

Helping Our Children Present Jesus as the King Part II

**Growing Godly Family Series
Manual 32**

By

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Growing Godly Families Series

This series of manuals is the result of a series of weekly e-mail topics that have been prepared and e-mailed over a period of years. They originally started out as a one page topic that gradually grew to the point where most topics are about three pages in length.

This series is especially designed for those who are already Christian leaders to give them Biblical principles for the development of godly physical and spiritual families. Because they give Biblical principles for developing godly families, they are also helpful for new Christians that want to grow and become godly families.

Mark 10:43-45 says, "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." In these verses Christ taught that godly spiritual leaders do not have the attitudes of leaders in the world. Worldly leadership is based on power and authority and is designed to benefit the leader and place him above others. In contrast, godly spiritual leadership is designed to help every Christian reach their full potential in Christ. The following three statements give a summary of three styles of leadership. The purpose of this series is to help every family develop their full potential as godly families.

If we drive people, we will drive them until they can get out of our way.

If we lead people, we will be able to lead them as far as we have gone ourselves.

If we serve people, we will help each person develop their full God given potential and equip each person for the ministry that Christ has prepared for every Christian.

In the world people often measure success by the amount of things that they accumulate in this world before they die. However, they are unable to take any of those things with them when they die. Mark 8:36-37 says, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" Success produces rewards until we die but it produces nothing for eternity.

In contrast, God measures effectiveness by our faithfulness and obedience. Matthew 6:19-21 says, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Effectiveness produces eternal rewards. Mark 10:29-30 says, "So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life." I Corinthians 10:31 says, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." The Growing Godly Families Series is designed to help your family life count for eternity by bringing glory to God.

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Jesus Sent the Twelve out to Preach and Heal

In our last topic we saw that we show our physical and spiritual children by our example how to obey Christ and pray that the Lord of the harvest will send forth laborers into His harvest. Jesus told His disciples that the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. That is why He asked them to pray the Lord of the harvest. In our topic today we will see that Jesus sent the very ones that He asked to pray into His harvest field.

In Matthew 10:1-4 we read, “And when He had called His twelve disciples to *Him*, He gave them power *over* unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the *son* of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.” Jesus had told the disciples to pray that the Father would send forth laborers into His harvest. In these verses we see that the disciples are the answer to their own prayers.

In these verses we see that Jesus sent out the Twelve to gain experience in ministry. Jesus gave the twelve special power as He sent them out to minister. Hebrews 2:3-4 says, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?” In these verses from Hebrews we see that God chose to confirm the message of the apostles by various signs and wonders, various miracles and with gifts of the Holy Spirit. This was done by the Father because that was His will.

We also see the message that Jesus gave the Twelve as He sent them out to preach. Luke 9:1-2 says, “Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.” This shows that Jesus told them to preach the kingdom of God. The “kingdom of God” is defined in Luke 17:20-21 where we read, “Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.” The disciples were to make it clear that the way that people enter the kingdom of God is through a change of heart. Earlier John the Baptist said in Matthew 3:2 as he preached, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” Repentance means to have sorrow for sin that leads one to turn from sin and turn to God. It is a change of heart that results in a changed life. It also refers to the time in the future when Jesus will rule on the earth in Revelation 20:4-6.

We are also given the names of the twelve apostles. By comparing this list of the twelve with the other lists of the twelve we see that Christ very possibly had the disciples divided into three smaller groups. This would have made it very possible for Jesus to teach each of the small

groups as they walked along the road while traveling from place to place. Luke 6:14-16 gives us one of the other places where the twelve are listed. Those verses say, “Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; Matthew and Thomas; James the *son* of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot; Judas *the son* of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor.” The first name in every list of the twelve is Peter. Andrew, James and John are always the next three mentioned after Peter. Philip is always number five on the lists followed by Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas. James the son of Alphaeus is always number nine in the list followed by Thaddaeus, Simon the Canaanite and Judas Iscariot.

Thaddaeus is also called either Lebbaeus or Judas. Simon is called the Canaanite or the Zealot. The last name on every list of the twelve is Judas Iscariot. The various lists also describe the actions of Judas. He is the final one listed in Mark 3:16-19. Verse 19 says, “And Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him. And they went into a house.” Matthew and Mark both mention that Judas betrayed Jesus while Luke says that he also became a traitor. After Judas killed himself, Acts 1:24-26 says, “And they prayed and said, ‘You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.’” And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.” Here we see that the Lord guided in the choosing of Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot after his death.

We go on to read that Jesus gave the twelve specific instructions before he sent them out to preach about the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 10:5-8 says, “These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.” We see that Jesus began these instructions by telling the disciples what they were not to do this first time as they went out to share about the kingdom of heaven (kingdom of God in the other Gospels). They were not to go to areas where the Gentiles lived. They were not to go to the Samaritans. Later they would be told to go to both of these groups but Jesus wanted them to learn to make contacts with other Jews first. The Jews had a background similar to the twelve. This is a helpful principle to remember when training others

That is why Jesus told the twelve to go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Other Jews were all familiar with the Old Testament as they had all grown up in the synagogues. Acts 15:21 says, “For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.” The Jews were taken out of the area of Israel during the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC. They realized that if they were going to survive as a people that the thing that would make that possible was to all become familiar with the Old Testament. As a result, in every city where the Jews were scattered if there were ten or more Jewish men in that city they were required to build a synagogue so that they could read the Old Testament. However, although the Jews were all familiar with the Old Testament, they did not understand how to enter the kingdom of God. This is illustrated by the question of Nicodemus in John 3:3-4 where we read, “Jesus answered

and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” As a result, they were lost sheep.

The message that the disciples were to preach as they went was “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” John the Baptist had preached this same message as he told the people to prepare for the coming of the Christ. Matthew 3:1-2 says, “In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’” Now the twelve were to preach that same message as Jesus sent them out in teams of two to the various cities and villages. Later Jesus sent out a total of 70 disciples. Luke 10:9 gives the message that they were to preach as they went to the cities where Jesus would soon come. That verse says, “And heal the sick there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’” Here we see that all shared the same message as they prepared for the coming of Jesus.

Jesus also gave the twelve disciples various signs to the Jews to verify their message. In I Corinthians 1:22 we read, “For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom.” Then John 20:30-31 says, “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” The Jews required signs in order to believe. As a result, Jesus gave the twelve four specific signs to verify their message about the kingdom of heaven. They were to heal the sick. They were to cleanse the lepers. They were to raise the dead. They were to cast out demons. Jesus also did each of these four things as a part of His ministry to show that He came from God. However, most of the Jews did not believe.

Matthew records a final instruction that Jesus gave the twelve before He sent them to preach the kingdom of God. Jesus said, “Freely you have received, freely give.” The word translated “freely” means undeservedly or freely. Romans 3:24 says, “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” These verses remind us that each person who receives the righteousness of God has that righteousness placed on him as a free gift. We did nothing to earn the right to receive the righteousness of God. As a result, we were declared right in the sight of God freely by the grace of the Father because Christ paid the entire price to redeem us from sin.

The disciples were to give the message freely. They were to perform the signs freely. Acts 8:18-19 says, “And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’” Jesus knew there would be people like Simon the sorcerer and so He wanted to make certain the disciples did not charge anyone anything for healing. In the same way we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to freely share the message of the Gospel with all. May the Lord richly bless you as you model what it means to give freely.

Jesus Told the Twelve they were to go by Faith

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn what Jesus told His disciples to do and what to avoid as He sent them out to preach the message of the kingdom of God. Jesus also gave them some other instructions before actually sending them out. Those other instructions will be the focus of this topic.

One of the most important lessons that Jesus wants every Christian to learn is to walk by faith. Matthew 10:9-10 says, "Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for *your* journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food." Here we see how Jesus taught the twelve to begin to learn to walk by faith. First, Jesus told the disciples to take no money with them as He sent them out on this first ministry trip. They were not to take any gold coins because then they would have had plenty of money. In fact Jesus said that they were not even to take any silver coins for their trip as that would have provided anything that they needed. Then Jesus told them not to take any copper coins with them. Copper is worth much less than gold or silver. However, Jesus did not want the disciples to take any money with them so that they would learn to trust Him to supply what was needed.

Second Jesus told them not to take a bag or any extra clothing on this first ministry trip. A bag was a leather sack that travelers would use to carry their food for their travel. Here we see that Jesus told them not to take a bag of food with them. In addition, they were not to take any extra clothes. A tunic was an undergarment or a coat. In John 19:23 we read, "Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece." In this verse we see that the word refers to the coat that Jesus wore. This meant that the disciples had to depend on God to supply an extra coat if one was needed as they traveled from city to city. Jesus said the same thing about taking an extra pair of sandals. Jesus told the disciples not even to take an extra staff with them.

Then Jesus explained why the disciples were not to take any of these things with them. Jesus said that a workman is worthy of his food. Jesus explained that it is fitting for God to supply food through people as they served the Lord on this ministry trip. However, Jesus was also preparing His disciples for the future. II Corinthians 5:7 says, "For we walk by faith, not by sight." This was the most important lesson that Jesus wanted His disciples to learn on this ministry trip. Paul gave a wonderful promise to the Philippians about the way that the Lord will supply as we put Him first in our service. Philippians 4:19 says, "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." God knows the necessities that we will need as we go through life. That is why I Timothy 6:6-8 says, "Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content." God will supply our basic needs.

Jesus went on to tell the disciples what to do at each city when they arrived at that city.

Matthew 10:11-13 says, “Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out. And when you go into a household, greet it. If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.” Here we see the first thing that the disciples were to do when they arrived at a city or a town. The word translated “inquire” means to ask or to search. Herod used this word when he told the wise men in Matthew 2:8, “And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, ‘Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found *Him*, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.’” In this verse the word is translated search. This meant that in some cities it might take a little longer to find a person that was worthy.

