippians we see that the religion founded according to God's Word was keeping the believers from living Christ. The hindrance dealt with in Colossians is philosophy, perhaps a kind of Gnosticism. Galatians and Philippians deal with the frustration caused by Judaism, and Colossians deals with the frustration caused by philosophy. We may say that this religion and philosophy were the highest products of man's culture. But these were the very things that were keeping God's chosen people from living Christ. Therefore, in Philippians Paul declared, "To me to live is Christ" (1:21). In Galatians 2:20 he said, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who

live, but Christ lives in me." Then in Colossians 3:4 he spoke of "Christ our life."

As we consider the life portrayed in the Gospel of Mark and the definition of this life in the Epistles of Paul, we need to see the kind of life we should have today. This picture needs to direct, preserve, and control us in a life that is fully according to and for God's New Testament economy. As those who have been brought through all the chapters of the Gospel of Mark, we should be the continuation of the life presented in this Gospel.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE SIXTY-TWO

A LIFE FULLY ACCORDING TO AND FOR GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

(11)

Scripture Reading: Mark 8:27-31; 9:2-8

Many Christians do not realize that the Gospel of Mark gives us a biography of a life that is fully according to and for God's New Testament economy. The New Testament economy of God is for God to dispense Himself into His chosen people to make them sons of God and members of Christ for the formation of the Body of Christ to express the Triune God. This is a simple definition of the wonderful matter of God's New Testament economy.

In order to have a proper understanding of God's New Testament economy, we need the entire New Testament. The Gospel of Mark by itself is not sufficient for this. As we have pointed out, in the Epistles we have the explanation and definition of the life presented in Mark. Therefore, in the light revealed in the Epistles we can see that the life recorded in the Gospel of Mark is a life fully according to and for God's New Testament economy.

THE SIMPLICITY OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK

When I was young, Mark was not as precious to me as Matthew, John, and Luke were. My impression of the Gospel of Mark was that it was too simple. Matthew, on the contrary, presents wonderful teachings and parables concerning the kingdom of the heavens. I spent much time to study the Gospel of Matthew, and, as early as 1939, I put out a series of messages on the kingdom of the heavens based on the Lord's teaching in chapters five, six,

seven, thirteen, twenty-four, and twenty-five. I have also given many messages on the Gospel of John. Although I have not given as many messages on Luke as on Matthew and John, in the book entitled *Gospel Outlines* there are a good number of outlines of subjects taken from the Gospel of Luke. Those outlines are based on the different gospel stories and parables in Luke.

In the past, I appreciated Matthew, John, and Luke, but I did not have nearly as much appreciation for Mark. It seemed to me that this Gospel could be compared to a cup of plain water that had no particular color or flavor. However, recently, while I was preparing the Life-study Messages on Mark, the light began to shine from this Gospel. Now I see that in the Gospel of Mark we have a record of a life that is absolutely according to and for God's New Testament economy.

I believe that the Gospel of Mark is the most simple book in the New Testament. But the simplicity of Mark is very striking, and we need to consider it. We need to ask why the Gospel of Mark was written in such a simple way. We need to ask why, apparently, this Gospel has no particular taste or color. I can testify that this kind of questioning opened the door for the light to shine in. The simplicity of the Gospel of Mark is very meaningful.

The more we read the Gospel of Mark, the more we are impressed with its simplicity. Compared to Mark, the Gospel of Matthew is quite complicated. Consider how many names are included in the first sixteen verses of Matthew. Mark, however, begins in a very simple way: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1).

Like Matthew, the Gospel of Luke is also rather complicated. Consider, for example, the lengthy account of the conception and birth of John the Baptist and the conception and birth of the Lord Jesus. Furthermore, Luke 1 includes the praises of Mary, Elizabeth, and Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist. Then in chapter three Luke presents a genealogy that is more complicated than that found in Matthew. Matthew speaks only of forty-two generations, but in Luke we have seventy-seven

generations. To be sure, whereas Mark is simple, Luke is complicated.

In the Gospel of John we have many deep mysteries. John's Gospel opens in a mysterious way: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (1:1). We are told that in Him was life (1:4), and then that the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us (v. 14). The Gospel of John, therefore, has a distinct color and flavor. When we read the Gospel of John, we can taste the flavor of this Gospel. But what kind of flavor do you taste when you read the Gospel of Mark? It seems that the only taste in Mark is the taste of plain water.

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL AND THE TERMINATION OF THE OLD THINGS

We have seen that Mark opens with a word concerning the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In 1:4-8 John the Baptist preached the baptism of repentance and also introduced the Slave-Savior. Then in 1:9 we are told that "Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John." After the Lord Jesus was baptized, He was anointed by the Spirit. Then He began His ministry. As we have pointed out, with the Lord Jesus life, work, and ministry were all one. With Him there was no distinction between life and work.

As we have seen, the word "beginning" in 1:1 implies a new start, and this new start involves the termination of the old things. In previous messages we have listed ten items of these old things: culture, religion, ethics, morality, improvement of character, human philosophy, and trying to be spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious. All these things were in existence when John the Baptist came forth to preach the baptism of repentance. In Mark 1 these things were terminated. By what were the old things terminated? They were terminated by the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Furthermore, these old things were buried when the Lord Jesus was baptized.

When the children of Israel passed through the Red Sea, Pharaoh and the armies of Egypt were buried. We may say that the children of Israel brought Pharaoh and his armies with them into the sea. In a similar way, when the Lord Jesus stepped into the waters of baptism, He brought with Him all ten items of the old things. Hence, these old things were terminated and buried.

LIVING IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The life the Lord Jesus lived was not a life according to culture or religion. It was not even according to ethics, morality, philosophy, or improvement of character. The Lord Jesus did not live a life of trying to be spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious. Instead of living according to these ten items, He lived a life that was fully according to and for God's New Testament economy.

We need to be deeply impressed with the matter of a life fully according to and for God's New Testament economy. If we are impressed with this thought and expression as we read the Gospel of Mark, we shall be enlightened through what is recorded in this Gospel.

The Lord Jesus, as portrayed in the Gospel of Mark, was different from any other man who had ever lived. In the Old Testament we see the living of those who came before the Lord Jesus. Many of those who lived before the time of Christ were men of culture, religion, ethics, and morality. Some cared for philosophy, and others were for the improvement of character. Some sought to be spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious. But in Mark we see a Man who is in an altogether different category. This One--the Lord Jesus--lives in the kingdom of God. Actually, He Himself is the kingdom.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LORD AS THE SEED OF THE KINGDOM

In 1:1 and 14 we read of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the gospel of God. This gospel is also the gospel of the kingdom of God. Not many Christians have realized that the kingdom of God is a person. The kingdom eventually

becomes a corporate person. The seed of the kingdom is an individual, the Lord Jesus. As the Sower, He came to sow Himself as the seed of the kingdom into His disciples. Now this seed is developing into the corporate kingdom of God. This kingdom is actually the Body of Christ. The development of the Lord as the seed of the kingdom is His Body, and His Body is His increase, His enlargement.

This understanding of the kingdom of God is certainly different from the traditional concept of the kingdom. According to the New Testament, the kingdom of God is the enlargement of the Person of Christ. The kingdom is the development of the seed, which is Jesus Christ. Today this development of Christ is the church. Hence, the church as Christ's Body is the kingdom of God.

THE DISPENSING OF THE TRIUNE GOD

As the One who is the seed of the kingdom of God, the Lord Jesus lived a life that is altogether different from a life of culture, religion, ethics, morality, improvement of character, philosophy, and the effort to be spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious. The life He lived was according to God's New Testament economy. As we have seen, God's economy is a matter of the dispensing of Himself--the Triune God--into His believers.

Only the kind of life lived by the Lord Jesus is a life in which the Triune God is dispensed into God's chosen people. A living that is according to culture, religion, ethics, and morality is not the living that dispenses God into man. No matter how cultured, religious, ethical, or moral you may be, in that kind of living there will be no dispensing of the Triune God into others. Confucius, for example, taught ethics, and he behaved in a moral, ethical way. Nevertheless, in his living there was not the dispensing of the Triune God into people. The same is true with respect to those who lived a life of philosophy or improvement of character, and even of those who tried to be spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious. Praise the Lord that in His life there was the dispensing of the Triune God into His chosen people!

THE SEED OF LIFE AS THE EMBODIMENT OF THE TRIUNE GOD

We have emphasized the fact that the gospel, which is a new beginning, terminates all the old things. When the Lord Jesus was baptized, the old things were buried. In His living after His baptism, a living that was according to the New Testament economy of God, the Lord Jesus sowed Himself as the seed of life into His believers.

The seed sown by the Lord Jesus, a seed that was actually the Lord Jesus Himself, is the embodiment of the Triune God. This means that the Lord Jesus is nothing less than the very embodiment of the Triune God. This is proved in the Gospel of John. The Word in the beginning, the Word which was God, became flesh (John 1:1,14). This indicates that Jesus is the very God. Through incarnation He became the seed of life, and in His ministry He sowed this seed into others. This means that into His followers He sowed Himself as the embodiment of the Triune God.

If we see that such a seed was sown into the Lord's disciples, we shall have a proper basis for understanding the Gospel of Mark as a portrait of the life that is fully according to and for God's New Testament economy.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE SIXTY-THREE

A LIFE FULLY ACCORDING TO AND FOR GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

(12)

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:16-20; 4:3, 26; 9:1-8; Eph. 1:4; Mark 1:9-11; Gal. 2:20

The Lord Jesus is the embodiment of the Triune God. As the embodiment of the Triune God, His life was fully according to and for God's New Testament economy. This One sowed Himself as the seed of life into His disciples. This seed is the Lord as the embodiment of the Triune God.

THE LORD SOWING THE TRIUNE GOD INTO HIS BELIEVERS AS THE SOIL

As the Lord Jesus was ministering and living a life according to God's New Testament economy, He collected the "soil" into which He would sow Himself as a seed. This soil was the Lord's followers. The first one to be gathered by the Lord Jesus was Peter. We may say that the Lord Jesus put Peter into His "pocket" and carried this "soil" with Him wherever He went.

As we read the Gospel of Mark, we need to see that the Lord Jesus was living a life of sowing the Triune God into His believers as the soil. In chapter one He began to collect the soil. Peter, the first one to be called by the Lord Jesus, is our representative. He took the lead in things both good and bad. He took the lead to recognize that Jesus is the Christ and also to deny the Lord. Peter even took the lead to be crucified. In a foregoing message we pointed out that, in a sense, Peter was crucified even before the Lord Jesus was. Furthermore, after the Lord's resurrection, the angel specifically mentioned Peter's name (16:7). This indicates

that Peter was known by the angels. He certainly was our representative.

THE CONDITION OF THE SOIL

The Gospel of Mark not only portrays the Lord as the One sowing the Triune God into His believers as the soil, hut this Gospel also depicts the condition of this soil. The cases recorded in this Gospel indicate that the soil was not in a healthy condition. In Mark we have twelve cases involving thirteen people. (One case involves two people, a woman and a young girl.) Four of these twelve cases are cases of people possessed by demons. This indicates that the soil gathered by the Lord Jesus was possessed, occupied, by demons.

Were you not occupied by some kind of "demon" before you were saved? Many today are possessed by the demon of drugs or the demon of gambling. As we consider today's situation in the world, we see that all the unsaved people are occupied by demons. Therefore, when the Lord Jesus comes to select a person and gather that one to be His soil, the first thing He does is cast out the demon from that person. From our experience we know that when we were called by the Lord, He cast out our demons.

The twelve cases recorded in the Gospel of Mark may be regarded as depicting the condition of an individual. In other words, these cases are a composite picture of a single person. In the eyes of the Lord Jesus, everyone who becomes His soil is the one portrayed by these twelve cases. Hence, the case of Peter's mother-in-law, who was sick with a fever, indicates that, spiritually speaking, we all have a fever. Because our spiritual temperature is not normal, it is easy for us to be angry. Was this not your condition before you were saved? We all were once sick with a high fever. Furthermore, we were lepers, those unclean, contaminated, in relation to both God and man. We also were paralyzed and withered, unable to walk before God or work for Him.

GENERAL, HEALING AND PARTICULAR HEALING

Although this was our condition before we were saved, the Lord Jesus has healed us in a general way. The person portrayed by these cases has been healed and is no longer abnormal in temperature and is no longer unclean, paralyzed, and withered.

According to the sequence of the Gospel of Mark, after the cases that portray general healing, we have three cases that depict the healing of specific organs, namely, the hearing organ, the speaking organ, and the seeing organ. Before chapter eight, the soil was collected, and the disciples were healed in a general way. However, spiritually speaking, they still could not see, hear, or speak. Therefore, the Lord began to practice the healing of specific organs, the organs of sight, hearing, and speech.

TWO CASES OF BLINDNESS

In the Gospel of Mark we have two cases of particular healings of blindness. The first case is that of the healing of the blind man in Bethsaida (8:22-26). After the Lord spit in the blind man's eyes and laid His hands on him, He asked him, "Do you see anything?" (v. 23). The man replied, "I behold men; I see them as trees walking." Then the Lord laid His hands upon his eyes, and the man "looked intently and was restored, and he saw all things clearly" (v. 25).

Immediately after the healing of the blind man in Bethsaida, the Lord Jesus went with His disciples into the villages of Caesarea Philippi. On the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, "Who do men say that I am?" (8:27). They answered, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but others, one of the prophets" (v. 28). Then the Lord questioned the disciples further: "But you, who do you say that I am?" (v. 29). This question indicates that the Lord was healing His disciples' seeing organ.

The second case of the healing of blindness recorded in Mark is the case of blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52). It is significant that this case comes immediately after the Lord's dealing with the request of James and John to sit at

His right and left in His glory (10:35-45). The fact that they could make such a request proves that they were blind and in need of the Lord's specific healing. The disciples needed the healing of their seeing, hearing, and speaking organs.

CHRIST REPLACING THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS

Beginning in chapter eight, the Lord Jesus began to help the disciples to see His Person, His all-inclusive death, and His marvelous resurrection. Three times He spoke to them concerning His death and resurrection (8:31; 9:30-32; 10:33-34).

On the Mount of Transfiguration the Lord Jesus gave a demonstration to Peter, James, and John concerning who He was. "He was transformed before them; and His garments became brilliant, exceedingly white, such as no fuller on earth could whiten them" (9:2-3). On the mountain "there appeared to them Elijah together with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus" (v. 4). Not knowing what to say, Peter took the lead to say to the Lord Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. And let us make three tabernacles--one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (v. 5). What Peter spoke was according to the Old Testament. He did not realize that the Old Testament things had been buried with the Lord Jesus in chapter one. From the human point of view, there was nothing wrong with Peter's suggestion. Moses and Elijah were both great men. Moses represented the law, and Elijah represented the prophets. Nevertheless, from the point of view of God's New Testament economy, Peter spoke in a nonsensical way.

Mark 9:7 says, "And a cloud came overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, This is My Son, the Beloved. Hear Him!" This word is our basis for saying that Christ is the entire, universal replacement. This One should replace Moses and Elijah; that is, He should replace the law and the prophets. He should replace the old things, which were terminated and buried in chapter one. Chapter nine of the Gospel of Mark indicates that Christ is the universal replacement.

CHOSEN IN CHRIST AND BAPTIZED WITH CHRIST

The Lord Jesus gathered the disciples to be the soil in which He sowed the Triune God as a seed. The Lord healed the disciples' organs of seeing, hearing, and speaking. Then He brought this soil with Him when He was examined, judged, and crucified. He brought it with Him through His all-inclusive death and into His wonderful resurrection.

We need to consider the Gospel of Mark from the point of view of the Epistles of Paul. According to Ephesians 1:4, God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. This indicates that in eternity past God put us into Christ, for He chose us in Christ. The fact of His choosing us in Christ indicates that He had already put us into Christ. Hence, we were put into Christ before the foundation of the world.

According to our experience, we may say that we were put into Christ when we believed into Him and were baptized into Him. This understanding is correct, and it is according to the New Testament. We are told in the New Testament that we are baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27). This is a word concerning being in Christ in a practical way. Ephesians 1:4, however, is a word concerning God's selection of us in eternity, a word that indicates that before the foundation of the world God had already put us into Christ.

We need to view Mark 1 in the light of Ephesians 1. In chapter one of Mark the Christ into whom we were put by God in eternity past came to be baptized by John the Baptist. Since we had been put into Him before the foundation of the world, Christ did not come alone. Rather, He came with us. Therefore, when He was baptized, we were baptized in Him.

Do you believe that you were put into Christ by God the Father before the foundation of the world and that you were in Christ when He was baptized? If you see this, you will praise the Lord and say, "Hallelujah, when the Lord Jesus was baptized in Mark 1, I was baptized too! I was in Him when He was baptized in the Jordan." If we have the

view presented in Paul's Epistles. we shall realize that we were baptized in the Jordan with the Lord Jesus. We all need to see this.

CRUCIFIED, BURIED, AND RESURRECTED WITH CHRIST

Since we were put into Christ before the foundation of the world, we were also in Him when He was crucified. When He went to the cross, He went there with us. He died on the cross with us. This is the reason Paul could say, "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20). We need to have Paul's view of Christ's crucifixion.

Just as we were crucified with Christ, we were also buried and resurrected with Him. When He was buried in Mark 15, we were buried also. Likewise, when He was resurrected in Mark 16, we were resurrected with Him.

The Gospel of Mark is mainly a revelation of Christ's Person. Although this Gospel does not say anything about His birth, it does emphasize His death and resurrection. Therefore, the emphasis in Mark's Gospel is on the Person of Christ with His death and resurrection. We need the fourteen Epistles of Paul to give the adequate definition of Christ's Person and of His death and resurrection.

By now we all should have a clear view of the Lord Jesus as the One who lived a life of sowing the Triune God into His disciples. As the soil collected by Him, the disciples were in a condition portrayed by the different cases in the Gospel of Mark. This means that they were sick with a fever, contaminated, and paralyzed. But they were all healed both in a general way and in a particular way. Their organs of seeing, hearing, and speaking, in particular, were healed.

After the Lord called the disciples, He brought them with Him wherever He went. As He was bringing the soil of the disciples with Him, He was sowing Himself into the soil.

THE REPRODUCTION OF THE LORD JESUS

The book of Acts is the direct continuation of the

Gospel of Mark. In the first two chapters of Acts we see that Peter and the one hundred twenty had become the reproduction of the Lord Jesus. In Mark the disciples were disputing concerning who was greater. Also in Mark 14 Peter denied the Lord Jesus three times. But in Acts I no one cared about who was greater. Instead, they prayed continually in one accord for ten days. How could the disciples experience such a thing? They could experience this only by having the resurrected Christ in them as their life.

In the second chapter of Acts, the power from on high came upon the disciples. As a result, they became the increase, development, enlargement, and continuation of the Lord Jesus. He had brought them through His death and His resurrection, and He had wrought Himself into them. As a result, they were replaced by the Lord and saturated with Him. In this way they became His increase and continuation.

What kind of life did the one hundred twenty live in the book of Acts? They lived a life that was fully according to God's New Testament economy. They did not live a life of culture or religion. Neither did they live a life of ethics, morality, philosophy, or improvement of character. Just as the Lord Jesus lived absolutely according to and for God's New Testament economy, so the one hundred twenty in Acts lived the same way.

In Acts 21 and in the book of James, however, we see a contrast to the life that is fully according to and for God's New Testament economy. In Acts 21 James was a distraction to the life that is fully according to the New Testament economy of God. In James we see a life that is only partially according to God's New Testament economy. Mainly with James we see a life that is according to the Old Testament, a life according to religion and ethics.

WHAT GOD DESIRES TODAY

It is not our burden in these messages to study the Scriptures in a doctrinal way. Our burden is to present what God desires today. God wants us to be saturated by Him and with Him so that we may live a life of the divine

dispensing. Then we shall sow this life into others for the further dispensing of the Triune God. Concerning this, we all need a revolution in our concept and living so that we may be brought into a life that is according to God's New Testament economy.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE SIXTY-FOUR

A LIFE FULLY ACCORDING TO AND FOR GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

(13)

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:14-18; 4:26; 9:1-8;10:23-25; Rom. 14:17

THE BACKGROUND AND LOCATION OF THE LORD'S MINISTRY

It is helpful in our reading of the Gospel of Mark to have an understanding of the situation when the Lord Jesus was on earth. Man's culture had been in existence for over four thousand years. One aspect of this culture was the religion of the Jews, a strong, typical religion formed according to God's holy Word. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, the devout Jews were very much attached to this religion.

With this as the background, the Lord Jesus came forth in His ministry to sow Himself as a seed into God's chosen people. Actually, the Lord Jesus lived and ministered in the center of the world's population. Both geographically and culturally, the Jewish nation was the center of the inhabited earth. It was to that center that the Lord Jesus came to sow Himself.

Have you ever realized that the Lord Jesus came to the center of the inhabited earth to sow Himself as a seed into God's chosen people? I do not know of any Christian writings that speak of the Lord's sowing Himself into people. If you would ask Christians what the Lord Jesus came to do, some would probably reply that He came to save sinners, or that He came to die for our salvation. Of course, the New Testament says that Jesus Christ came to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). However, in the Gospel of Mark

we see that the Lord Jesus came to preach the gospel of God (1:14).

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The phrase "the gospel of God" does not simply mean that the gospel is of God in the sense of belonging to God. The main thought is that the gospel is something of God Himself. In the New Testament, expressions such as the life of God, the love of God, and the righteousness of God mean that life, love, and righteousness are actually God Himself. In the same principle, the expression "the gospel of God" indicates that the gospel is God Himself. Therefore, to preach the gospel of God actually means to preach God.

The gospel preached by the Lord Jesus was the gospel of the kingdom of God. What is the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God is God Himself. Then what is the gospel of the kingdom of God? We may answer this question by saying that the gospel is the kingdom, and the kingdom is God. The gospel, the kingdom, and God are not separate; on the contrary, these three are one.

It is of vital importance for us to see that the gospel, the kingdom, and God are one. The gospel is God, and God is the kingdom. Likewise, the gospel is the kingdom, and the kingdom is God. Therefore, according to the New Testament, the gospel of the kingdom of God actually refers to the very God Himself. Here we have God as the kingdom, and the kingdom as the gospel. What should we be preaching today? We should preach God as the kingdom, and the kingdom of God as the gospel.

We should not think that besides the kingdom of God or in addition to the kingdom of God, there is something called the gospel. No, the gospel is the kingdom of God. Neither should we think that besides God there is something called the kingdom. No, the kingdom is actually God Himself. Hence, the Lord Jesus came to preach the gospel of God, which is the gospel of the kingdom of God. Now we must go on to consider how the Lord Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom of God.

THE NEED FOR SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING

At this point I would like to say, by way of reminder, that when we read the Bible, we should not understand it in a natural way. We should not understand any word in the Scriptures in a natural way. The problem among Christians is that, for the most part, they read the Bible according to their natural understanding. Our need is for spiritual understanding. This was the reason Paul says in Colossians 1:9 that he asked on behalf of the saints that they would be "filled with the full knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." This was also the reason Paul prayed, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him" (Eph. 1:17). Paul knew that in this Epistle spiritual mysteries would be unveiled, and he knew that he had to use human language. He was concerned that the receivers of this Epistle might understand his writing merely in a natural way according to the letters in black and white. Therefore, Paul prayed that the Father would grant us a spirit of wisdom and revelation. This prayer indicates strongly that we should not try to understand the Bible in letter merely according to our natural mentality.

No doubt, since the Bible is something written, we need a proper understanding of the words written. However, the interpretation of what is written should not be according to our natural understanding. Instead, the interpretation must be according to spiritual wisdom and revelation. In particular, we need a spiritual understanding of how the Lord Jesus preached the gospel.

THE LORD'S WAY OF PREACHING THE GOSPEL

Mark 1:14 tells us that Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God. According to verse 15, He said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has drawn near. Repent and believe in the gospel!" The Lord's word here is brief. There is no record in this chapter of a lengthy message given by Him. When He came to Galilee to preach the gospel, He did not say, "You all must realize

that you are sinners. You became fallen in Adam. Now you need to repent and believe in Me as the One who has come to die for your sins. If you do not repent and believe, you will go to hell." In Mark there is not such a message given by the Lord.