In verses 11 we have the same word that was translated “worthy” in verse 10. There we saw that the word means fitting. The word can also mean something of value and when used of a person speaks of a person that is respected. In Luke 7:4-5 we read, “And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, ‘for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue.’” In this verse we see that the word is translated deserving. The Jews were talking about a Roman centurion who was highly respected by the Jews because of his love for them. Jesus told the disciples on this first ministry trip to ask and find out who was respected and then stay with that person while they were in that city. Staying at the home of a respected person would cause the people of that city to be more open to hear the message that the disciples would be sharing while they were in that city.

The disciples were also told what to do at the first household that they contacted as they came into the city. They were to give a greeting of peace to that household. Peter gives us a picture of what a greeting of peace is like in Acts 10:27-29 where we read, “And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. Then he said to them, ‘You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?’” Peter spent some time talking with Cornelius before he even entered into the house. At the home of a stranger this first conversation would determine whether that household was open to learn about the kingdom of God.

We see that the disciples were to take a short time to get acquainted with people and during this time of getting acquainted to offer peace to that household. Jesus said that the household would show that they were open if they responded with respect and wanted to learn more about the kingdom of God. Jesus said that some households would respond with respect while others would not. In Luke 7:4-5 we read, “And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, ‘for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue.’” Here the Jews described a Roman centurion as deserving because the centurion had shown his love for the people of Capernaum. This showed them an attitude of respect by the centurion.

Jesus said that if a household showed respect that peace would come on that household. In contrast, if that household did not show respect then Jesus told the disciples that their peace would return to them instead of being on the household that rejected them. In this way followers

of Jesus could experience peace even when they were rejected by some households. Jesus also told the disciples what to do if they did not find a worthy household in a city. Matthew 10:14-15 says, "And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!"

In this statement Jesus warned the disciples that they might not be received in some cities. There would be those cities that refused to listen to the message about the kingdom of God. The night before His crucifixion Jesus explained to the disciples in John 15:20, "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also." Jesus wanted the disciples to understand that those who rejected them did so because they rejected both Jesus and the Father. Jesus wanted the disciples not to take it personally when they were rejected because of their message.

Jesus told the disciples what to do when one of the cities of the Jews rejected them. Jesus said that they were to shake off the dust from their feet. Acts 13:50-51 says, "But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium." Here we see that the Jews stirred up the people of Antioch of Pisidia and convinced the leaders of the city to expel Paul and Barnabas from their region. Paul and Barnabas followed the instructions that Jesus had given and shook off the dust of their feet as a testimony against the Jews in that city. The Jews had the Old Testament that spoke of the promised Messiah. The Jews knew what the Old Testament said but Jesus warned that some would reject Him. They were to be treated as they treated the Gentiles for their unbelief.

Jesus then gave a warning about the judgment of those cities which rejected the message of the kingdom of God. Jesus said that it would be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city. Genesis 19:24-25 says, "Then the LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the LORD out of the heavens. So He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground." Here we see the earthly judgment of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. However, Jesus said here that the Jewish cities that rejected the disciples would receive a greater eternal judgment than the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Jews had a much greater privilege than Sodom and Gomorrah because they had the Old Testament which prophesied the coming of Jesus and still some cities rejected Him.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that there will also be people who will reject them when they share the message of the death and resurrection of Jesus. However, they do not need to take such rejection personally as long as they have spoken the truth in love. As Jesus explained to the disciples those who reject Jesus and the Father will also reject them. In contrast, those who respond positively to the message of the Gospel will also respond positively to them. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand how to handle rejection.

31.

Jesus Prepared the Disciples for Opposition

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to handle rejection by not taking it personally when people reject the message of the Gospel. In this topic we will see that Jesus gave His disciples further instructions about other forms of rejection that they would experience as they served Him.

In Matthew 10:16-18 we read, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.” In these verses we see that Jesus gave His disciples a very visual picture of their need to depend on Him. Matthew 7:15 says, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.” In John 10:12 we see that the wolf catches and scatters the sheep. Then in Acts 20:29 we read, “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.” In all three passages we see that wolves are compared to false teachers. They have the same goal as Satan and that is to steal, kill and destroy.

The fact that Jesus said that He sent out the disciples as sheep among wolves meant that they needed to depend on the Lord at every moment. If you have a sheep and a wolf in the same place the wolf has lunch and the sheep is lunch. In contrast, if you have a sheep, a wolf and a shepherd in the same place you have a dead wolf. Jesus told the disciples what to do since they were sheep among wolves. He said be wise as serpents. Genesis 3:1 says, “Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” Among people in Biblical times the serpent was known for cunning and wisdom. Christ knew that the disciples needed great wisdom. The dove or pigeon was known for being harmless. The disciples were to be harmless while at the same time using great wisdom.

Jesus went on to tell the disciples some of the things that would happen to them in the future. Jesus told the disciples that they would be delivered up to councils. Among the Jews every city and town had a council that would deliberate and pass judgment. Acts 5:40-41 says, “And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” This is one of many times a council persecuted the leaders of the early church. Jesus also warned the apostles they would be beaten in the synagogues.

Jesus also told the disciples that they would be brought before governors and kings for His sake. Jesus said that this persecution would be a testimony both for these rulers and also for the Gentiles. Later the Lord told Ananias that Saul would have these things happen to him so that he could be a witness. Acts 9:15-16 says, “But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will

show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." In the case of Saul who later became Paul he even had the opportunity to speak to the Roman emperor and share the Gospel with him.

Jesus went on to explain to the disciples what they were to do when they were delivered to any group of leaders for their faith. Matthew 10:19-20 says, "But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you." Here Jesus gave the disciples a key instruction for them and for every Christian since who has faced opposition for the Gospel. Jesus just said "do not worry." Philippians 4:6-7 says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." As we pray with thanksgiving the Lord will guard our hearts and minds with His peace regardless of what kind of opposition we may face.

Jesus told the disciples they did not need to worry about how to speak or what they should speak when they were delivered to those who opposed the Gospel. Jesus said that when a disciple is delivered to any council, court or any other person or group who opposes the message of the Gospel that the Lord will give the words to speak at that time. Peter illustrated the fact that the Lord gives the words to speak in Acts 4:7-10 says, "And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, 'By what power or by what name have you done this?' Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed *done* to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole.'" Peter was able to speak boldly because God gave him the words to speak.

That was an example of exactly what Jesus said when He said in verse 20, "For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you." The reason we do not need to worry if we have to face a group or council that are opposed to the Gospel is the fact that Jesus promised we would not have to speak our own thoughts. Instead we see that the Holy Spirit is the One who will speak in us and give us the words to say. John 14:26 says, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." Jesus said that the Holy Spirit will bring to our remembrance the things that we have been taught from the Word of God. Then we will be able to share the Word of God and explain what it means to those who are in opposition to the Gospel.

Jesus went on to explain to the disciples other forms of opposition that those who follow Him will experience. Matthew 10:21-23 says, "Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father *his* child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes." Here we see that the disciples were warned that there could even be opposition from within their own families. This

opposition could come from a brother, a parent or even from children. We may also face opposition to the Gospel of Christ even from within our own families. Paul reminded us in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” We are to remember that the Gospel we share is so powerful that it is able to transform all who believe including those who oppose at first.

Jesus warned the disciples that they might be hated by all for His name’s sake. Jesus gave a very similar statement to the disciples at another time. Mark 13:13 says, “And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.” However, in that passage Jesus was talking about the time of the tribulation. Mark 13:19 says, “For *in* those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be.” That time is still future and talks about the opposition that will happen to those who become saints during the tribulation. Jeremiah 30:7 says, “Alas! For that day *is* great, so that none *is* like it; and it *is* the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it.” As Jesus was talking to the disciples, He was letting them know what would happen both in the near future and also in the more distant future.

The disciples themselves faced much opposition from the Jews. However, the Jews who become saints during the future tribulation described in Mark 13 will face equal or greater opposition. In fact most Jews and Gentiles who become saints during the time of the tribulation will be put to death for their faith. Peter explained why both the disciples and the future tribulation saints are able to endure in times of persecution. I Peter 1:3-5 says, “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” In these verses we see that any believer who experiences persecution at any time can look forward to our future reward because we are kept by the power of God. Nothing can separate us from His love.

Jesus also gave instructions to the disciples about what they should do when they faced persecution. He told them to flee to another city and continue their ministry. Jesus said that the Son of Man (Jesus) would come before they had gone through all the cities of Israel. That same thing will also be true in the time of the future tribulation. In Revelation 20 we see that Christ will return at the end of the tribulation to rule on the earth for a thousand years. We also want to prepare our physical and spiritual children for opposition as they share the Gospel with others. That opposition may come from their family, from various levels of government and especially from those in the world who do not want to hear the message of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Jesus said, when they get opposition in one place we can encourage them to be faithful and just keep moving forward as they share the Gospel. May the Lord richly bless you as you prepare your children for opposition.

Jesus Told the Disciples not to be Fearful

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to prepare for opposition from some when they share the message of Jesus Christ. We want them to remember that those who oppose Christ will also oppose them when they share about Christ. In our topic today we are going to see that Jesus taught His disciples not to be fearful because He knew everything that happened in their lives.

Jesus told His disciples not to fear those who rejected them. Matthew 10:24-26 says, “A disciple is not above *his* teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more *will they call* those of his household! Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.” Jesus gave the disciples two comparisons. First, he said a disciple is not above his teacher. Second, he said a servant is not above his master. Jesus was actually comparing His two relationships to His disciples.

Jesus was their Teacher and they were His disciples. At the same time Jesus was also their Master and they were His servants. In Mark 3:22 we read, “And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, ‘He has Beelzebub,’ and, ‘By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons.’” Matthew 12:24 makes it clear that these scribes who earned their living by copying books of the Old Testament were also Pharisees. Here we see that the scribes from Jerusalem called Jesus by the name of Beelzebub. Beelzebub was a name of Satan. That name meant “lord of the house” or prince of the evil spirits. Jesus said that if these religious leaders called Him Satan that they would also call His disciples evil since they were part of the household or family of Jesus. The same thing is true for us today because we are also a part of the household of Jesus when we repent of our sin.