Only one chapter in the Gospel of Mark is devoted to the Lord's preaching, and this is chapter four. Chapter four contains the only message of the Lord Jesus recorded in Mark. He did not give a message in chapters one through three; neither did He give a message in chapters five through sixteen. His one message recorded in Mark was not preached to sinners. Taking a boat as His Holy of Holies, He preached the gospel to His disciples.

Sowing Himself as the Seed

What is the central thought of the Lord's message in Mark 4? The central thought is that the Lord is the Sower sowing Himself into us as a seed. He opened His preaching in chapter four with these words: "Behold, the sower went out to sow." Later, in 4:26, He said, "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed on the earth." Here we have the Lord as the Sower sowing Himself as the seed into God's chosen people.

Some may question why we say that the Lord Jesus came to sow Himself into people. They may wonder why we do not say that Jesus came to preach the gospel. The reason we emphasize the Lord's sowing is that the proper understanding of preaching the gospel has been spoiled. Yes, the New Testament says that the Lord Jesus came to preach the gospel. However, He did not preach the gospel according to our understanding of the way the gospel is preached. On the contrary, in Mark 4 we see that the Lord preached the gospel by sowing Himself as a seed into people.

In Mark 1 we are told that the Lord Jesus came to Galilee preaching the gospel of God. But how did He preach the gospel, and what is the gospel the Lord preached? We should not understand either the gospel itself or the preaching of the gospel in a natural way.

Concerning this, many Christians are covered by a thick veil of tradition. They take for granted that they know what it means, according to the New Testament, to preach the gospel. As we have seen, chapter four of Mark reveals that to preach the gospel is to sow the seed. As we have pointed out in previous messages, the seed sown in Mark 4 is the seed of the kingdom.

If we want to have a proper understanding of the gospel and of the preaching of the gospel, we need to consider what is revealed in the Gospel of Mark. First, in 1:14 we see that the Lord preached the gospel of God. In verse 15 He spoke of the kingdom of God and the gospel. In Mark there is no further mention of the kingdom until chapter four. We have seen that 4:26 says, "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed on the earth." Therefore, in chapter four of Mark we see what the kingdom of God is, and we also see what it means to preach the gospel. According to this chapter, to preach is to sow.

The Kingdom of God Drawing Near

Mark 1:14 and 15 indicate that the kingdom of God is the gospel. In verse 14 the Lord Jesus preached the gospel of God. In verse 15 He said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has drawn near. Repent and believe in the gospel!" Hence, the gospel the Lord preached is the kingdom of God that has drawn near, and the kingdom of God that is near is the gospel. Furthermore, to repent and believe in the gospel is actually to repent and believe in the kingdom of God. Therefore, it is correct to say that the kingdom of God is the gospel.

We have pointed out emphatically that, according to Mark, to preach the gospel is to sow the seed. Mark 1:15 says that the kingdom of God has drawn near. But how does the kingdom of God draw near? The kingdom of God draws near through sowing. Apart from the sowing, there is no drawing near of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God drew near by Jesus' sowing, and His sowing was His preaching.

I doubt that many evangelists realize that their preaching of the gospel should be a sowing. To preach the gospel is to sow Jesus Christ as a seed into human hearts.

In Mark 1 we have preaching, and in Mark 4 we have sowing. The sowing in chapter four is equal to the preaching in chapter one. Sowing is preaching, and preaching is sowing. Furthermore, the kingdom of God in chapter four is equal to the gospel of God in chapter one. This means that to preach the gospel of God is to sow the seed of the kingdom of God.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE KINGDOM SEED

The Lord Jesus not only preached the gospel by sowing, but He is also the seed sown. This means that He Himself is the seed of the kingdom. After this seed is sown into us, it develops into a kingdom. If we read the entire fourth chapter of Mark carefully, we shall see that the seed of the kingdom is Jesus and that the development of the seed in the aggregate of the believers is the kingdom. According to Paul's Epistles, this aggregate is the church.

Paul's word in Romans 14:17 indicates that the kingdom of God is the church: "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." If we read carefully chapters twelve through fourteen of the book of Romans, we shall see that the kingdom of God in these chapters is actually the church life. In chapter fourteen Paul speaks concerning the receiving of the saints, a matter related to the church life. This indicates that the church life today is the kingdom of God. This kingdom is the development in the believers of the Lord Jesus as the kingdom seed.

THE WHEAT AND THE WEEDS

Because of the influence of culture and the religion of Judaism in that day, many people cared for religion, ethics, morality, and the improvement of character. Suddenly there appeared the One who came forth to sow Himself into God's chosen people. As He was about to

begin His ministry of sowing, the first thing the Lord Jesus did was to have Himself baptized. When He was baptized, the things of culture and religion were buried with Him. This means that the Lord Jesus terminated culture and religion. After He came out of the waters of baptism, He began to sow Himself into God's people.

The Lord Jesus sowed Himself as the seed into the "soil" of God's chosen people. The Lord's intention was that He as the real wheat would grow in this soil. We may say that the things of culture and religion are "weeds" that are also growing in the soil. Have you ever thought of religion as a weed, as something that grows in competition with Christ as the wheat? Culture, religion, ethics, morality, philosophy, improvement of character--all these are weeds that are competing with the wheat.

Although we may have been Christians for years, we still may not be clear concerning our situation. We need to see that many things other than Christ as the wheat are still growing within us. All these things are weeds, replacements of Christ, and need to be uprooted. Included among these weeds are the ten matters mentioned in the foregoing messages: culture, religion, ethics, morality, human philosophy, improvement of character, and the effort to be spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious. These things should not be allowed to replace Christ; instead, they all should be replaced by Christ. As we have pointed out, Christ is the entire, universal replacement. Nevertheless, in our actual living these ten items may become a replacement of Christ within us.

GOD'S PURPOSE AND OUR ENJOYMENT

In this message we have seen that the things of culture and religion were terminated when the Lord Jesus was baptized. We have also seen that in His ministry He sowed Himself into God's people for the development of the kingdom of God. This kingdom fulfills God's eternal purpose, which is to build up the church for the eternal expression of the Triune God. The kingdom of God is also for our enjoyment. Therefore, the kingdom of God fulfills

God's purpose and also satisfies us with the divine enjoyment. According to the Gospel of Mark, the Lord Jesus came to the center of the inhabited earth to sow Himself into God's chosen people in order to develop into a kingdom for God's purpose and our enjoyment.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE SIXTY-FIVE

A LIFE FULLY ACCORDING TO AND FOR GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

(14)

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:14-18; 4:26; 9:1-8; 10:23-25; Rom. 14:17

In the foregoing message we considered the background of the Lord's ministry in the Gospel of Mark. We saw that in His baptism He terminated the things of religion and culture. Then in His ministry He sowed Himself as the seed of the kingdom into God's chosen people. This seed develops into the kingdom of God. On the one hand, the kingdom of God is for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose; on the other hand, the kingdom of God is for our enjoyment. Let us now go on to see how God's chosen people are the "soil" into which Christ as the seed of the kingdom is sown to develop into the kingdom of God.

SOIL TO GROW CHRIST INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD

God's chosen people are the soil to grow Christ into the kingdom of God. However, God's people have become fallen. According to the picture portrayed by the cases recorded in Mark, they were sick, contaminated, paralyzed, withered, corrupt, deaf, dumb, blind, and even spiritually dead.

God's people had been destined by Him to be the soil in which Christ would be sown as a seed and in which He would grow for the development of the kingdom of God. But this "soil" became sick, contaminated, paralyzed, and withered. The soil was corrupt, blind, deaf, dumb, and even demon-possessed. Before we were saved, we all were this kind of soil.

In chapter one of the Gospel of Mark the Lord Jesus began to gather the soil. In 1:14 and 15 we are told that Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has drawn near. Repent and believe in the gospel!" Immediately after this we have the record of the Lord's calling four of His disciples: Simon, Andrew, James, and John (1:16-20). In the foregoing message we pointed out that the Lord preached the gospel by sowing Himself as the seed into people. In 1:16-20 we see four of those whom the Lord gathered to be the soil into which He sowed Himself as the seed of the kingdom.

FOLLOWING THE LORD

When the Lord gathered the disciples in 1:16-20, what did He want them to do? Verse 16 tells us that Simon and Andrew were "casting a net in the sea, for they were fishermen." Jesus said to them, "Come after Me, and I will make you become fishers of men" (v. 17). Immediately, they left their nets and followed Him (v. 18). Going on a little further, the Lord Jesus saw James and John in a boat mending the nets. He called them, and "leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, they went after Him" (v. 20). Here we see that these four disciples left their nets, their boat, their father, and even the sea. They left everything to follow Jesus.

When I read the Gospels as a youth, I wondered what it meant to follow Jesus. I was very impressed with the Lord's words, "Follow Me." Later I was taught that to follow Jesus meant to do whatever Jesus did. For example, Jesus loved people, and we also should love others. Jesus was gentle and kind, and we also should be gentle and kind. At first I agreed with this understanding of the meaning of following the Lord Jesus. But eventually I discovered that to follow Jesus in this way can be compared to teaching a monkey to act like a man. A monkey may be trained to sit, stand, and walk like a man. However, this is nothing more than mere imitation. Nevertheless, many Christians try to follow Christ in the

way of imitating Him. This understanding of following Jesus is mistaken, and we should repudiate it. But we are still left with the question concerning what it means to follow the Lord Jesus.

We have emphasized the fact that when the Lord Jesus called the disciples, He gathered them to be the soil into which He would sow Himself as the seed. Therefore, we may say that to follow Jesus is to be put in His "pocket" for the purpose of His sowing Himself into us.

THE HEALING OF THE SOIL

Chosen by God

We have seen that in Mark the Lord Jesus gathered the soil and put it into His pocket in order to sow Himself into it. But according to the cases recorded in the Gospel of Mark, this soil was in a pitiful condition. How could the Lord use soil that is sick, contaminated, and corrupt? Some may think that He should cast such useless soil away. But the Lord cannot cast away those who were chosen by God and predestinated before the foundation of the world. In a very real sense, the Lord Jesus did not have a choice. The disciples had been marked out, predestinated. How could He reject them? The Father had chosen them before the foundation of the world, and the Lord had come to do the will of God the Father. Therefore, He could not cast aside the disciples, even though as soil they were in such a pitiful condition. What, then, could the Lord do about the soil? As the Gospel of Mark indicates, it was necessary for Him to heal this soil and turn it into good soil.

Through Death and Resurrection

We have seen that, according to the Gospel of Mark, the soil was in a pitiful condition. How could it be healed? The proper way to heal the soil is for it to pass through a process of death and resurrection. In principle, this is the way healing takes place in our physical bodies. We thank the Lord that in His creation of man's body He ordained such a principle. Otherwise, once a person became ill, he would not be able to recover. However, in our bodies there

is the principle of death and resurrection, the principle of the dying out of what is old and the rising up of something new. Diseases are healed in man's body through this basic life principle in which old things die out and new things are produced.

If we understand this principle, we shall see how the Lord Jesus heals the soil into which He sows Himself as the seed of the kingdom. The human soil that had been chosen by God became contaminated and useless. But because God the Father had chosen this soil, the Lord Jesus could not cast it away. This soil had even been predestinated, marked out, by the Father. The Lord must have some way to heal this soil.

As we have seen, to follow the Lord Jesus is to be put in His "pocket." But how does the Lord heal the soil that is in His pocket? He heals the soil by bringing it to the cross and causing it to die out and then bringing it into resurrection. In the Lord's death we died out; that is, in His death we were made dead. Then in His resurrection we were resurrected. Therefore, we died in the Lord's death and rose in His resurrection. In this way the soil is healed.

In chapter one of Mark, the Lord Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John, and they began to follow Him. Actually, they followed the Lord blindly, not knowing where they were going or what they were doing. The fact that Peter made many blunders indicates that he did not know what was happening. The Lord Jesus, however, knew what He intended to do with the disciples.

After gathering the disciples as the soil, the Lord presented Himself to them as a pattern. For more than three years, Peter and the other disciples observed what the Lord said and did. Eventually, the Lord Jesus brought the disciples, and all those chosen by God, to the cross. After He brought them through death and resurrection, they were healed. This is the reason we say that in Christ's death and resurrection His followers, as the soil chosen by God, were healed. All the healings in the Gospel of Mark are signs pointing to this real healing, the healing that takes place through Christ's death and resurrection.

When we come to a chapter one of Acts, we see that Peter, Andrew, John, and James, with the remainder of the one hundred twenty, were no longer sick. They were no longer sick with a fever, contaminated, paralyzed, withered, blind, deaf, or dumb. They all had been healed through the Lord's death and resurrection.

In the foregoing message and in this message we have covered four matters: the background of the Lord's ministry, the Lord as the Sower sowing Himself as the seed, the disciples as the soil chosen by God, and the healing of the soil. As a result of being healed through Christ's death and resurrection, the chosen people of God were recovered and became good soil. They became the "good earth" spoken of in Mark 4:8 and 20.

THE COMPLETION OF THE LORD'S SOWING

Through His death and resurrection the Lord Jesus not only healed the soil, but He also released God's life and imparted it into the soil. Through His death the divine life in Him was released, and through His resurrection this life was imparted to the soil. Hence, the Lord's death and resurrection were the completion of His sowing Himself as a seed into His disciples.

This sowing began in chapter one of Mark and continued throughout this Gospel until it was completed in chapter sixteen. In chapter after chapter the Lord Jesus was sowing Himself into His disciples. This is clearly revealed in chapter four where we see that as the Sower He came to sow the seed of the kingdom. When the Lord Jesus was resurrected, this sowing was completed. The disciples then became another kind of soil, the good soil, and they began to grow Christ. In the early chapters of the book of Acts we see that the disciples were good soil producing Christ.

THE REAPPEARANCE OF THE WEEDS

However, the fact that the disciples became good soil and began to grow Christ does not mean that the "weeds"

could not grow in them again. In Galatians 2 we see that certain weeds had begun to grow again in Peter. The reason the weeds came back was that Peter was still under the influence of the old religion.

Actually, the weeds were trying to grow in Peter in Acts 10. According to this chapter, Peter saw a heavenly vision, a vision related to the sowing of the seed into the Gentiles. God intended to use Peter to sow the seed of the kingdom into another kind of soil, into Gentile soil. At first Peter refused to obey the vision. This refusal indicates that something was growing in Peter instead of wheat. The things of the old religion, the weeds, were growing in him.

In chapter twenty-one of Acts we see that Peter was under the influence of James. When we consider Acts 21 together with Galatians 2, we see that many weeds were growing in Peter.

We need to ask ourselves how many weeds are growing in us. What do we mean by weeds? A weed is something other than Christ that is growing in us to replace Christ. In our experience these weeds may include culture, religion, ethics, morality, philosophy, improvement of character, and the effort to be spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious.

Many of the saints who have been under this ministry for years are still under the influence of their cultural and religious background. Because of this influence, the view of God's New Testament economy has not been made clear to them. This influence and this lack of clarity delay the Lord's coming back because it frustrates the development of the kingdom within us.

OUR NEED FOR A CLEAR VIEW CONCERNING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

At this point we should once again ask this question: what is the kingdom of God? Contrary to the traditional understanding, the kingdom is not merely a realm where God rules over people and a realm which we enter to enjoy eternal life. Many Christians do not have a proper understanding even of what eternal life is. They think

that eternal life is some kind of everlasting blessing. We need to have a clear view from the New Testament concerning the kingdom of God.

In the New Testament the kingdom of God is not a material realm in which God exercises His authority to carry out His governmental administration so that we may enter this realm to enjoy an eternal blessing. This is not the concept of the kingdom in the New Testament, and we should drop this concept. What is revealed in the New Testament regarding the kingdom of God is that the kingdom is a Person, not a material realm. This Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the embodiment of the Triune God. This One who is the embodiment of the Triune God came to be the kingdom. In Mark 4 He says that the kingdom is like a sower sowing the seed. Both the Sower and the seed are the Lord Himself. The Lord Jesus came to sow Himself as the seed of the kingdom into God's chosen people. In His ministry He did not sow anything other than Himself as the seed of the kingdom.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE SIXTY-SIX

A LIFE FULLY ACCORDING TO AND FOR GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

(15)

Scripture Reading: Mark 1:14-18; 4:26; 9:1-8; 10:23-25; Rom. 14:17

In the two preceding messages we considered four important matters: the background of the Lord's ministry, the Lord as the Sower sowing Himself into God's people, the condition of the disciples as "soil," and the Lord's healing of this soil through His death and resurrection. We saw that through this healing the one hundred twenty became the good ground for the Lord's sowing. However, we saw that in Acts 10 and 21 and Galatians 2 there are strong indications that the "weeds" of things that replace Christ had begun to grow again.

We concluded the last message with a word concerning the kingdom of God. We pointed out that, according to the New Testament, the kingdom of God is a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, sown into us in order to be developed. In His ministry, the Lord came to sow Himself as the seed of the kingdom into God's chosen people so that this seed might develop into God's kingdom.

THE KINGDOM AS THE TRANSFIGURATION OF JESUS

We see another aspect of the kingdom in 9:1-8. In 9:1 the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I tell you, there are some of those standing here who shall by no means taste death until they see the kingdom of God come in power." This verse is immediately followed by the record of the Lord's transfiguration on the mount. Verses 2 and 3 go on to say, "And after six days Jesus takes with Him Peter and James and John, and brings them up into a high

mountain by themselves alone. And He was transformed before them; and His garments became brilliant, exceedingly white, such as no fuller on earth could whiten them."

When we put these verses together, we see that the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus was the coming of the kingdom. This proves that the kingdom is not a material realm. Rather, these verses indicate that the kingdom is a Person transfigured. When the Lord Jesus was transfigured, that was the coming of the kingdom. What, then, is the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God is the Lord Jesus Himself transfigured.

EXPERIENCING THE LORD BLOSSOMING WITHIN US

The Lord Being Transfigured in Us

We need to consider this understanding of the kingdom as the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus in the light of our experience. When you believed in the Lord Jesus and received Him, you received a Jesus who was not transfigured. Just as the seed received by the soil is a seed that has not yet been transfigured, so in our experience the Christ we received was a Christ not transfigured. The transfiguration of a seed requires the growth of that seed into a mature plant and the blossoming of that plant. Therefore, we may say that the transfiguration of a seed requires growth and blossoming. In a similar way, the Lord Jesus we received needs to grow in us until He blossoms from within us.

We are the soil, and the Lord Jesus is the seed of the kingdom. When we received Him into us, we received Him as the One who had not yet been transfigured in our experience. Have you received the Lord Jesus, and is He now in you? We all can testify strongly that we have received the Lord and that He is in us. But has the Lord been transfigured in you? If the Lord who is in you has not yet been transfigured, others will not be able to see the

kingdom of God in you. Since we have not yet experienced this kind of transfiguration, we need the Lord to grow in us until He blossoms. That blossoming will be the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus in us in a practical way. Such a transfiguration is the kingdom of God.

Enjoyment and Ruling

The transfiguration of the Lord Jesus within us becomes not only our enjoyment but also God's ruling. When the Lord Jesus is transfigured in us in a practical way in our daily living, that transfiguration becomes the kingdom of God ruling everything in our life. This kingdom rules us and also gives us the full enjoyment of God.

Growth and Transfiguration

For years I was familiar with the story of the Lord's transfiguration without realizing that this transfiguration should be something experiential and practical to us in our daily living. We all have the Lord Jesus within us, but He has not yet been transfigured in us. Hence, we need Him to grow in us until by transfiguration He blossoms into the expression of the kingdom of God in our experience.

The Seed Transfigured

In 1:15 the Lord Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has drawn near." Then in the parable of the seed the Lord said, "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed on the earth" (4:26). Later, in 9:1, the Lord told His disciples that some standing there would not taste death until they saw the kingdom of God come in power. Immediately after speaking this word concerning the kingdom, the Lord Jesus was transfigured on the mountaintop before Peter, James, and John. His transfiguration was the coming of the kingdom of God in power. This is a strong indication that the kingdom of God is actually the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus.

In chapter four of Mark we have the seed of the kingdom. Now in chapter nine this seed is transfigured,

and this transfiguration of the seed is the coming of the kingdom of God.

Do you know why among many genuine Christians there is the lack of the kingdom of God today? The reason is that among these Christians there is the lack of the transfiguration of Christ. The Christ who lives in so many believers is still a seed; He has not yet been transfigured. This may also be our situation. Yes, we have the Lord Jesus living within us, but we may not have given Him the opportunity to be transfigured in us. Therefore, with us there may be only the seed of the kingdom, but not the appearing of the kingdom.

The Appearing of the Kingdom

On the day of the Lord's transfiguration on the mountaintop there was the coming the appearing, of the kingdom. From this we see that in order to have the appearing of the kingdom from within us, we need to experience the Lord's being transfigured within us.

Producing the Church Life

Mark 9:1-3 proves that the kingdom of God is not a material realm. We have emphasized the fact that the kingdom of God is the transfiguration of the Person of the Lord Jesus. Today such a transfiguration produces the church life, which is the kingdom of God.

This understanding of the church as the kingdom corresponds to Paul's word in Romans 14:17: "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." According to the context, the kingdom of God in this verse refers to the church life.

LIVING A LIFE OF GOD FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD

We all need to see that God's eternal plan, which is His New Testament economy, is to dispense Himself as the Triune God into His chosen people. In order to accomplish His plan, He was incarnated, becoming a man named

Jesus. When this man came out to preach, He began to sow Himself into God's chosen people. However, as the soil for the Lord's sowing, His chosen people had become fallen, damaged, and corrupt. Therefore, the Lord Jesus brought this soil to the cross and crucified it. Then He brought God's chosen people as the soil with Him into His resurrection. Through His death and resurrection, the Lord not only healed the soil, but also became the replacement for God's people. By replacing them with Himself, He made them His reproduction; that is, He made them the same as He.

When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He lived a life of God for the kingdom of God. He did not live a life of culture, religion, or ethics. Now His followers should live the same kind of life. This means that His followers should live a life of God for the development of God's kingdom.

It is crucial for us to see that as God's people, as those who have been replaced by Christ and with Christ, we need to live a life that is absolutely of God. We should not live a life that is of something other than the Triune God.

Day by day we need to put this vision into practice. This means that instead of living a life of culture, religion, ethics, morality, philosophy, improvement of character, and of trying to be spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious, we need to live a life that is absolutely of God and for the kingdom of God.

For example, a married brother should not try in himself to love his wife. Neither should he endeavor to be a pattern to others of what a good husband should be. To have this thought is to miss the mark of God's New Testament economy. Furthermore, it is to miss the vision of God's economy.

According to the vision of God's economy presented in the New Testament, as God's chosen people, those who have been replaced by and with Christ, we should live only a life of God. This means that if a married brother has the thought of trying to be a good husband, he should drop that thought and simply live a life of God. Such a brother needs to realize that he has been chosen by God and replaced by Christ, not that he should try in himself to be

a good husband, but that he should live a life of God. He has not been destined to live a life of loving his wife; rather, he has been destined to live a life of God. Therefore, he should not live a life of culture, religion, or ethics. Instead of seeing these things, he should see Jesus only. Eventually, he will live in a way that is much higher than culture, religion, ethics, or morality. He will have a love for his wife that is much higher than his natural human love.

We should not be occupied even with good things such as ethics and improvement of character or be frustrated by these things. Instead, we should be occupied, thoroughly filled, with the Triune God. The One who lived a life fully according to and for God's New Testament economy, the One who has replaced us with Himself, is now the Spirit living through us. We should not allow anything other than this One to fill us and occupy us.

RICH IN THINGS OTHER THAN THE TRIUNE GOD

The incident concerning the rich man in Mark 10 is an illustration of our need to be free from being occupied by anything except God Himself. After the rich man went away sorrowing, the Lord said to His disciples, "With what difficulty shall those who hold on to riches enter into the kingdom of God!" (10:23). Some who read this may say, "God isn't fair. Why can a poor man enter the kingdom of God, but not a rich man?"

We need to see why the rich man in Mark 10 could not enter into the kingdom of God. He could not enter because his being was occupied by things other than God. There was no room in him for Christ to grow into a kingdom. Once again we need to see that the kingdom of God is not a material realm. The kingdom of God is the Lord Jesus growing and developing within us.