Jesus said that because the disciples were a part of His household that they did not need to fear the scribes and the Pharisees. They might also be accused of being followers of Satan by the scribes and Pharisees because they were followers of Jesus but that was not a reason to fear them. The scribes and Pharisees were trying to cover their own evil by accusing Jesus of being the source of evil. However, Jesus said that such accusations could not hide the evil of the scribes. The evil that they were trying to hide in their hearts would be revealed and their evil would be revealed for all to see. Jesus had earlier said in Matthew 7:18-20, “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.” Jesus said that the hearts of those who are evil would be revealed by the fruit of their lives.

In contrast to the evil hearts of the scribes, Jesus said that a good tree cannot bear bad fruit. As a result, Jesus told the disciples in Matthew 10:27-31, “Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body

in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." Jesus had taught the disciples many times in private when it was just He and the disciples. Now as He sent them out to preach Jesus told the disciples to speak and share those teachings with others in public. Jesus said that He had taught them when they were alone and they had heard what He said. Now Jesus told them to preach those things from the housetops so that everyone could hear what Jesus had taught the disciples.

Jesus did not want the disciples to be afraid as they taught those things. Instead Jesus wanted them to speak boldly. Then Jesus told them who to fear and who not to fear. They were not to fear people because people can only kill the body but not the soul. Once people have killed the body there is nothing more that they can do. In contrast, they needed to fear God because He is the One who will bring eternal judgment on those who reject Him. Revelation 20:15 says, "And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." We might put it this way. If we fear people then we will not fear God. In contrast, if we fear God, we will not have a fear of people because we know that the One that we serve is much greater than those people.

Then Jesus gave the disciples a comparison to help them understand that their lives were very valuable in the sight of God. People could buy two sparrows for a small copper coin that was worth about the same amount of money as the two coins which the poor widow gave in Luke 21:1-4. Luke 21:3-4 says, "So He said, 'Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had.'" Jesus then said that the Father knows when every sparrow dies and falls to the ground even though their value is very small. Then Jesus went on to explain what the Father knows about each person. Jesus said that the Father knows how many hairs each person has which would mean that He knows whenever we lose even one hair.

This is a reminder that God knows everything about each person on the earth right down to the smallest detail (the number of hairs on our heads). Paul used that thought to show the greatness of the protection of the Lord when he said to the sailors of the ship in Acts 27:34, "Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you." In addition, the fact that God knows how many hairs you have at any moment also shows that God knows all things. Mark 4:22 says, "For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light." God knows every single thing that we have ever thought or said. However, God gives a wonderful promise to those who trust in Him. Hebrews 8:12 says, "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." God knows every sin that a follower of Jesus has committed and chooses to remember them no more.

Jesus talked about the value of sparrows. Then after He said the Father knows the number of our hairs Jesus went on to say that we are of much more value than many sparrows. The Father stated how much value He placed on each of our lives when Romans 5:8 says, "But God

demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” God loves us and has given infinite value to our lives. Based on the fact that God has given our lives such great value, Jesus went on to say in Matthew 10:32-33, “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.”

The word translated “confesses” means to say the same thing or to agree with another. True repentance and faith will cause a person to confess that Jesus is the Christ. A lack of repentance and faith will keep a person silent. John 12:42-43 says, “Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *Him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” In these verses we see that many leaders were more concerned to have the praise of men than to have Jesus confess their names before the Father.

In contrast, Romans 10:9-10 says, “That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” True repentance and faith will cause us to confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord. Repentance happens in the heart. I Thessalonians 1:9-10 says, “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” Repentance is turning from sin and turning to God with the result that we want to serve Him. Such repentance in the heart will also cause us to confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord. That is why we can know that Jesus will confess us before the Father.

The word translated “deny” means to reject or to refuse something that is offered. Those who deny Jesus before men show that they have refused to accept the eternal life that Jesus has offered to them as a free gift. However, this is also the word that is used in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John to speak of the denial by Peter of Jesus the night when Jesus was on trial before the Jewish religious leaders. Jesus had told Peter earlier that evening in Luke 22:31-32, “And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren.’” Peter felt that He was such a failure because he had depended on his own strength that he felt the only thing that he could do was go back to fishing. That was why it was necessary for Jesus to come and restore Peter by telling him three times to feed His lambs and sheep.

Like Peter we will act out of fear and deny Jesus if we depend on our own strength as Christians. That is why Romans 6:19-20 says, “I speak in human *terms* because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members *as* slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness *leading to more* lawlessness, so now present your members *as* slaves *of* righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.” We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the importance of yielding our spirit to the Holy Spirit so that we will speak boldly for Jesus. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to speak boldly for Christ.

Jesus Promised There are Rewards for Service

In our last topic we saw that we want to show our physical and spiritual children how to speak boldly for Jesus so that we do not deny Him either in our hearts or by the words that we speak. In this topic we see that Jesus promised rewards to disciples if they would be faithful in speaking for Him.

Before speaking about rewards to His disciples, Jesus warned that His message would bring conflict. Matthew 10:34-36 says, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’” In Luke 2:14 we see that the angels praised God at the birth of Jesus by saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” Here we see that Jesus said just the opposite. Jesus had to defeat Satan before that peace could come. All who come to Christ in repentance and faith can experience the peace of God in our hearts but until Satan is sent to judgment there will continue to be conflict on the earth.

Jesus said that this conflict will be in a person’s own family. We have an illustration of one such conflict in John 9 when Jesus healed a blind man. John 9:20-22 says, “His parents answered them and said, ‘We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself.’ His parents said these *things* because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed *that He was Christ*, he would be put out of the synagogue.” Here we see that the parents chose to show a lack of respect to their son because of their fear of being put out of the synagogue. That was just a very early picture of much greater conflicts that would happen in families in the future because of the eternal life that Jesus offers. Jesus warned of much greater suffering from family members during the time of the tribulation. Luke 21:16-17 says, “You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put *some* of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake.” In these verses we see that Jesus explained to the disciples that in the time of the tribulation that many would be betrayed even by their own households.

Jesus went on to explain in Matthew 10:37-39, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.” The word translated “love” in these verses is the word for family love. In contrast, Matthew 22:37-40 says, “Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” In these verses the word used for love is the word that speaks of God’s love for us. Family love involves commitment. Godly love is pictured by the fact that Christ loved us so much that He gave His life to pay the penalty for our sins on the cross. This is total sacrifice and not just commitment and is eternal and not just for this world.

In I John 4:18-21 we read, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us. If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God *must* love his brother also.” By taking all of these verses together we see that we respond to God’s love because He loved us first. That love was shown by the fact that Jesus gave His life to pay the penalty for our sins. His love is much greater than any human love because it is eternal. As a result, our response to that love will cause us to love God even more than we love any member of our family. Jesus said that otherwise we are not worthy of Him.

Then Jesus said that a person who does not take his cross and follow after Jesus is not worthy of Him. Matthew 16:24-26 says, “Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” In these verses we see that Jesus explained that those who put the things of the world first in their lives have not denied themselves. They have kept the world and the things of the world as the love of their life instead of responding to the love and sacrifice that Christ made to save their lives.

Jesus explained to His disciples what it means to love Him as He talked to them the night before He was crucified. First, Jesus said that to love Him means to be obedient to His commandments. John 15:10 says, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.” In Matthew 22:37-40 quoted in a pervious paragraph we see that Jesus summarized all of the Old Testament commandments in just two commandments: Love God with our whole heart, soul and mind and love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

Second, Jesus said that to love Him means to love one another as He loves us. John 15:12 says, “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” Third, Jesus said that to love Him means to lay down our life for Him and for others. We see that to take up the cross of Jesus means that we are willing to lay down our lives for Him. Then John 15:13-14 says, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” Galatians 5:13 tells us one key way to lay down our lives for others. That verse says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” When we love Jesus more than we love our family it will actually cause them to experience the love of Christ flowing through us which means that we will love them with an eternal love that causes us to pray for their salvation if they are not Christians. If they are Christians that eternal love will help them grow and become more like Christ.

Then Jesus went on to promise the disciples rewards for faithful service. Matthew 10:40-42 says, “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward. And he

who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold *water* in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward." The word translated "receive" means to take with the hand, to give hospitality or to receive instruction.

Jesus said that those who received the disciples as they went out to share the message of the kingdom of God would actually be receiving Christ which meant that they would also receive the Father who sent Him. Jesus said that the people who received the disciples would also receive rewards. Jesus said that the one who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet would receive a prophet's reward. Jesus was sending His disciples out two by two throughout Galilee. There would be many who received them in the various cities and villages. If they received them as prophets of God, they would be rewarded just as the prophets are rewarded by God. If those people received the disciples as righteous men in the name of the One who is truly righteous they would receive a righteous man's reward. Romans 3:21-22a says, "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe." Here we see that the first reward for all who receive Jesus is that they receive the righteousness of God.

Jesus went on to show that He is very eager to give rewards. Jesus said that any person who gives even a little child a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple will by no means lose his reward. The word translated "lose" means to be destroyed. This word is used about Satan in John 10:10 where we read, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly." Satan came to destroy but Jesus came to give life and as we see from this verse to also give rewards. In that chapter Jesus also explained one reward that all who become His disciples will receive. John 10:28 says, "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." All of those who serve Jesus because they are His disciples will never perish because Jesus said no one is able to take them out of His hand.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that Jesus will reward them as they love and serve Him. No service that they give because they are true followers of Christ will go unrewarded. Christ is our foundation. Jesus led Paul to write in I Corinthians 3:14 what happens if we build on that foundation, "If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward." We want to help our children understand why it is important to choose to do those things that have eternal value so that they can receive the rewards that the Lord desires to give to them. They will be able to experience eternal joy when they receive those rewards. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand the rewards that come from serving Christ.

Jesus Sent Words of Encouragement to John the Baptist

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand fully what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. We also saw that Jesus promised rewards to all who are faithful in their service for Him. In this topic we will see that Jesus sent a message of encouragement to John the Baptist.

In our last four topics we see that Jesus gave the disciples several very important instructions before He sent them out in teams of two to preach. Matthew 11:1 says, “Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples, that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities.” Jesus had finished giving those instructions to His disciples. Mark 6:12-13 says, “So they went out and preached that *people* should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed *them*.” The message of the disciples as they went out was that people should repent. Throughout the Gospels we see that the message of John the Baptist, Jesus and now the disciples was to repent. That is the same message that Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost. Paul also summarized his message in Acts 20:21 by saying, “Testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” In fact that is the message throughout the New Testament as various individuals shared the news of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

After sending out the disciples to preach, we see that Jesus then left that area to teach and preach in the cities of Galilee. Meanwhile John the Baptist had been thrown into prison by Herod. Luke 3:19-20 says, “But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, also added this, above all, that he shut John up in prison.” John the Baptist rebuked Herod for living in adultery with the wife of his brother. Herod did not like the rebuke and so he gave the order for John the Baptist to be thrown into prison. As a result, John had now been in prison for a period of time. While in prison John began to hear about the miracles that Jesus was doing.

Matthew 11:2-6 says, “And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, ‘Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: *The* blind see and *the* lame walk; *the* lepers are cleansed and *the* deaf hear; *the* dead are raised up and *the* poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.’” Here we see that John sent two of his disciples to talk to Jesus. Matthew tells us that the two asked Jesus the question, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” Instead of answering the two, Luke 7:21 tells us what happened immediately after the two asked this question to Jesus. That verse says, “And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight.” Here we see that the two were able to see what Jesus was doing and see how He had power over sickness, demons and even blindness. Then we see what He told the disciples after they had observed these miracles.

Jesus told the two disciples to go and tell John the things that they had heard and seen. Jesus

had performed many miracles during the time that the two observed Jesus. The details of these miracles are not given. Instead we just have a summary of the various kinds of miracles that Jesus did during the time the two were visiting Jesus. First, we see that Jesus gave sight to some who were blind. At a different time one who had been blind was told that Jesus was a sinner. We see his answer in John 9:25 where we read, “He answered and said, ‘Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see.’” This blind man knew that his life had been changed.

Second, we see that Jesus caused the lame to walk. Jesus healed many who could not walk. In John 5:8-9 we read, “Jesus said to him, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk.’ And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath.” In the case of this man he had been lame and could not walk for a period of 38 years. Third, we read that lepers were cleansed. At another time a leper had come to Jesus. Mark 1:40-42 says, “Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, ‘If You are willing, You can make me clean.’ Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out *His* hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed.” Leprosy is a disease for which there is no cure but Jesus could heal this terrible disease with just a touch of His hand.

Fourth, we read that the deaf could now hear. After Jesus healed a man that was deaf and had an impediment of speech Mark 7:37 says, “And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, ‘He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.’” Sixth, we read that Jesus raised the dead. Luke 7:14-15 says, “Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, ‘Young man, I say to you, arise.’ So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother.” Sixth, we read that the poor had the Gospel preached to them. Jesus introduced His public ministry by saying in Luke 4:18-19, “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”

During the time that the disciples of John the Baptist were with Jesus they saw the miracles that He did and heard the message that He preached. Then Jesus told them to tell John, “And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.” Jesus wanted John to be encouraged even though he was in prison. That is why Jesus had the disciples of John spend some time with Him. That way they saw what Jesus did and they heard what He taught. Then they were told to encourage John by telling him not to be offended even though he had been put in prison. Jesus knew exactly what was happening in his life and wanted him to have peace during the time he was in prison. Jesus knew that when John heard what Jesus was preaching and heard about the miracles that Jesus was doing that John would have great joy because God was working in the lives of people.

Matthew 11:7-10 says, “As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft *clothing* are in kings’ houses. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more

than a prophet. For this is *he* of whom it is written: Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.” Here we see that Jesus began to talk about John the Baptist after his disciples left to return to tell John what they had heard and seen while they were with Jesus.

Jesus turned to the people who were gathered around Him and asked them what they had gone out in to the wilderness to see. A reed was a stick or a branch of a bush. When the wind is blowing in a wilderness area all of the branches of the bushes will be shaking because of the wind. As a result, no one goes out to the wilderness to see the branches of a bush shake. Jesus answered His own question with two additional questions, “But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments?” Clothing made from soft material in that day was more expensive than the cheaper materials from which much clothing was made. Jesus said that if they were looking for that kind of clothing they would have looked in the houses of kings or other rulers.

Then Jesus explained the real reason why the people had gone out into the wilderness. They had gone out into the wilderness to see a prophet of God. It had been about 400 hundred years since Malachi had written the last book of the Old Testament. The people had been looking for the Messiah to come. As a result, Mark 1:4-5 says, “John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.” John 1:19-21 adds, “Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, ‘I am not the Christ.’ And they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the Prophet?’ And he answered, ‘No.’” Jesus then explained that John was more than a prophet. He was the one who fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy of Malachi.

Malachi 3:1 says, “Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts.” By quoting part of this verse Jesus made it clear that the ministry of John the Baptist was to prepare the way for the coming of the Christ (the Anointed One or the Messiah). The disciples of John had asked Jesus if He was the Coming One. We saw that Jesus did a variety of different miracles as signs to prove that He was the Coming One instead of answering their question directly. However, by this statement Jesus made it clear that John was the messenger who was preparing the way for the coming of the Christ. This caused the people there that day to have to make a choice to either believe or reject Jesus. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to present this same choice to others. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

Jesus Said the People Rejected both John and Jesus

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain the fact that the ministry of John the Baptist was to prepare the way and introduce Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. In this topic we see that Jesus went on to explain more about the ministry of John the Baptist.

Jesus continued speaking about John the Baptist. We read in Matthew 11:11-15, “Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive *it*, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” In these verses we see that Jesus explained that John was a great prophet.

Jesus said that among those who had been born to women that there had not arisen one greater than John the Baptist. John actually had a greater privilege than any of the Old Testament prophets. Many Old Testament people had great lives and impacts. Some even gave prophecies about the coming Messiah. However, none of them had the privilege of seeing Jesus and hearing about His ministry. None of them had the opportunity to see how God was going to provide salvation. I Peter 1:10-11 says, “Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.” The Old Testament prophets could only write about the coming Messiah but they did not see or know Him.

After talking about the greatness of John the Baptist Jesus went on to make an even more amazing statement. Jesus said, “But he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” John the Baptist died before the death and resurrection of Jesus. As a result, I Peter 1:12 went on to say, “To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.” The coming of the Holy Spirit to live in each Christian as the down payment and guarantee of our salvation means that even the least known and weakest Christian has an even greater privilege than John the Baptist as well as all who lived in the time of the Old Testament.

However, something happened that began with John the Baptist that has affected the kingdom of heaven ever since. We read that the kingdom suffers violence. Just a short time later Herod killed John the Baptist to please Herodias. Matthew 14:7-10 says, “Therefore he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, ‘Give me John the Baptist’s head here on a platter.’ And the king was sorry; nevertheless, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he commanded *it* to be given to *her*. So he sent and had John beheaded in prison.” The violence against followers of Jesus that began with the death of John the Baptist has continued until today.

The whole Old Testament and even John prophesied about the coming of the Messiah. Jesus said that if the people of that day as a whole would have received John the Baptist and his message that He would carry out the ministry of Elijah which is to come. The last two verses of the Old Testament, Malachi 4:5-6 says, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." In these verses we see that Elijah will come before the coming of the great and dreadful Day of the Lord (the tribulation period described in Revelation 4-19). That event is still future and will happen after we as Christians are taken to heaven. Jesus said John the Baptist could have fulfilled that ministry if the people would have received him. Instead John prepared the way for the first coming of Christ and Elijah will prepare the way for the second coming of Christ.

Jesus then made a very important statement when He said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" Matthew repeats this statement of Jesus three times, Mark one time and Luke two times. John made a very similar statement to each of the seven churches in Revelation. The seventh of those statements is found in Revelation 3:22 where we read, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." As a result, these two statements together are given thirteen times in the New Testament. I Corinthians 2:12-14 says, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned." These verses show that the only ones who can truly hear are those who are given understanding by the Holy Spirit.

Then Jesus went on to explain what that generation was like. Matthew 11:16-17 says, "But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, and saying: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you, and you did not lament.'" This quote is also given in Luke 7:32. Luke 7:29-30 says, "And when all the people heard *Him*, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him." In these verses we see that the tax collectors responded to the message of John the Baptist while the Pharisees and lawyers rejected that message and by doing that rejected the will of God for them. That is why Jesus compared them to children in the marketplace. Jesus was saying that the Pharisees and lawyers were like children who got very upset because the other children would not obey them. By this statement Jesus made it clear that the Pharisees and lawyers were very childish in their ways.

Jesus went on to explain these childish attitudes in Matthew 11:18-19. Those verses say, "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children." In these verses we see that because the Pharisees and lawyers had rejected God that they would not accept anyone who came from God. Instead they always found some way to complain about those who came from God just like the children in the marketplace.

Then Jesus explained the complaint of the Pharisees about John the Baptist. Luke 7:33 says, “For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’” John was out in the wilderness and had an unusual appearance and ate different food than most of the people. Matthew 3:4 says, “Now John himself was clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.” Locusts are large grasshoppers so John ate what he could find for food in the wilderness and that happened to be locusts and wild honey. Instead of listening to the message of John, the Pharisees just used the unusual diet of John to condemn him. As a result, they accused John of having a demon.

In contrast, Jesus lived and ate very differently than John. Luke 7:34 says, “The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’” One of the many places where the Pharisees complained about Jesus was at the home of Matthew. Luke 5:29-30 says, “Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them. And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, ‘Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’” Here we see that Jesus was enjoying a great feast with the tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees used that feast as an excuse to complain and condemn Jesus because He was eating with tax collectors and sinners.