When some read about the rich man in Mark 10, they may rejoice over the fact that they are poor and not at all like the rich man. However, you may be quite rich in things other than material wealth. Even the young ones among us may be rich in the ten matters that are

replacements for Christ, rich in culture, religion, ethics, morality, philosophy, improvement of character, and the effort to be spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious.

Do you know what it means to be rich? To be rich means to be occupied by something other than the Triune God. In my years of serving the Lord, I have met hundreds of Christians who were rich in things other than the Triune God. They were rich in such things as Bible knowledge, traditional theology, and the effort to be spiritual. Because they were rich in this way, there was no room for the Lord Jesus to grow within them.

I am not giving a word in this message that I have not first applied to myself. Before giving this message. I asked myself, "Are you occupied by anything other than Christ? Perhaps you are occupied by some concept you have concerning the Bible." I am deeply concerned that I may still be occupied by certain good things that are not Christ Himself.

OUR NEED TO EMPTY OURSELVES TO ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD THROUGH THE GROWTH OF CHRIST WITHIN US

We all need to be emptied of anything other than Christ that occupies us. Our being needs to be unloaded for the Lord Jesus. We need to empty ourselves. According to the Bible, to humble ourselves is to empty ourselves. We need to empty ourselves so that all of the space within us will be available for the growth of the Lord Jesus in us.

To empty ourselves and give the Lord Jesus all the room within us is to enter into the kingdom of God. We should not regard the kingdom as a material realm that we shall enter one day after certain terms have been fulfilled. That is a traditional concept of the kingdom of God, not the teaching concerning the kingdom in the New Testament.

We need to be impressed with the fact that to enter into the kingdom of God is to empty ourselves, to unload ourselves of everything other than Christ so that our entire

being may be available for Him to grow in us in full. I have the full assurance that this is the proper understanding of what it means to enter into the kingdom of God. If you do not agree with this understanding today, eventually you will agree that it is according to the New Testament revelation.

To enter the kingdom of God is not a matter of entering a material realm outside of us. Rather, to enter the kingdom of God is to grow Christ inwardly. The developing of the kingdom within us is our entering into the kingdom.

How can the kingdom develop within us? If we would have the kingdom develop in us, we need to humble ourselves, empty ourselves, unload ourselves. We should not be occupied with culture, religion, ethics, morality, philosophy, improvement of character, or the effort to be spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious. We should care only for Christ and for the growth of Christ within us. All the ground within us should be made available for Him to grow in us.

I would encourage you to take this understanding of the kingdom and read Matthew 13 and Mark 4 in light of it. In these chapters we see the Lord Jesus as the Sower coming to sow Himself into us as the soil. He expects that we shall empty ourselves, unload ourselves, and give Him the ground to grow in us.

The growing of Christ within us is our entering into the kingdom. The reason the growth of Christ in us is our entrance into the kingdom is that this growing is the developing of the kingdom. Furthermore, as we develop the kingdom, we enter into it. Therefore, the kingdom is not a material realm. On the contrary, the kingdom is a matter of Christ growing in our being.

God has chosen us in Christ, and He has provided Christ as the universal replacement. Now we need to cooperate with the Lord by unloading ourselves so that He may grow freely in our being. If we do this, we shall be in the kingdom. We shall be in the manifestation of the kingdom in the coming age, and we shall be in the reality

of the kingdom today. This is a life that lives according to God's New Testament economy.

May we all see such a view of the New Testament economy of God. If we see the vision of a life fully according to and for God's New Testament economy, our entire Christian life will be revolutionized.

A RICH DEVELOPMENT FOR A RICH ENTRANCE

In 2 Peter 1:3-11 we have a further indication that the development of the kingdom within us is actually our entrance into the kingdom. In verses 3 and 4 Peter speaks of the divine power granting to us all things which relate to life and godliness and of becoming partakers of the divine nature. Then in verses 5 through 11 we have the development through growth in life unto the rich entrance into the eternal kingdom.

In verses 5 through 7 Peter says, "And for this very reason also, adding all diligence, supply bountifully in your faith virtue, and in virtue knowledge, and in knowledge self-control, and in self-control endurance, and in endurance godliness, and in godliness brotherly love, and in brotherly love love." Here we see the development of the divine life in us through a number of steps. Then in verse 11 Peter concludes, "For so shall be richly and bountifully supplied to you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." This verse is a strong confirmation of what we have been saying concerning entering into the kingdom of God.

The entrance into the kingdom is a matter of the development of the divine life within us. If we have a rich development of this life, this development will become our rich entrance into God's kingdom. In 2 Peter 1:3-11 we see how an entrance into the kingdom is supplied to us richly and bountifully. We would emphasize the fact that this entrance is supplied through the development of the divine life within us. Apparently it is we who enter into the kingdom of God. Actually the entrance into the kingdom is supplied to us by the Lord through our growth in His life and through the development of this life within us.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE SIXTY-SEVEN

A LIFE FULLY ACCORDING TO AND FOR GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

(16)

Scripture Reading: John 16:12-15; 20:22; Acts 1:5, 8; 2:1-4, 17-18; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9, 52; 6:3, 5a; 7:55; 11:24; 8:29, 39; 16:6-7; Rom. 8:2, 9-11; 1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:17-18; Phil. 1:19-21a; 3:7-10

In the Gospel of Mark we see the Lord Jesus as the One who lived a life according to God's New Testament economy. This One is both the Sower and the seed. He sowed Himself as the seed into His disciples. The Lord gathered the disciples, the chosen ones of God, as His "soil" in which He sowed Himself so that He might grow in them and that they might grow Him. The Lord also brought His disciples with Him to the cross and terminated them. After this, He brought them into His resurrection. Having seen all this in the foregoing messages, let us now go on to see how the disciples are the continuation of the Lord Jesus.

The Gospel of Mark ends with the Lord's ascension. What is the Lord Jesus doing now that He has resurrected and ascended? In order to find out what the Lord is doing after His ascension, we need the book of Acts.

TWO ASPECTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In chapter one of Acts the resurrected Christ charged His disciples to remain in Jerusalem for the baptism in the Holy Spirit: "For John indeed baptized in water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:5). In verse 8 He went on to say, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you."

Here we see that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a matter of the Spirit descending upon the disciples.

In Acts 1 the Lord talks about the disciples experiencing the Holy Spirit coming upon them. But had the disciples not received the Holy Spirit already? According to John 20, in the evening of His resurrection day, the Lord appeared to His disciples, breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (v. 22). In this verse the Holy Spirit is likened to breath. Breath is something inward, something related to the life within us. In John 20:22, therefore, the disciples received the Holy Spirit as breath for life.

Forty days after His resurrection, the Lord commanded the disciples to remain in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to descend upon them. That descending of the Spirit upon the disciples was for power, not for life. In John 20 we have the Spirit inwardly for life; in Acts 1 we have the Spirit outwardly for power, for baptism. When a person is baptized, he does not drink the water; instead, he is immersed in the water. In a similar way, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a matter of the Spirit coming upon us outwardly so that we may have power.

The Lord's word to the disciples concerning the Holy Spirit in chapter one of Acts was fulfilled in chapter two. On the day of Pentecost "suddenly there came a noise out of heaven like a rushing violent wind," and it filled the house where the disciples were sitting. Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). On the day of the Lord's resurrection the disciples received the Holy Spirit as breath for life. Then fifty days later, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples as a rushing mighty wind. We can easily see the difference between breath and wind. Breath is for life, and wind is for power. In John 20 and Acts 2 we have two symbols of the Holy Spirit: the breath for life inwardly and the wind for power outwardly.

In the Life and Ministry of the Lord Jesus

With the Lord Jesus we also see these two aspects of

the Holy Spirit. First, the Lord was conceived of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:18, 20). Then at the age of thirty, when He came forth to minister, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him, and He was baptized in the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:21-22). The Lord's being conceived of the Spirit was a matter of the Spirit essentially, but His being baptized in the Holy Spirit was a matter of the Spirit descending upon Him economically. Hence, the Holy Spirit for the Lord's conception was essential, whereas the Holy Spirit for His ministry was economical.

Because the Lord Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit essentially, the Spirit became the essence of His being. The Lord had the divine essence of the conceiving Holy Spirit. He also received the human essence from the virgin Mary. Because He was conceived of the divine essence and born with the human essence, He was born a God-man. This means that for His being as the God-man He had two essences--the divine essence and the human essence. Therefore, the Lord was both God and man, the complete God and a perfect man. This is a matter of His being, His existence.

For thirty years the Lord Jesus lived on earth as the God-man. At the age of thirty He began to minister. For His ministry He needed the Spirit of God to descend upon Him not essentially but economically. This descending of the Spirit upon the Lord Jesus was for God's economy; it was not for the Lord's existence. For His existence He needed the Holy Spirit essentially to be His divine essence. But for the carrying out of God's economy, He needed the Holy Spirit to descend on Him economically.

In the Experience of the Disciples

The disciples also received the Holy Spirit both essentially and economically. They received the Spirit essentially in John 20:22. The receiving of the essential Spirit was for their spiritual existence, their spiritual being. When the disciples received the Holy Spirit in John 20, they received the divine essence. After receiving the Spirit in this aspect for their spiritual existence, it was

still necessary for them to receive the Spirit economically so that they could carry out God's economy as the continuation of the Lord Jesus. The disciples had to carry out God's economy in the same way the Lord Jesus carried it out. Since the Lord carried out God's economy by the economical Spirit, the disciples had to carry out God's economy by the economical Spirit. Therefore, after receiving the Spirit essentially, the disciples needed to receive the Spirit economically. They received the economical Spirit in chapter two of Acts.

We have emphasized that in John 20:22 the disciples received the Holy Spirit essentially for their spiritual being and existence. In Acts 1 we see the disciples living in this spiritual being. Before John 20, that is, before the Lord's death and resurrection, the disciples had not been made alive in their spiritual being for their spiritual existence. Instead, they had a fallen natural, fleshly being. Even after the Lord had revealed to them His death and resurrection the third time (Mark 10:32-34), the disciples were still disputing concerning who was greater (Mark 10:35-45). In addition, Peter certainly was in his natural being when he denied the Lord. But after Christ's death and resurrection, the disciples received the essential Spirit as the source of their spiritual being. In chapter one of Acts, although the disciples had not yet received the Holy Spirit descending upon them economically, they had experienced the Spirit essentially for their spiritual existence. Therefore, in their being they became spiritual.

The disciples had the essential Spirit for their spiritual being, but they still needed the Holy Spirit to descend upon them economically. This took place on the day of Pentecost. In Acts 2 the Spirit was fully consummated for the experience of the believers.

In Our Experience Today

When did you receive the Holy Spirit essentially and economically? Some may say that they received the Holy Spirit essentially when they were regenerated and economically at a time after their regeneration. According to the biblical way of understanding this matter, we

received the Holy Spirit essentially and economically more than nineteen hundred years ago. We all received the Holy Spirit essentially in John 20. Then the Jewish believers in Christ received the Holy Spirit economically in Acts 2, and the Gentile believers received the Spirit economically in Acts 10.

We may use purchasing a house as an illustration of receiving the Holy Spirit. Suppose a certain brother buys a house before he is married. Later he gets married and has children. When did this brother's wife and children buy the house? The correct answer is that they bought it when he bought it. The principle is the same with our receiving the Holy Spirit. When did we receive the Holy Spirit? We received the Spirit when the disciples as our representatives received the Spirit.

Throughout the centuries a great many people have believed in the Lord Jesus. Each time a person believes in Him does the Lord come to that one to breathe on him and then baptize him in the Holy Spirit? No, the Lord Jesus breathed out the Spirit and baptized the believers in the Spirit once for all. Both the Lord's breathing out of the Spirit and His baptizing in the Spirit are accomplished facts. In John 20 the Lord breathed the Spirit essentially into His Body. This happened once for all. Now, as a brother's wife and children share in the house purchased by him before he was married and before his children were born, in a similar way, we have a share in the Lord's breathing out of the Spirit as those who have become members of His Body. In the one case, there is no need for the wife and children to purchase the house again. Instead, they simply share in the house purchased by the brother. In a similar way, there is no need for the Lord to breathe out the Spirit again. We simply need to share in the Spirit breathed by the Lord into the Body.