We see the answer of Jesus about the accusations of the Pharisees. Luke 7:35 says, “But wisdom is justified by all her children.” Here we see that wisdom is shown by what it produces. The lack of wisdom had been shown by the fact that the Pharisees were acting like a group of little children in the marketplace. In contrast, Jesus made it clear that the ministry of John the Baptist and His ministry would be seen by the results that their ministries produced in the lives of others. The religious leaders were forced to recognize the fact that Jesus had transformed lives. Acts 4:13 says, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.” Then Acts 5:28-29 adds, “Saying, ‘Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!’ But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’” The religious leaders had to admit Jesus transformed the lives of others.

In the same way we want to help our physical and spiritual children have their lives transformed so that they are equipped to speak boldly for the Lord as they depend on the power of the Holy Spirit to work through their lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to yield to Christ so that their lives are transformed.

36.

Jesus Invited People to Take His Yoke

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children have their lives transformed so that they are equipped to speak boldly for Christ. In this topic we will see that Jesus warned those who were rejecting and invited others to take His yoke and learn from Him.

Jesus had spent much time in certain cities where He had done many of His miracles. Matthew 11:20-24 says, “Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: ‘Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you.’” Here we see that Jesus gave a warning to three cities.

The first two cities were Chorazin and Bethsaida and the third was Capernaum. Both Chorazin and Bethsaida were smaller towns located close to the city of Capernaum. Matthew 4:13 says, “And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali.” Here we see that Jesus made Capernaum the headquarters for His ministry so many of the miracles that Jesus did were in Capernaum and the nearby towns which included Chorazin and Bethsaida. Bethsaida was the hometown of at least five of the disciples of Jesus as John 1:43-44 says, “The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.” Then Luke 5:8-10 tells us that James and John were partners with Simon Peter.

First, Jesus compared Chorazin and Bethsaida to Tyre and Sidon and the judgment which had come on those two cities. God promised judgment to Tyre in Ezekiel 26:4 where we read, “And they shall destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers; I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock.” Here we see that God said the walls and towers of Tyre would be broken down. Later the walls and towers were torn down and the material in those walls and towers was dumped into the Mediterranean Sea so that all that was left of Tyre was the large rock on which the city had been built. Then Ezekiel 28:22 says, “Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Behold, I *am* against you, O Sidon; I will be glorified in your midst; and they shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I execute judgments in her and am hallowed in her.’” The judgments of these two cities happened exactly as Ezekiel had prophesied. God said that if the miracles that were done in Chorazin and Bethsaida had been done in Tyre and Sidon that those cities would have repented long ago. As a result, the eternal judgment of Chorazin and Bethsaida will be worse than the judgment of Tyre and Sidon.

Jesus then spoke about the city of Capernaum. Jesus did many miracles in this city since this was the city where He had made His headquarters. We see that Jesus compared Capernaum to

Sodom. Jesus said that if He had done the miracles in Sodom that He had done in Capernaum that the people of Sodom would have repented and remained until that very day. Capernaum had not been evil like Sodom. Instead they had just ignored Jesus and failed to believe in Him. Jesus had exalted Capernaum by doing so many miracles there. At the final judgment they would be judged more severely than Sodom because of their rejection. Luke 12:48 says, "But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more." Capernaum had received much and faced greater judgment.

Jesus went on to thank the Father for what the Father had done. Matthew 11:25-27 says, "At that time Jesus answered and said, 'I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and *the one* to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*.'" Here we see that the Father works in a very different way than the world. The world focuses on those who are highly successful based on worldly wisdom. In contrast, Jesus said that the Father revealed His truth to those who were just babes.

The word translated "babes" is used in both a good way and a negative way in the New Testament. Here it is used in a good way. Jesus also used this word in a good way when He said in Matthew 21:15-16, "But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' they were indignant and said to Him, 'Do You hear what these are saying?' And Jesus said to them, 'Yes. Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise'?" The young children were giving praise to Jesus and recognizing Him as the Son of David and the religious leaders were upset. They were upset because the title Son of David was a title for the Messiah and they refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah. The Father led children to speak for Jesus instead.

Jesus then spoke of His relationship with the Father. Jesus said that His Father chose to do what seemed good in His sight. By this statement Jesus made it clear that He is the Son of God. Jesus said all things had been committed to Him by the Father. Matthew 28:18 says, "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.'" Jesus went on to say that no one knows the Son but the Father. In the same way no one fully knows the Father except the Son. The word translated "know" in these verses means to know thoroughly or accurately so that there is full understanding.

Jesus then said that it is possible for people to get to know the Father when the Son chooses to reveal Him. Jesus went on to invite the burdened to come to Him. Matthew 11:28-30 says, "Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light." Here we see that Jesus gave a wonderful invitation to all who would come to Him. Jesus will reveal the Father to those who choose to come to Him.

The word translated “labor” means to grow weary or to be exhausted. Paul worked to the point of exhaustion to share the Gospel. Colossians 1:28-29 says, “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.” The word translated “heavy laden” means to load a burden on or to place a burden on someone. The only other place this word is used in the New Testament is in Luke 11:46 where we read, “And He said, ‘Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.’” In this passage we see that the Pharisees, scribes and lawyers loaded heavy burdens on the people by their interpretations of the law. At the same time that they loaded heavy burdens on others by giving them many rules, these men avoided even carrying out a little tiny part of the loads that they loaded on others.

In contrast to the heavy load that these religious leaders put on the people, Jesus said, “Come to me and I will give you rest.” The word that is translated “rest” means to rest, to refresh or to keep quiet and calm. The word is used in I Peter 4:14 where we read, “If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.” In this verse we see that God causes His Spirit to rest on us when people speak evil against us for the sake of Christ. The rules of the religious were like a heavy yoke.

Then Jesus gave a very vivid illustration to explain what He meant. The word translated “yoke” was used to speak of the heavy wooden yoke that was placed on a team of oxen so that they could pull a heavy load or the yoke that was placed on a slave by his master. I Timothy 6:1 says, “Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and *His* doctrine may not be blasphemed.” With oxen the people would put a young ox in a yoke with an older ox so that the young ox would learn to walk in step as he helped pull the yoke. When the yoke was first placed on a young ox he would often go too fast or too slow. Either way it would pull on the neck of the older ox.

Jesus told those burdened with sin to yoke up with Him. Jesus explained that He was gentle and patient. Jesus said that all those who came to Him would experience rest from the burden of their sins and the burdens that religious leaders placed on them. Jesus said that His yoke is easy. The word translated “easy” means useful or kind. The word translated “light” speaks of something this is light and not a burden. The only other place this word is used in the New Testament is II Corinthians 4:17 where we read, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory.” We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that Christ takes our heavy load and gives us an eternal blessing in exchange. We also want to help our children learn to share that message with others. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand this important promise.

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain to others what Jesus meant when He said to take His yoke. Jesus wants to free all people from their burden of sin and exchange that burden for eternal life and blessing. In this topic we will see that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath.

Jesus had rebuked the religious leaders several times for their unbelief. As a result, the Pharisees were always looking for an opportunity to condemn Jesus or His disciples. Matthew 12:1-2 says, “At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said to Him, ‘Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!’” Here we see that the Pharisees thought that they had an excuse that they could use to condemn Jesus and His disciples.

In the time of the Bible the Jews often had narrow paths that passed through the grainfields and divided the fields of various owners. These paths were used by people to get from where they were to the nearby villages and cities. Jesus and His disciples were walking along one of these paths one Sabbath. They were probably on their way to the synagogue since the next recorded event happens in a synagogue. The disciples were hungry and so they began to break off heads of grain from the grain along the path, rub the heads of grain together, blow on them to remove any loose pieces of straw and then eat these heads of grain. Deuteronomy 23:25 says, “When you come into your neighbor’s standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor’s standing grain.” This verse shows that the law explicitly allowed people walking through a grain field to break off heads of grain and eat them as they walked along the path. This verse only made it clear that it was against the law to use of a sickle to cut part of the field of grain so that they could sell a part of the grain that belonged to someone else.

This was a Sabbath day and so that was the reason why the Pharisees thought that they could use this law to condemn Jesus and His disciples. Exodus 20:8-9 says, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates.” The Pharisees were accusing the disciples of working on the Sabbath because they broke off a few heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands and then blew on them. Jesus used three illustrations to show the Pharisees that their attempt to twist the law to condemn the disciples did not agree with the Old Testament.

First, Jesus showed that the law allows needs to be met on the Sabbath. Matthew 12:3-4 says, “But He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?” In I Samuel

chapter 21 David and his men were fleeing from Saul and they had a need of food. As they fled they came to the tabernacle and David asked the high priest if he had any bread available. I Samuel 21:3 gives us the question of David when that verse says, “Now therefore, what have you on hand? Give *me* five *loaves of* bread in my hand, or whatever can be found.”

We see the response of the priest to David in verse I Samuel 21:6 where we read, “So the priest gave him holy bread; for there was no bread there but the showbread which had been taken from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread in its place on the day when it was taken away.” Normally only the priests were to eat the bread that had been on the table of showbread for the previous week because it was considered holy bread. However, the priest recognized that David and his men were hungry so he made an exception to the law to meet the need of the men with David. He gave them the holy bread to eat and give them strength as they went on their way. This is an example of the fact that we fulfill the second great commandment which Jesus summarized in Matthew 22:39, “And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’” by showing love to those in need and meeting those needs.

Second, Jesus showed that the law allowed the priests to work on the Sabbath as they carried out the work of offering sacrifices at the temple. Matthew 12:5-6 says, “Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is *One* greater than the temple.” Exodus 20:9-10 says, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates.” At the same time Exodus 30:7-8 says, “Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.” Here we see that Aaron and all of the priests that followed him were to work on the Sabbath just as they did every other day as they offered the morning and evening sacrifices, burned incense and tended to the lamps by putting oil in them to keep them burning. Jesus said that the priests were blameless even though they were involved in this work on the Sabbath.

Then Jesus made an even more important statement when He said that there was One standing among them at that very moment who was greater than the temple. This was a clear statement to the religious leaders that He is the Son of God. Jesus made a similar statement early in His ministry to the religious leaders in Jerusalem. The religious leaders asked for a sign to show that He had the right to cleanse the temple. Jesus answered in John 2:19-22, “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ Then the Jews said, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?’ But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.” Even His disciples did not understand His statement at that time. However, they remembered and understood after Jesus rose from the dead.

Third, Jesus showed it was right to do acts of mercy on the Sabbath. Matthew 12:7-8 says, “But if you had known what *this* means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” The Pharisees

thought that their sacrifices made them right with God even though their hearts were in rebellion against Him. Saul had that same problem when he was the first king of Israel because he kept the animals God told him to destroy when he fought against Amalek. God sent Samuel to tell him the consequences of his disobedience. I Samuel 15:22-23 says, “So Samuel said: ‘Has the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *and* to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from *being* king.’” God knows when there is inward rebellion and He will judge that rebellion.

Then Jesus explained what was needed in the hearts of the Pharisees instead of their inward rebellion. Jesus said, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” This was a quote from Hosea 6:6. The whole verse says, “For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” The Pharisees had condemned the disciples of Jesus for breaking off heads of grain and eating those kernels of grain to satisfy their hunger that morning. We saw earlier that was clearly allowed by the Old Testament law. As a result, Jesus went on to tell the Pharisees that if they would have shown mercy that they would not have condemned the guiltless. The word translated “guiltless” means blameless or innocent. The only other place where this word is used in the New Testament is here in verse 5 where Jesus said that the priests were blameless when they served in the temple on the Sabbath. As a result, Jesus made it clear that His disciples were as innocent as the priests when the priests served the Lord.

Then Jesus again told the Pharisees that He is God. Verse eight says, “For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” This caused the Pharisees to become very angry because they refused to recognize that Jesus is the Son of God. Matthew 12:9-10 says, “Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue. And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?’—that they might accuse Him.” Here we see that they followed Him to the synagogue and immediately looked for an excuse there to condemn Jesus. In the process they also rejected the verse that Jesus had just quoted to them from Hosea. They saw a man with a withered hand but they did not show any kindness or mercy to that man. Instead they used the disability of the man to try and find an excuse to condemn Jesus because of their hatred for the fact that Jesus said He was the Son of Man. They especially did not want to admit that Jesus was the Lord of the Sabbath.

Here we see that when people have rebellion in their hearts that they seek to condemn rather than show mercy. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that there will be people who will condemn them for sharing the Word of God or for showing mercy to others. Such individuals just show their heart attitudes. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand these heart attitudes.

Jesus Healed on the Sabbath

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to recognize that those who continually seek to condemn others rather than show mercy have wrong heart attitudes just as the Pharisees had in the time of Jesus. In this topic we will see that the Pharisees began to plot to destroy Jesus because of these heart attitudes.

Jesus and His disciples had been confronted by the Pharisees as they walked through the fields. We go on to see that they were on their way to the synagogue. Matthew 12:9-10 says, “Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue. And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”—that they might accuse Him.” Here we see that the Pharisees followed Jesus right into the synagogue. There happened to be a man at the synagogue that had a withered hand. The word translated “withered” speaks of a part of the body that is withered or of something that is dried up because of a lack of water. This second meaning is the way the word is used in Luke 23:31 where we read, “For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?” Jesus used this illustration as He spoke to the women who were mourning for Him as He was led to the cross.

However, here the word speaks of an arm and hand that is much smaller than the other hand. Jesus knew that the Pharisees were watching Him closely. Luke 6:7-8 says, “So the scribes and Pharisees watched Him closely, whether He would heal on the Sabbath, that they might find an accusation against Him. But He knew their thoughts, and said to the man who had the withered hand, ‘Arise and stand here.’ And he arose and stood.” Luke mentioned that it was both scribes and Pharisees that were watching Jesus closely. Many of the Pharisees were also scribes and made their living by copying books of the Old Testament. They were considered experts on the Old Testament because they spent much time making copies of the various books.

Jesus knew that they were looking for an excuse to accuse Him because Luke tells us that He knew their thoughts. The fact that Jesus knew their thoughts was another proof that He is God and knows all things. I Corinthians 2:11 says, “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.” This verse makes it clear that a man can only know his own thoughts. In contrast, Jesus is God and He knew the thoughts of each person that was in the synagogue that day. Jesus told the man to stand up so that everyone could see him. That gave the Pharisees the opportunity to ask Jesus their question so that they could try to trap Jesus. Jesus had just told them out in the fields that it was lawful for the disciples to break off kernels of grain and eat them. This time they thought that they might be able to find an excuse to accuse Jesus. As a result, they asked, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”

Instead of answering their question immediately, Jesus asked the Pharisees a question. Matthew 12:11-13 says, “Then He said to them, ‘What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift *it* out? Of how

much more value than is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.’ Then He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ And he stretched *it* out, and it was restored as whole as the other.” Jesus just asked the Pharisees what they would do if they had a sheep fall into a pit on the Sabbath. Many times a pit has water in the bottom of the pit. If a sheep fell into a pit with water in it the sheep would soon drown if it was not pulled out of the pit very soon. Jesus knew that was exactly what the Pharisees would do in that situation and so He answered the question. He said that they would take hold of the sheep and lift it out of the pit immediately. They would not leave the sheep in the pit until the next day.

Jesus then went on to point out the fact that a man has much more value than a sheep. In fact Mark 8:36-37 points out the fact that God places a very high value on the life of each person. Those verses say, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” By this statement Jesus made it clear that the value of one person is worth more than all of the riches in the world. However, Jesus did more than just speak about the value of each human life. He paid the penalty to make it possible to save each of us for all eternity. I Peter 2:24 says, “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.” This verse reminds us that Jesus paid the price to provide spiritual life for each one who will repent of their sin of unbelief and receive Jesus by faith.

Then Jesus taught a very key principle not only for the Pharisees that day but for every person since that time. Jesus said, “Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” This word that is translated good means the things that are excellent, right or well. It is the word used in Matthew 5:44 where we read, “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” In this verse we see that we are to do things that are excellent and right even to those who hate us.

In Galatians 6:10 we have an even stronger word for good. Galatians 6:9-10 says, “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” This word translated “good” means that which is upright, honorable, or good in its character and beneficial in its effect. Here we see that Christians are to do good to all including those who are not Christians. The word that is translated “opportunity” means a fixed period of time. That fixed period of time refers to the length of our lives. Together these passages and the two different words for good emphasize the fact that Christians have been placed on this earth to do that which is good in its character and beneficial in its effects to all people and especially to Christians as long as the Lord gives us time on this earth.

Jesus then showed the Pharisees that it is right to do good on the Sabbath. Jesus told the man with the withered hand to stretch out his hand. Jesus gave this man the opportunity to show his faith by obedience. The man immediately stretched out his hand and his hand was restored as whole as the other. The word translated “restore” means to restore or to be in its former state. In this verse we see that it has a somewhat different meaning. This verse says that it was restored so that it was as whole as the other hand. The word “whole” means sound. As a result, this man had his hand and arm restored so that both hands and arms were completely normal.

However, the Pharisees were not happy at all because Jesus had shown them twice in one morning what the Old Testament really means and that their interpretations were wrong. Matthew 12:14-15 says, “Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him. But when Jesus knew *it*, He withdrew from there. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all.” Here we see that the Pharisees now had one goal. The word translated “plotted” is usually translated council and means to have an assembly to deliberate and reach a decision. The verse says that the reason for their council was to reach a decision about the way that they would destroy Jesus. The word translated “destroy” means to put an end to, to kill, to declare that one must be put to death or to speak of eternal judgment. This is the same word that was used the night before Jesus was crucified. John 18:13-14 says, “And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year. Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.” The Sanhedrin meeting as a council condemned Jesus to death that night.

However, at this time it was not yet the time or the place for Jesus to die and so we see that Jesus withdrew from that area because Jesus knew what the Pharisees were planning. We see that there was a great difference between the attitude of the Pharisees and many of the other people. Jesus left that area and great crowds of people followed Him as He went from that area. We will see in the next several chapters that Jesus had many more things to do before the time would come for Him to die. He was going to die at the exact time that the Father planned for Him to die and not at the time the Pharisees and other religious leaders wanted Him to die.

We read that as Jesus went to another area that Jesus healed all that came to Him. In the Old Testament there had been some miracles including healing especially involving three people: Moses, Elijah and Elisha. A short time before Elijah was taken to heaven he asked Elisha a question. II Kings 2:9 says, “And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, ‘Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?’ Elisha said, ‘Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.’” God honored the request of Elisha. The Old Testament records seven miracles during the time that Elijah was a prophet. It records fourteen miracles during the time of Elisha. That was the period that the greatest number of healings in the Old Testament are recorded. In contrast, here we see that Jesus healed all those who came to Him. In our next topic we will see that this was to fulfill a promise in the Old Testament made by Isaiah.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that one of the things that Jesus did was to make sure that He fulfilled all of the prophecies that had been written about His first coming to earth. Throughout His ministry Jesus made certain that everything He did was to carry out the will of the Father. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand why it is also important for us to do His will.

Jesus Said the Gentiles Would Trust in Him

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that everything that Jesus did was to carry out the will of the Father and fulfill all of the Old Testament prophecies about His first coming. In this topic we will see that Jesus healed all who came to Him to fulfill a prophecy given by Isaiah.

Isaiah and the other Old Testament prophets made many predictions about the first coming of Jesus to this earth. Matthew 12:16-21 talks about the fulfillment of one of those prophecies. We see that Jesus fulfilled each of these prophecies. We saw in our last topic that Jesus had healed all who came to Him. Matthew 12:16-18 quotes the first part of that prophecy, “Yet He warned them not to make Him known, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased! I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He will declare justice to the Gentiles.’” Jesus knew that many of the Jewish rabbis were looking for a political leader who would set them free from Roman control and not for a Savior who came to save people of all nations.