After His resurrection, the Lord Jesus came to His disciples and, regarding them as His Body, breathed the Holy Spirit into them essentially. Fifty days later, on the day of Pentecost, He baptized the Jewish part of His Body into the Holy Spirit. Later, in the house of Cornelius, He

baptized the Gentile part of His Body into the Spirit. At that time the consummation of the Spirit for the Body was fully accomplished.

Whenever a sinner believes in the Lord Jesus, his believing joins him both to the Lord and to the Body. In this way, the Spirit becomes his portion. He now has a share in the Lord's breathing of the Spirit essentially into the Body and in His baptizing the Body in the Spirit economically.

We should not think that there are two Spirits or that the Spirit can somehow be divided. On the contrary, there is one Spirit. Yet there are the two aspects of the Spirit, one aspect for essence and another aspect for economy. The first aspect of the Spirit is essential; the second aspect is economical. Today in our experience we have both aspects of the Holy Spirit. We have both the essential Spirit and the economical Spirit.

THE ESSENTIAL SPIRIT AND THE ECONOMICAL SPIRIT IN ACTS

In the book of Acts we may say that there are two lines concerning the Spirit--the line of the essential Spirit and the line of the economical Spirit. Let us first consider some verses related to the economical Spirit and then verses related to the essential Spirit.

The Economical Spirit

Acts 1:5 says "For John indeed baptized in water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days from now." This clearly refers to the economical Spirit. Then verse 8 goes on to say, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." The Spirit coming upon us is a matter of the economical Spirit.

Acts 2:4 says that the disciples "were all filled with the Holy Spirit." Here we see that the disciples were filled with the Spirit economically for their ministry.

Acts 2:17 and 18 say, "And it shall be in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and

your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; and upon My slaves, both men and women I will pour out of My Spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy." These verses speak of the pouring out of the Spirit. This differs from the breathing of the Spirit into the disciples out of the mouth of Christ at His resurrection. The pouring out of God's Spirit was from the heavens at Christ's ascension. The former is the essential aspect of the Spirit breathed into the disciples for their spiritual being and existence; the latter is the economical aspect of the Spirit poured upon them as power for their work.

In chapter four of Acts the economical aspect of the Holy Spirit is mentioned twice. Verse 8 says that Peter was "filled with the Holy Spirit." This was an economical filling of the Spirit for ministry. Verse 31 says, "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit." This also was an economical filling of the Spirit.

In Acts 9:17 we see that Ananias was sent to Saul of Tarsus so that Saul might receive an economical filling of the Holy Spirit: "Ananias went away and entered into the house; and laying his hands on him, he said, Saul, brother, the Lord has sent me, Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you came, so that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Before Ananias came to him, Saul had already received the essential Spirit. When Saul called on the Lord's name, he began to participate in the essential Spirit. But in 9:17 Ananias came to lay hands on him so that he could participate in the economical Spirit.

Acts 13:9 tells us that Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit. This also refers to the economical aspect of the Spirit.

The Essential Spirit

Other verses in Acts refer to the essential Spirit. One of these verses is Acts 6:3: "Now brothers, select seven well-attested men from among you, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we shall appoint over this need." This refers to being filled with the Spirit essentially for life. To

do the service spoken of in chapter six does not require power; it requires life with wisdom and endurance. For this service we need to be full of the Spirit of life, not with the Spirit of power. To be filled with the Spirit of power is for God's economy, but to be filled with the Spirit of life is for our spiritual existence. In this verse "wisdom" indicates that the filling is the filling of the essential Spirit for life.

In Acts 6:5 we are told that Stephen was "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit." Once again, this refers to the essential aspect of the Spirit.

When Stephen was stoned, he was full of the Spirit essentially: "Being full of the Holy Spirit, looking intently into heaven, he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (7:55). The filling of the Spirit here is a matter of life, not of power. Hence, it is the filling of the essential Spirit.

Speaking of Barnabas, Acts 11:24 describes him as a "good man and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." This verse also speaks of the essential aspect of the Spirit.

Acts 13:52 says, "The disciples were made full of joy and of the Holy Spirit." The filling of the Holy Spirit here is not for power but for life. In this verse the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit essentially for life, not for power.

As we consider these verses in the book of Acts, we see clearly the two aspects of the Holy Spirit. On the one hand we see the essential aspect of the Spirit for our spiritual being; on the other hand, we see the economical aspect of the Spirit for our work to carry out God's New Testament economy.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE SIXTY-EIGHT

A LIFE FULLY ACCORDING TO AND FOR GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

(17)

Scripture Reading: John 16:12-15; 20:22; Acts 1:5, 8; 2:1-4, 7-18; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9, 52; 6:3, 5a; 7:55; 11:24; 8:29, 39; 16:6-7; Rom. 8:2, 9-11; 1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:17-18; Phil. 1:19-21a; 3:7-10

In the foregoing message we pointed out that in the book of Acts we have both the essential Spirit and the economical Spirit. In chapter eight of Acts we have both the Spirit and the Spirit of the Lord. Acts 8:29 says, "And the Spirit said to Philip, Approach and join this chariot." Here the Spirit for our spiritual existence and the Spirit for God's economy is simply called the Spirit.

Acts 8:39 goes on to say, "And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip." The expression "the Spirit of the Lord" indicates that the Spirit is the Lord. Just as the expression "the love of God" means that love is God, and "the life of God" that life is God, so here "the Spirit of the Lord" means that the Spirit is the Lord. Therefore, in Acts we see that the Spirit in two aspects, the essential aspect and the economical aspect, is actually the Lord Himself.

THE SPIRIT OF JESUS

Acts 16:6 and 7 say, "And they passed through the country of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come down to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them." The interchangeable use of the Spirit of Jesus with the Holy

Spirit in the preceding verse reveals that the Spirit of Jesus is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a general title of the Spirit of God in the New Testament. The Spirit of Jesus is a particular expression concerning the Spirit of God. This expression refers to the Spirit of the incarnated Savior who, as Jesus in His humanity, passed through human living and death on the cross. This indicates that in the Spirit of Jesus there is not only the divine element of God, but also the human element of Jesus, and the element of His human living and His suffering of death as well.

THE LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT

In the hook of Acts we see that after His resurrection and ascension Christ became the Spirit, the life-giving Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 15:45 Paul says, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul; the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit." Adam became a living soul through creation with a soulish body. Christ became a life-giving Spirit through resurrection with a spiritual body. Adam as a living soul is natural; Christ as a life-giving Spirit is resurrected. First, in incarnation, Christ became flesh for redemption (John 1:14, 29). Then in resurrection He became a life-giving Spirit for imparting life (John 10:10). As the life-giving Spirit in resurrection, He is ready to be received by those who believe in Him. When we believe in Him, He enters our spirit, and we are joined to Him as the life-giving Spirit. Hence, we become one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17).

Although 1 Corinthians 15:45 says that Christ, the last Adam, in resurrection became a life-giving Spirit, some regard this as heresy. If you were to tell them that Christ is the Spirit today, they would say, "This teaching is against the doctrine of the Trinity and is heretical. To say that Christ is the Spirit is to confuse the three Persons of the Trinity." We, however, do not follow the traditional doctrine of the Trinity. Instead, we follow the Word of God. God's Word says clearly that the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD

In 2 Corinthians 3:17 Paul says, "And the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." On the one hand, Paul says that the Lord is the Spirit; on the other hand, he speaks of the Spirit of the Lord. According to the context, the Lord in 2 Corinthians 3:17 refers to Christ the Lord (2 Cor. 2:12, 14-15, 17; 3:3-4, 14, 16; 4:5). This, then, is a strong word in the Bible telling us that Christ is the Spirit.

The expression "the Spirit of the Lord" is used both in 2 Corinthians 3:17 and in Acts 8:39. According to the entire context of the book of Acts, the Spirit of the Lord refers to Jesus Christ. The same is true in 2 Corinthians 3:17, where the Spirit of the Lord refers to the Lord as the Spirit. Therefore, in the same verse Paul says that the Lord is the Spirit.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul goes on to say, "And we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit." The Lord Spirit may be considered a compound title like the Father God and the Lord Christ. The expression "the Lord Spirit" again proves that the Lord Christ is the Spirit, and the Spirit is the Lord Christ. Because the Lord is the Spirit, and the Spirit is the Lord, He is called the Lord Spirit. This is the pneumatic Christ.

In the Gospel of Mark we see Jesus, and in the book of Acts we have the Spirit of the Lord and the Spirit of Jesus. Then in 1 Corinthians 15:45 Paul speaks of Christ as the life-giving Spirit. To be sure, the last Adam is Jesus, the very Jesus presented in the Gospel of Mark. Paul says that this last Adam has become a life-giving Spirit. He became the life-giving Spirit through the process of death and resurrection.

We may say that the Spirit of Jesus is the transfiguration of Jesus. The Lord Jesus was the seed that passed through the process of death and resurrection. In resurrection He, the last Adam, "blossomed" and became the life-giving Spirit. Therefore, we may say that the life-

giving Spirit is the blossoming of the Lord as the seed that passed through death and resurrection. Let us use a carnation seed as an illustration. Both the seed and the blossom are a carnation. The difference is that the seed is the carnation in seed form, whereas the blossom is the carnation in blossom form. In a similar way, we may say that the seed in Mark is Jesus, and the "blossom" in Acts is the Spirit of Jesus.

Today do we participate in the Lord as the seed or the blossom? The correct answer to this question is that we experience Him as both the seed and the blossom. We enjoy Him as the seed who has become the blossom in resurrection.

SPIRIT OF CHRIST

In Romans 8:2 Paul speaks of the Spirit of life, and in Romans 8:9, of the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit of Christ is related to the Lord's death and resurrection. The Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of the One who passed through death and entered into resurrection. Now that we have this Spirit in us, we have not only Christ, but Christ in His death and resurrection.

The Lord's death was an all-inclusive termination, and His resurrection was an all-inclusive germination. In His death we were terminated, and in His resurrection we were germinated. Praise the Lord that we have the all-inclusive Christ with the all-inclusive termination and germination! The Spirit of Christ, therefore, is the totality, the aggregate, of the all-inclusive Christ with His all-inclusive death and resurrection. Because we have this Spirit as the blossom of Christ, we have the all-inclusive Christ and His all-inclusive termination and germination. As those who have been terminated and germinated, we are now in this wonderful Spirit.

Because we have received the wonderful Spirit of Christ, we should praise Him and not merely pray. Let us praise Him because we already have the Spirit. If we only pray but do not praise, in our experience we may be like

the disciples in the Gospel of Mark. In a sense, James and John prayed when they asked the Lord that He would grant them to sit at His right and left in His kingdom. We today are not in Mark 10 nor even in Mark 16--we are in Romans 8. Since we are in Romans 8, we should not tell the Lord in prayer how miserable we are or how pitiful our condition is. Instead of asking the Lord to help us with our problems, we should praise Him that we are in the all-inclusive Spirit. In this Spirit we have life, strength, power, ability, might, and authority.

THE BOUNTIFUL SUPPLY OF THE SPIRIT OF JESUS CHRIST

In Philippians 1:19 Paul says, "For I know that for me this shall turn out to salvation through your petition and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." As in Romans 8, the Spirit here is the aggregate Spirit. Thus Paul is saying that his situation will turn out to salvation through the bountiful supply of the aggregate Spirit.

There is no indication in the book of Philippians that Paul prayed in the way of telling the Lord how weak he was and that he needed the Lord to strengthen him. There is no indication that Paul prayed, "Lord, You know that I am in prison for Your sake. I have been faithful to You, Lord, but I'm weak, and I need You to strengthen me. Have mercy on me so that I can bear this imprisonment." Paul did not pray this way in the book of Philippians, nor did he pray like this when he and Silas were in prison in Acts 16. According to the record in chapter 16 of Acts, Paul and Silas sang praises to the Lord.

Too many Christians pray in a pitiful way. Too few Christians are joyful, praising Christians. We need to be Christians who are joyful, praising, and full of rejoicing. Even while in prison, Paul could speak about rejoicing in the Lord (Phil. 3:1). Paul knew that through the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ his imprisonment would become a salvation to him so that he might magnify Christ and live Him (Phil. 1:20-21).

A CONTINUATION OF THE LORD JESUS

In Philippians 3:7-10 Paul says, "But what things were gains to me, these I have counted loss on account of Christ. But surely I count also all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them to be refuse that I may gain Christ, and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God based on faith, to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death. Here we see that Paul counted all things to he loss on account of Christ. These things certainly include the ten items we have mentioned in previous messages: culture, religion, ethics, morality, philosophy, improvement of character, and the effort to be spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious. Paul counted all such things loss for the sake of the aggregate Spirit so that he might be found in Christ, not in anything else.

Paul also aspired to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and to be conformed to His death. Once again we have Christ with His death and resurrection.

In Philippians we see that Paul was the continuation of the Lord Jesus. Just as the Lord lived a life fully according to and for God's New Testament economy, so Paul lived a life according to and for the New Testament economy of God.

THE ALL-INCLUSIVE SPIRIT IN US

In the New Testament the twenty-two books from Acts to Jude reveal the all-inclusive pneumatic Christ. We have seen that we need to praise the Lord that we have received this pneumatic Christ, that we have received Him as the life-giving Spirit. However, some may say, "Do you really mean that all we should do is praise the Lord? Isn't there something else we should do?" To ask such a question is to give ground for the "weeds" of the ten items that are replacements for Christ to grow in us. The more we

question what we should do, the more these weeds will be sown into us.

Just as the seeds of certain kinds of weeds are carried by the air, so the seeds of devilish weeds are carried by the blowing of the satanic air. Someone may say, "I agree that we should praise the Lord that He is the all-inclusive Spirit in us. Yet I still believe that we need to do something." This kind of speaking shows the influence of the blowing of the satanic wind. As long as we think that we in ourselves must do something, we shall experience failure, and we shall be distracted from what we have heard in these messages.

Let us forget our own efforts to do something and praise the Lord that we have received the aggregate Spirit. Praise Him that we have received His breathing of the essential Spirit and His baptizing with the economical Spirit. Now we are in the all-inclusive Spirit as the ultimate consummation of the Triune God.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE SIXTY-NINE

A LIFE FULLY ACCORDING TO AND FOR GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

(8)

Scripture Reading: Rev. 1:4-5a, 11-13, 20; 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5-6, 12-13, 21-22; 4:5; 5:6; 14:13-16; 21:1-3a, 9-12, 14, 18-19a, 21; 22:1-2, 14, 17

In the foregoing messages of this Life-study of the Gospel of Mark we have seen that the Lord's disciples followed Him from the beginning of His ministry. The Lord brought them on step by step wherever He went. He even brought them with Him into His death and resurrection. This means that the disciples passed through the processes through which the Slave-Savior passed.

By passing through the Lord's death and resurrection His disciples became His continuation. This continuation is unveiled in the book of Acts. We have pointed out that in chapter one of Acts the disciples are the Lord's continuation, following Him to live a life according to God's New Testament economy.

We have also seen that in the book of Acts there are two aspects of the Spirit--the essential aspect and the economical aspect. The Spirit of God, who is now the Spirit of Jesus and even the Spirit of Jesus Christ, is both essential and economical. The essential Spirit is for our spiritual being, and the economical Spirit is for our work. As believers, we have a spiritual being, a spiritual person, and this is of the essential Spirit. We also carry out a spiritual work, and this work is of the economical Spirit. Therefore, for our spiritual being we have the essential Spirit, and for our work to carry out God's economy we have the economical Spirit.

In this message and in the following message we shall consider the consummation of a life that is fully according

to and for God's New Testament economy. This consummation is fully unveiled in the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation.

THE CONTENTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Before we come to the consummation of God's New Testament economy, I would like to present a brief view of the entire New Testament. For this, I would ask you to study the chart printed on pages 586-587 of this message. The chart is entitled "God's New Testament Economy." This chart actually presents a view of the contents of the New Testament.

Many Christians would arrange the twenty-seven books of the New Testament into three sections: the books of history--the four Gospels and the book of Acts; the Epistles, from Romans through Jude; and the book of Revelation. However, recently, through the Life-study of Mark, we saw that there is another way to divide the New Testament into sections. This way of dividing the books of the New Testament is related to the living Person of the Lord Jesus, because the entire New Testament is concerned with this living Person, who is the embodiment of the Triune God. According to this way of arranging the New Testament into sections, we also have three sections: the four Gospels, the book of Acts through the Epistle of Jude, and the book of Revelation.

THE FIRST SECTION--THE FOUR GOSPELS

The Son Coming with the Father

What is revealed in the first section, the section that covers the four Gospels? The Gospels reveal the Son. When the Son came, He did not come alone; rather, He came with the Father. The Gospel of John in particular tells us that when the Son came to earth, He came with the Father (John 8:29). This was the reason that the Son said that He was not alone, for the Father was always with Him (John 16:32). The Son even said that He was in

the Father and that the Father was in Him (John 14:10). This is a matter not only of the coexistence of the Father and the Son? but of the coinherence of the Father and the Son.

The Son Coming by the Spirit

The four Gospels also reveal that the Son came by the Spirit. He was conceived and born of the Spirit essentially. Concerning this, Matthew 1:18 says that Mary was "with child of the Holy Spirit." Matthew 1:20 goes on to record the word of the angel of the Lord to Joseph: "Fear not to take Mary your wife, for that which is begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit." Furthermore, in Luke 1:35 the angel said to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; wherefore also the holy thing which is born will be called, Son of God." At the age of thirty, the Spirit descended upon the Lord Jesus economically, and He was anointed with the Spirit for His ministry (Luke 3:21-23).

The Lord Jesus was conceived of the Spirit and born of the Spirit essentially. For this reason, He had the divine essence, which He received from the Holy Spirit, and the human essence, which He received from the virgin Mary, Hence, He was born the God-man, the One who was the complete God and a perfect man. When at the age of thirty He came forth to minister, the Spirit of God descended upon Him not essentially but economically. Therefore, as the Lord Jesus was ministering on earth, He lived by the essential Spirit and ministered by the economical Spirit. This is the reason we say that in the Gospels the Son came by the Spirit. He came by the Spirit who is both the essential Spirit and the economical Spirit.

The Embodiment of the Triune God in Jesus Christ

According to the four Gospels, the Son came with the Father and by the Spirit. It is important for us to see this. We should give up the thought that when the Son came to earth, He left the Father in the heavens. No, the Son came with the Father, and He came by the Spirit. Actually, in

Jesus Christ, the Son, we have the embodiment of the Triune God. The Son came with the Father and by the Spirit to be the embodiment of the Triune God in the Man Jesus Christ.

God's Tabernacle and God's Temple

Jesus Christ, the One who is the embodiment of the Triune God, is God's tabernacle and God's temple. John 1:1 and 14 say that the Word, who was God, became flesh and tabernacled among us. The word "tabernacled" in John 1:14 indicates that when He was in the flesh, Christ was the tabernacle of God. In Him God tabernacled among men. Then in chapter two of the Gospel of John we see that the Lord was the temple of God, the dwelling place of God (vv. 19, 21). As the embodiment of the Triune God, Jesus Christ was God's dwelling place in order to express God among men.

Living the Life of God to Develop into the Kingdom of God

As the One who was the embodiment of the Triune God as God's tabernacle and God's temple, the Lord Jesus lived the life of God. He lived a life on the highest plane, a life much higher than ethics or morality. The life He lived was actually God Himself. Furthermore, He lived such a life in order that this life might develop into the kingdom of God.

According to the revelation in the four Gospels, the issue of the living of this wonderful One is the kingdom of God. Because the kingdom of God is the development of the life of God, the Lord Jesus preached not only the gospel of God but also the gospel of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14; Luke 4:43; 8:1).

I hope that we all shall be able to comprehend this brief outline of the four Gospels. In the Gospels we see that the Son came with the Father and by the Spirit to be the embodiment of the Triune God in Jesus Christ. This One, the embodiment of the Triune God, is God's tabernacle and God's temple as His dwelling place. This One lived a life of God, a life that developed into the kingdom of God.

THE SECOND SECTION--ACTS THROUGH JUDE

As indicated by the chart? the second section of the New Testament includes the twenty-two books from Acts through Jude. These books are also the revelation of a Person. Here we have the Spirit as the Son with the Father to be the consummation of the Triune God in the church.

The Spirit as the Son with the Father

In this section we do not see the Spirit alone; we see the Spirit as the Son. In 1 Corinthians 15:45 Paul says that the last Adam, Jesus Christ, became a life-giving Spirit. Here Paul says not only that Christ became the Spirit, but that He became a life-giving Spirit. This modifier indicates that the Spirit is the One who gives life. There is only one Spirit who gives life, and this is the divine Spirit. We should never think that in addition to the Holy Spirit there is another Spirit who gives life. No, the life-giving Spirit in 1 Corinthians 15:45 is the divine Spirit who gives life. Through resurrection Christ became the life-giving Spirit.

In 2 Corinthians 3:17 Paul says clearly, "The Lord is the Spirit." As we have pointed out, the Lord here is Christ the Lord. Therefore, this verse clearly tells us that Christ is the Spirit. Concerning this? the note in the *Ryrie Study Bible* says that here we have "a strong statement that Christ and the Holy Spirit are one in essence." In the second section of the New Testament, therefore, we have the Spirit as the Son.

When the Spirit came, He came as the Son with the Father. The Father is always with the Son. In John 14:23 the Lord Jesus said that if we love Him, the Father will love us and both the Father and the Son will come to us and make an abode with us. This proves that the Father comes with the Son. Since the Spirit comes as the Son, the Father is also present.

The Consummation of the Triune God

The Spirit coming as the Son with the Father is the consummation of the Triune God. In the Gospels the Son with the Father and by the Spirit is the embodiment of

the Triune God. Now in Acts through Jude the Spirit as the Son with the Father is the consummation of the Triune God.

In the Church

The Spirit as the consummation of the Triune God is in the church. In this section of the New Testament, we see the church as the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23) and the temple of God (Eph. 2:21; 1 Cor. 3:16). The Body of Christ is the kingdom of God, and the temple of God is the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15). Thus, to say that the church is the Body of Christ and the temple of God is to say that the church is the kingdom of God and the house of God. Romans 14:17 says that the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. According to the context of Romans 12 through 15, the kingdom of God must refer to today's church life. The church is both the kingdom of God and the house of God.

Living Christ unto the Fullness of God

As those in the church, we should live Christ unto the fullness of God. In the first section, we see the embodiment of the Triune God living the life of God to develop into the kingdom of God. Now we see the consummation of the Triune God in the church living Christ unto the fullness of God. This expression "the fullness of God" is revealed in Ephesians 3:19. What a marvelous picture we have in the twenty-two books of the second section of the New Testament!

In Acts through Jude what do we see? We see a wonderful, living Person--the Spirit as the Son with the Father to be the consummation of the Triune God realized in the church to live Christ unto the fullness of God.

THE THIRD SECTION--REVELATION

The Seven Spirits out from the Eternal One and of the Redeemer

Let us go on now to the third section of the New Testament. This section contains only one book, the book

of Revelation. In the book of Revelation we see the seven Spirits out from the eternal One and of the Redeemer (Rev. 1:4-5). In the first section we have the Son; in the second section, the Spirit; and in the third section, the seven Spirits. In the book of Revelation the Spirit becomes the seven Spirits. The seven Spirits are from the eternal One, the One who is, who was, and who is coming. This eternal One is Jehovah God, who in Exodus 3 is revealed as the One who was, who is, and who is coming. Hence, Revelation 1:4 actually refers to Jehovah God in Exodus 3, the eternal One, the eternal I Am.

The sequence of the Trinity is different in Revelation 1:4 and 5 from that in Matthew 28:19. In Matthew 28:19 the Spirit is third, but in Revelation 1:4 and 5 the seven Spirits are second. The fact that the seven Spirits are mentioned second indicates that the seven Spirits are from the eternal One and are also of the Redeemer. Revelation 5:6 says that the seven Spirits are the seven eyes of the Lamb. Since the seven Spirits are the seven eyes of the Lamb, the seven Spirits surely are of the Lamb, the Redeemer.

The Intensification of the Triune God

In Revelation the seven Spirits are related to the Triune God. On the chart we point out that the seven Spirits out from the eternal One and of the Redeemer are the intensification of the Triune God. The Son is the embodiment of the Triune God, the Spirit is the consummation of the Triune God, and the seven Spirits are the intensification of the Triune God.