That is why this prophecy from Isaiah 42:1-4 was so important even though Jesus was healing all of the people. Isaiah had explained the purpose why the Father had sent Jesus into the world. The Father said through Isaiah, “Behold My Servant whom I have chosen.” This first quote from Isaiah shows that Jesus came as a Servant and not as a conquering hero as the Jewish rabbis expected. Jesus explained His own leadership as He taught the disciples in Matthew 20:25-28 where we read, “But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Jesus came as the servant who came to serve and give His life to pay the penalty for our sins.

At the same time Jesus came as “My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased!” In fact when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist the Father spoke from heaven. Matthew 3:16-17 says, “When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’” This prophecy identified Jesus as the Son of God. The Father also said through Isaiah, “I will put My Spirit upon Him.” These verses mention that the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove.

The Father said that Jesus would also declare justice to the Gentiles. The word that is translated “justice” means those things that are right or wrong. The concern of the Father has always been for both the Jews and the Gentiles to hear the message of both judgment and forgiveness. Psalm 67:5-7 says, “Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. *Then*

the earth shall yield her increase; God, our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.” The plan of God has always been for the Gentiles to hear the message of repentance and faith.

Matthew 12:19-21 gives the rest of the prophecy quoted from Isaiah. Those verses say, “He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench, till He sends forth justice to victory; and in His name Gentiles will trust.” In these verses we see that the Father said that there were several things that His Son would not do as He came to this earth. First, He would not quarrel nor cry out nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. The word translated “quarrel” means to become involved in strife or conflict. The word translated “cry out” means to shout or to cry aloud. These were the things that the Jewish leaders did. John 19:15 says, “But they cried out, ‘Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar!’” Jesus never debated with the leaders when they condemned Him to death.

Second, God said, “A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench.” Many Jewish shepherds would take a reed and make a small musical instrument from it. Then they would play it until it cracked and became useless. The Jews would also use pieces of flax to make wicks for their lamps. Sometimes the flame on these wicks would burn out and start to smoke and become useless. When things became useless the people would throw them away. In contrast, Jesus did not come to throw away or destroy the useless. As He began His ministry Jesus quoted another prophecy from Isaiah to show what His ministry would be like. Luke 4:18-19 says, “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.” Here we see that Jesus came to minister to those who felt that their lives were useless and make those lives useful.

Third, God sent Jesus to send forth justice to victory and said in His name Gentiles will trust. We saw that the word translated “justice” means those things that are right or wrong. Many Jews wanted judgment for the Gentiles because of past sins committed against the Jews. In contrast, we see that Jesus focused on bringing Gentiles to Himself so that they could experience victory instead of judgment. I Corinthians 15:55-57 says, “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” This was not the kind of leader that the Jews were seeking at the time of Jesus. They were looking for a leader who would conquer the Romans and restore to them the control of their land. Instead these prophecies from Isaiah showed that Jesus would be gentle and loving. He would give purpose in life to those whose lives had previously been useless. He would reach out to the Gentiles and bring salvation to many Gentiles. That was why many of the Jews who were interested in learning more about Jesus at He began His ministry turned away from Him when they saw that He was not going to conquer the Romans or restore their land to their control.

We go on to read in Matthew 12:22-23, “Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and

saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, ‘Could this be the Son of David?’” Jesus had been healing all who came to Him. In these verses we read about one particular person that Jesus healed. Here we see that this man was demon-possessed. As we look at the various demon-possessed people that Jesus healed we see that the demons affected the people in a variety of different ways. In Matthew 8:28-34 we see that two demon-possessed men were exceedingly fierce so that no one could pass that way. In Matthew 9:33-32 we see that a demon caused a man to be mute. The word translated “mute” means to be deaf and unable to speak. In Mark 9:14-29 we see that a demon caused a child to often foam at the mouth, fall to the ground, and the demon often tried to throw him into the fire or water to destroy him.

These other passages show us that demons did many different things to people but all of them were destructive. This reminds us of John 10:10 which speaks of the fact that the goal of Satan is always to destroy in various ways. That verse says, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.” This verse makes it clear that the goal of Satan and his demons is always to steal, to kill and to destroy. Their goal is to take as many people as possible with them to eternal judgment. That certainly was the goal of the demon in this case as well as we see that this demon caused this man to be blind and mute. The goal of demons is always to destroy.

In contrast, Jesus came to set people free and give them eternal life. We see that Jesus healed this man by casting out the demon. Once this demon was cast out of the man we see that he was able both to speak and to see. We are going to see that this caused two very different responses among the people. We will look at one of those responses in this topic and the other response in the next topic. First, we see the response of the multitudes. Here we see that the multitudes were filled with amazement. This caused the multitudes to ask a very important question.

Their question was, “Could this be the Son of David?” This was a very important question because they were asking if Jesus could be the promised Messiah that would come from the family of David. This is clearly shown when Jesus questioned the Pharisees in Matthew 22:41-42 where we read, “While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, ‘What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?’ They said to Him, ‘The Son of David.’” Here we see that the Pharisees understood that the Christ would be a descendent of David. In fact all of the Jews recognized that the Christ would be a descendent of David. That is why the multitudes began to ask if Jesus could be the Christ because they saw that Jesus had the power to defeat Satan and cast the demon out of this man. We will see in the next topic that the Pharisees made a very different choice to try and explain how Jesus had the power to cast out demons.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand clearly that Jesus showed that He was the promised Son of David, the Christ. We want to help our children learn to explain this passage clearly to others. May the Lord bless you richly as you help your children to learn to explain why this is one thing that shows that Jesus is the Christ.

Jesus Warned of the Blasphemy of the Spirit

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain that Jesus is the promised Son of David, the Christ. In this topic we will see that the Pharisees did not want to admit this fact. We will see that the Pharisees made a choice and that choice showed that they were determined to reject the fact that Jesus is the Christ regardless of how much evidence they saw.

The multitudes had asked the question, “Could this be the Son of David?” We see that the Pharisees chose to reject that fact. Matthew 12:24-27 says, “Now when the Pharisees heard *it* they said, ‘“This *fellow* does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.’ But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: ‘Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? Therefore they shall be your judges.’”

Here we see that the Pharisees chose to reject this miracle and the other miracles of Jesus by saying that Jesus did those miracles by the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons. The name “Beelzebub” means lord of the house. It was originally the name of a Philistine god and was a part of their worship of idols. I Corinthians 10:20 explains, “Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.” As a result, the name Beelzebub came to be a name for Satan since he is the lord of the demons.

Jesus knew what the Pharisees were thinking. As a result, He pointed out the fact that a kingdom that is divided will destroy itself. Luke 11:17 says, “But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them: ‘Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls.’” By the very fact that Jesus knew their thoughts He was proving in another way that He is God. Jesus went on to point out that every city or family that is divided cannot stand. By this statement Jesus had shown that their thoughts made no sense. Jesus explained why their thoughts made no sense. Jesus said that if Satan casts out Satan that he will be fighting against himself. Jesus made it clear that Satan’s kingdom would not stand.

Jesus then gave a second illustration. Jesus asked by whom did their sons cast out demons if He had to depend on Beelzebub to cast out demons. Jesus had performed many miracles that showed that He had come from God and the Pharisees knew that He had demonstrated the power of God. By asking if that meant that their sons were casting out demons by Beelzebub the Pharisees knew in their hearts that He was from God. In Hebrews 6:13 we read, “For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself.” This verse shows that all followers of the Lord have One in them who is greater than the one in the world. We see that some Jews in the time of Jesus were also able to cast out demons. That is why Jesus told the Pharisees that their sons would be their judges because they believed in God and did what they did through the power of God.

Jesus went on to make it clear that He cast out demons by the Spirit of God. Matthew 12:28-30 says, “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.” The Pharisees had just seen Jesus cast demons out of a man that was deaf and unable to talk. They had seen that the man could now hear and talk because Jesus had cast the demon out of the man.

Jesus caused the Pharisees to make a choice by what He said in these verses. It was clear that this man had his life greatly changed when the demon was cast out of him. The Pharisees now had to decide whether to believe that Jesus came from God or continue to deny that He came from God. Jesus said that if He had cast out the demons by the Spirit of God that the kingdom of God had come to them. I Timothy 6:14-16 says, “That you keep *this* commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, *He who is* the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom *be* honor and everlasting power. Amen.” The King was there that day and the Pharisees had to either recognize Him or deny Him. As we see, they made the choice to deny Him.

Jesus used a very clear illustration to force the Pharisees to think through their choice. Jesus said that a person cannot enter the house of a strong man and take his goods as plunder unless he first binds the strong man. Jesus had just defeated the power of Satan by casting a demon out of the man by the power of God. I John 4:4 says, “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” Jesus had shown that He is greater than the one who is in the world. Jesus had been able to do that because He is the one who has the power to bind Satan. John 16:11 says that the Holy Spirit convicts, “Of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.” Jesus showed that He had the power to bind the strong man. When Jesus said on the cross, “It is finished!” the judgment of Satan was completed and he knows that his time is short before he will enter his eternal judgment.

The Pharisees showed that they were following Satan by what they said. That is why Jesus gave them a warning that whoever is not with Him is against Him. The Pharisees were doing the work of Satan and were not gathering people into the kingdom of heaven. The word translated “gather” means to draw together or to collect. In contrast to the Pharisees, Jesus had told His disciples in John 4:36, “And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.” The disciples were learning how to work with Jesus so that their lives and their future ministry would be used by Jesus to gather people into the kingdom of God. As a result of the fact that the Pharisees were not gathering people into the kingdom of God, Jesus said that they were scattering abroad by doing everything they could to keep people from entering the kingdom of God.