In the Overcoming Church

The seven Spirits as the intensification of the Triune God are in the overcoming church. In chapters two and three of Revelation we hear again and again concerning the overcomer. Also in these chapters the following word is repeated seven times: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6,13, 22). The word concerning the overcomer and the sevenfold mention of the Spirit speaking to the churches

indicates that what the Lord desires under the intensification of the Triune God is the overcoming church, the church that overcomes the degraded situation. In the overcoming church we have not only the embodiment of the Triune God and the consummation of the Triune God; in the overcoming church we have also the intensification of the Triune God, the Triune God intensified sevenfold.

Consummating in the Golden Lampstands and the New Jerusalem

According to the book of Revelation, the overcoming church consummates in the golden lampstands and, ultimately, the New Jerusalem. The seven lampstands are in this age, and the New Jerusalem will be in eternity. Therefore, the book of Revelation opens with the seven lampstands and closes with the New Jerusalem.

INITIATION, DEVELOPMENT, AND FINALIZATION

In the first section of the New Testament we have the initiation of God's New Testament economy, in the second section we have its development, and in the third section we have its finalization. This means that the seven Spirits as the intensification of the Triune God in the overcoming church are the finalization of the New Testament economy. The intensified Spirit finalizes God's New Testament economy in two stages: first, in this age, with the golden lampstands; finally, in eternity, in the New Jerusalem.

This is a brief outline of the entire New Testament concerning God's New Testament economy.

LIFE-STUDY OF MARK

MESSAGE SEVENTY

A LIFE FULLY ACCORDING TO AND FOR GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

(19)

Scripture Reading: Rev. 1:4-5a, 11-13, 20; 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5-6, 12-13, 21-22; 4:5; 5:6; 14:13-16; 21:1-3a, 9-12, 14, 18-19a, 21; 22:1-2, 14, 17

A SUMMARY OF GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT ECONOMY

In the foregoing message we considered a chart that presents a summary of God's New Testament economy. According to this chart, the entire New Testament may be divided into three sections the four Gospels as the initiation, Acts through Jude as the development, and the book of Revelation as the finalization. In the first section we see the Son with the Father and by the Spirit to be the embodiment of the Triune God in Jesus Christ as God's tabernacle and God's temple, living the life of God to develop into the kingdom of God. In the second section we see the Spirit as the Son with the Father to be the consummation of the Triune God in the church as the Body of Christ, the temple of God, the kingdom of God, and house of God, living Christ unto the fullness of God. In the third section we have the seven Spirits out from the eternal One and of the Redeemer to be the intensification of the Triune God in the overcoming church, consummating in the golden lampstands and the New Jerusalem. In this message, the last message in this Life-study of Mark let us consider the intensification of the Triune God consummating in the golden lampstands and the New Jerusalem.

According to the record of the Gospel of Mark. the disciples followed the Lord Jesus in the way of being brought into Him. They were carried on by the Lord, the all-inclusive One, wherever He went. Hence, He brought

the disciples into Himself. He brought them into His all-inclusive death, the death that terminated all the old things, and also into His all-inclusive resurrection, in which they were germinated to be His reproduction and continuation. In the book of Acts we can see that the disciples participated in Christ and enjoyed Him through His all-inclusive death and resurrection. Furthermore, through the disciples the church came into existence. The twenty-one Epistles from Romans through Jude are needed to define what is presented in summary in the book of Acts.

THE GOLDEN LAMPSTANDS

After the detailed definition in the Epistles, we have the consummation of God's New Testament economy in the book of Revelation. In this consummation the seven Spirits, the sevenfold intensified Spirit of God, play a major role. Through, by, and with the intensified Spirit the church becomes a pure golden lampstand. This is a great matter.

A Symbol of the Triune God

The golden lampstand is a symbol of the Triune God. The gold of the lampstand signifies the divine nature, the nature of God the Father. The shape or form of the lampstand signifies the Son of God as the embodiment of the Father. The seven lamps of the lampstand signify the Spirit of God as the expression. Therefore, in the lampstand we see God the Father as the nature, God the Son as the form, and God the Spirit as the expression.

Signifying the Church

The lampstand not only symbolizes the Triune God, but also signifies the church. But how can a church full of saved sinners be a lampstand of pure gold? Yes, we all are saved, but we are still too natural, too much in the flesh, the self, and the old creation. How can people such as we become a golden lampstand?

A Word of Encouragement

Some saints have told me that they are discouraged and even disappointed with the condition of the church. Some have said, "Years ago the situation was hopeful, but now the condition of the church is disappointing." If you feel this way, it is an indication that you do not see the sevenfold intensified Spirit. The New Testament does not end in disappointment. On the contrary, the New Testament consummates with a full hope, with the seven Spirits transforming a seemingly hopeless church into a pure golden lampstand.

In 1961 I wrote a number of hymns on the church and the New Jerusalem. I was especially happy to sing the hymns on the overcoming church. One day a brother said to me, "Do you mean that we can have the New Jerusalem today?" I replied, "Brother, I do not say that we can have the New Jerusalem today. But according to the book of Revelation, the churches in this age should be a miniature of the New Jerusalem." I went on to tell him that I definitely believe that the church can be a miniature of the New Jerusalem. I hope that you all will believe the same thing. The New Testament ends with a word of encouragement. Praise the Lord for the sevenfold intensified Spirit in the overcoming church, consummating in the golden lampstands!

The Intensification of the Triune God for the Church Life

In the first section of the New Testament, the four Gospels, we have the embodiment of the Triune God, and in the second section we have the consummation of the Triune God. What we have in the third section, in the book of Revelation, is the intensification of the Triune God. This means that the Spirit as the consummation of the Triune God is intensified to become the seven Spirits.

Do we not have the seven Spirits in the book of Revelation? Yes, Revelation emphasizes the seven Spirits. Do you prefer to stay with the Spirit in the book of Acts, or do you prefer the seven Spirits in the book of Revelation?

Where are you today, in Acts or in Revelation? We all should be able to testify that we are in the book of Revelation. Since we are in the book of Revelation, all the churches should realize that now is not a time of discouragement or disappointment. Rather, today is a day of intensification, a day full of hope and encouragement.

In Revelation we have the sevenfold intensification of the Triune God for the church life. Nevertheless, if we set our eyes on the condition of the churches, we shall be disappointed. But if we turn our eyes to the sevenfold intensification of the Triune God, we shall be filled with praise to the Lord.

Do you believe in the condition of the church or in the sevenfold intensification of the Triune God? The condition of the church is not our salvation. Instead, the church's condition may be a discouragement to us. Therefore, we should look at the sevenfold intensification of the Triune God, for this intensification is our salvation.

In the book of Revelation the sevenfold Spirit is emphasized again and again. In 1:4 we read of the seven Spirits who are before the throne of God. Then in chapters two and three the Spirit is stressed repeatedly. Seven times the following word is spoken: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7,11,17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Revelation 4:5 says, "And seven lamps of fire are burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God." Revelation 5:6 speaks of a "Lamb standing as having been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth." Here we see that the Spirit is intensified to be the seven Spirits who are the seven eyes of the Lamb, the Redeemer. In Revelation 14:13 we have this word: "Yes, says the Spirit." Finally, in 22:17 the Spirit and the bride are mentioned together: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come!" Here we see that at the very end of the book of Revelation, the bride, which is the church, becomes one with the Spirit.

In the book of Revelation the titles "the Spirit of God" and "the Holy Spirit" are not used. Instead, we have the Spirit and the seven Spirits. We need to appreciate the

seven Spirits. The sevenfold intensified Spirit is able to transform a hopeless church into a lampstand of pure gold.

Concerning the church, we should not be discouraged or disappointed. Let us be encouraged with the golden lampstand and the New Jerusalem. The Bible ends with strong encouragement. Look at the golden lampstands shining in this dark age, shining in this perverted generation. In eternity the New Jerusalem will be the consummation of the intensification of the Triune God. This surely indicates that our God cannot be defeated by Satan. Even today God is not defeated, His church is not defeated, and we are not defeated. However, if you think you are defeated, you will be defeated. Instead of thinking like this we should say, "Hallelujah, in Christ I am not defeated! Through the sevenfold intensified Spirit, I shall never be defeated!"

THE NEW JERUSALEM

A Sign of the Aggregate of God's Chosen People

The ultimate consummation of the intensification of the Triune God is the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is a sign of the aggregate of God's chosen people both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. The New Jerusalem, therefore, is a composition of all the Old Testament saints, represented by the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev. 21:12), and of all the New Testament saints, represented by the names of the twelve apostles (Rev. 21:14). Hence, the New Jerusalem is a living composition of God's chosen, redeemed, saved, regenerated, and transformed people. God's people will all be transformed into gold, pearl, and precious stones. These materials all point to the building up of God's dwelling place.

The Intrinsic Essence of the Divine Building

Although in the New Jerusalem revealed in the book of Revelation we see the precious materials of gold, pearl,

and precious stones, with these materials we cannot see the intrinsic essence of the divine building specifically. The intrinsic essence of God's building is actually the Triune God as life to us.

The Water of Life and the Tree of Life

At the center of the New Jerusalem is the throne of God, and out of the throne flows the river of water of life (Rev. 22:1-2). The tree of life as a vine grows along the two sides of the river. As the book of Revelation indicates, the water of life in the river is for us to drink, and the tree of life growing along the river is for us to eat. To drink water is to take it into our being. Likewise, to eat something is to take that thing into us. By eating and drinking we are supplied with the essence of what we eat and drink. The river of life and the tree of life thus indicate the intrinsic essence of the nature of this city. This intrinsic essence is the Triune God Himself as our life and life supply.

In the flowing river with the tree of life we see the Triune God. This river flows out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. According to John 7:38 and 39, this flowing river is the Spirit. Hence, we have God, the Lamb, and the Spirit. This is the Triune God flowing to supply us with Himself as life. This flowing Triune God not only saturates us, but also supplies us with the divine essence.

We may use the petrification of wood as an illustration of how the flow of the Triune God imparts the divine essence to us. The flowing of water causes wood to be petrified. The flowing water saturates the wood with the element of certain minerals. As the wood is saturated with the essence of these minerals, it is transformed into stone. This is a picture of the flow of the Spirit bringing the divine essence into our being. This essence accomplishes the work of transforming us, people of dust, into precious stones. This picture helps us to see that the intrinsic essence of the composition of God's building, the New Jerusalem, is the Triune God Himself as life and life supply to us.

In Revelation 22 we see that we need to drink of the Triune God. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 Paul says that we were all baptized in the one Spirit and were all made to drink of this Spirit. Our destiny is to drink the Triune God. As God's chosen people, we have been destined to drink the Triune God. This is our eternal destiny and our eternal enjoyment. For eternity our unique drink will be the Triune God as the divine life. Hallelujah for this all-inclusive drink!

In Revelation 22:1 and 2 we see that the tree of life comes with the water of life. God's life is our drink to saturate us and also our food to satisfy us.

The Way of Life and the Light of Life

In the New Jerusalem the river of life flows in the midst of the street. This indicates that in the New Jerusalem we shall walk along the way of life. In this city there will be only one street, the street on which flows the river of life. The river is the river of life, the tree is the tree of life, and the street is the way of life. This way will direct, guide, regulate, and preserve us.

In the New Jerusalem the Triune God will also he our light. Revelation 21:23 says, "And the city has no need of the sun nor of the moon that they should shine in it, for the glory of God illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb." In the New Jerusalem the Lamb will be the lamp in which will be God as our light.

In the New Jerusalem the Triune God will be our life to saturate us, satisfy us, and regulate, guide, and direct us. The Triune God will also be our light to enlighten us. Here we have the intrinsic essence of the New Jerusalem.

The Intrinsic Essence in the Church Life

The intrinsic essence of the New Jerusalem should also be the intrinsic essence in the church life today. In the church life there should be the throne of God out from which flows the Triune God as our drink, with the tree of life as our food to afford us the way of life and the light of life. This is the intrinsic essence of the church life, the

essence that transforms us into a pure golden lampstand today and that will transform us into precious stones for the building up of the New Jerusalem in the coming age. By this intrinsic essence we may live a life fully according to and for God's New Testament economy.