Jesus then gave the Pharisees a warning about the danger of their actions. Matthew 12:31-32 says, “Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy *against* the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of

Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age* to come.” It is very important to understand what is meant by the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit since these verses say that this is the one sin that will not be forgiven. John 15:26 says, “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.” In this verse we see that one of the key ministries of the Holy Spirit is to testify of Christ.

The Pharisees in the time of Jesus had a very unique opportunity. They had the privilege of seeing Jesus perform miracles like this miracle in which Jesus had just demonstrated His power over the power of Satan. The whole Sanhedrin later repeated this same type of denial after Jesus had returned to heaven. Acts 4:16-17 says, “Saying, ‘What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them *is* evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny *it*. But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.’” They admitted that they could not deny the miracle. At the same time they said here that it was done through the power of Satan and in Acts they decided to threaten the apostles to try and keep them quiet. In both situations they knew that they had seen the power of God and at the same time said it was done by the power of Satan.

The Pharisees and religious leaders who knew that they were denying the power of God were not committing sins of ignorance. Jesus was present with them at that very moment and they chose to say that His works were being done by the power of Satan. The word translated “blasphemy” means to slander or speak evil. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit means to speak evil against the work of the Holy Spirit and to knowingly reject the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote in I Timothy 1:12-13, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief.” Paul was a blasphemer but the Lord turned his life around and transformed him because he did it ignorantly while still in a state of unbelief.

Today there are people who wonder if they have committed the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. A key ministry of the Holy Spirit is to testify of Christ. Christ is not now present on the earth so no one today can see Christ personally do miracles as He did when He was here on the earth and then claim that they have been done by the power of Satan. As a result, people may be like Paul and blaspheme ignorantly in their unbelief. However, the one sin that will cause them to experience eternal judgment is the sin of unbelief until they die because there is not second chance after death. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand and explain to others that Jesus still continues to invite all who will to come to Him in repentance and faith. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to share this message with others.

41.

Jesus Said a Tree is Known by its Fruit

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain to others that Jesus offers eternal life to all who will come to Him in repentance and faith. We saw that the Pharisees were choosing to reject that offer and were even claiming that Jesus cast out demons by the power of Satan. In this topic we will see that Jesus went on to teach that a tree is known by its fruit.

The scribes and the Pharisees had accused Jesus of casting out a demon by the power of Satan. Jesus chose to show that the real problem with these men began in their hearts. Matthew 12:33-37 says, "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by *its* fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." Here Jesus compared the hearts of the scribes and the Pharisees to a fruit tree.

Jesus gave two illustrations of the hearts of the scribes and Pharisees. First, Jesus showed that a fruit tree has a very interesting way of showing when the inside of the tree is rotten even though the fruit tree may look beautiful on the outside. If the inner core of the tree is rotten, the tree will bear rotten fruit. The fruit may even look good on the outside but when you cut the fruit open it will be rotten in the center. Jesus used that as a very interesting illustration of the scribes and Pharisees in this verse. Just like the inside of a fruit tree can be known by its fruit, the scribes and the Pharisees were showing the condition of their hearts by their refusal to admit that Jesus was from God even though they had seen His power over demons. Matthew 7:20 says, "Therefore by their fruits you will know them." Jesus said the Pharisees could be known by their fruit.

Second, Jesus compared the scribes and Pharisees to a family of snakes. Jesus said they could not speak good things because their hearts were full of evil. The phrase "the abundance of the heart" means the things that fill the heart. Here Jesus pointed out the fact that the hearts of the scribes and Pharisees were filled with evil. They were like the generation in the time of Noah. Genesis 6:5 says, "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually." Psalm 119:11 says, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You." This verse illustrates a person with a good heart because such a person will bring forth good things. In contrast, Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?" This verse illustrates the heart of an evil person and such a person brings forth evil things.

The word translated "idle" means lazy or one avoiding work which he should do. An idle word

means an evil word that is spoken. Revelation 20:13 speaks of all those who reject Christ. That verse says, “The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.” Here we see that their works will include their evil words. In contrast, the words of the righteous will be rewarded. A person who is right with God will speak words of love because he or she is motivated by the love of Christ. A person who is in rebellion against God will speak evil words because that person is motivated by fear because of a desire to please self.

The scribes and Pharisees did not like to have their works described. As a result, they tried to change the subject by asking a question. Matthew 12:38-40 says, “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.’ But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.’” Here we see that the scribes and Pharisees said that they wanted to see a sign from Jesus to prove that He was from God. Jesus had just done many miracles and they had seen the change when Jesus cast the demon out of the man that was demon possessed but they refused to believe those signs.

In fact they wanted a sign from the heavens because Luke 11:16 says, “Others, testing Him, sought from Him a sign from heaven.” Instead Jesus gave them a sign from the Old Testament after He described their character. Jesus said that there were two characteristics of that generation and especially of the scribes and Pharisees. First, Jesus said that generation was an evil generation. The word translated “evil” means that which is sinful or bad in its nature or condition and is translated wicked in part of its uses. That is the way the word is translated just a few verses later in Matthew 12:45 where we read, “Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation.” In this verse we see that Jesus described those with whom He was talking as “this wicked generation”.

Second, Jesus called that generation an adulterous generation. The word translated “adulterous” means to be unfaithful in marriage or to be unfaithful to God. Jesus made a very similar statement again to the Pharisees in Matthew 16:4 where we read, “A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.” And He left them and departed.” In both of these passages Jesus was talking about the fact that the Pharisees were unfaithful to God and in both places He gave a sign from the Old Testament by speaking of the prophet Jonah. Here we see that Jesus reminded these men of the fact that Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights. Then Jesus said that the Son of Man would also be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. As a result, the sign that Jesus gave was His own coming death and resurrection.

The many miracles that Jesus did were all signs of the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. John 20:30-31 says, “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” However, the greatest sign of all of that fact that Jesus is God was His own resurrection from the dead.

Then Jesus went on to warn the scribes and Pharisees that they would face judgment if there was no repentance on their part. Matthew 12:41-42 says, “The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah *is* here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon *is* here.” Here we see that Jesus used two illustrations to show that the generation of His time here on earth would face greater judgment.

First, Jesus said that the men of Nineveh would condemn that generation. They had repented when Jonah came and preached to them. Jonah 3:5-9 says, “So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered *himself* with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he caused *it* to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell *if* God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?” The people of Nineveh believed God. Then they repented and showed their repentance by their actions. Jesus said that there was One among them that day that was greater than Jonah but the people that day were not repenting.

Second, Jesus said that the queen of the South would also condemn that generation. The Queen of Sheba had heard about the wisdom of Solomon but she did not believe such wisdom was possible and came to test Solomon with hard questions. I Kings 10:3 says, “So Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing so difficult for the king that he could not explain *it* to her.” Then in I Kings 10:6-7 we read, “Then she said to the king: “It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. However I did not believe the words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard.” The queen believed when she heard the wisdom of Solomon and saw the greatness of his kingdom. Then Jesus said that there was One there that day with greater wisdom than Solomon. However, the Pharisees did not believe even though they heard and saw Jesus.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand how to explain to others why Jesus is the One who is greater than either Jonah or Solomon. We also want to help our children learn to explain why Jesus warned the scribes and Pharisees that they would be condemned by both the people of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba because of their unbelief. In this way we are equipping our children both to explain the love of Christ and also warn of judgment for those who fail to believe. May the Lord richly bless you as you equip your children to explain the Word of God.

Jesus Warned about the Danger of Depending on Self

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why Jesus warned the scribes and Pharisees of their coming judgment if they failed to repent and turn from their sin. Jesus then went on to warn those men about the danger of trying to change in their own strength. That will be the focus of this topic.

Jesus had been warning the scribes and Pharisees about the danger of future judgment. As we begin this topic we see that Jesus also warned them about the danger of trying to change through their own efforts. Matthew 12:43-45 says, “When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds *it* empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation.” Here we see that Jesus warned the Pharisees that they could not change themselves.

Jesus had cast out a demon and the man was also healed so that he now both spoke and could see. The Pharisees had accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan when Jesus had cast out the demon. In contrast, Jesus went on to say that a demon could leave a person on his own temporarily for a period of time but warned that such a demon could later return. Demons are evil spirits and want to possess a body so that they can torment and destroy. Mark 1:26 says, “And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him.” Mark 5:2-3 says, “And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains.” Mark 5:13 says, “And at once Jesus gave them permission. Then the unclean spirits went out and entered the swine (there were about two thousand); and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and drowned in the sea.” In all three of these verses we see demons tormenting and destroying.

We see that when a demon goes out of a person instead of being cast out by Jesus that the demon may sooner or later return. Jesus said that a demon that has not taken possession of a body is seeking a place of rest but cannot find such a place. Here we see that the demon can choose to return to the body that it had previously possessed before the demon chose to leave that body. We see that when this demon came back that he found his former home empty, swept and put in order. Here we see that the person out of whom the demon had gone had tried to improve his life by his own efforts. The Lord was not in his life. He had tried to make his life beautiful by his own works (sweeping and decorating it). The demon now saw that it was an ideal body in which he could again torment and destroy. However, he did not go back into that body alone. Instead he took with him seven more evil spirits who were even more evil than himself.

With eight demons in his life this man was in a much worse state than he had been when there

was just one demon in his life. Then Jesus made a very key point when He said, “So shall it also be with this wicked generation.” Jesus was talking to and about the scribes and Pharisees. Here we see that one of the ways that demons can torment and destroy is by causing a person to become very rigid and religious. II Corinthians 11:13-15 describes such individuals when those verses say, “For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.” Here we see that such individuals can be very religious. They are also deceitful. They have made it appear they are angels of light. However, in their hearts they are filled with evil. Judas is an example of such an individual.

While Jesus was teaching we see that His mother and brothers came to talk to Jesus. They stood outside the place where Jesus was and sent word that they would like to talk to Him. In Matthew 15:55-56 we see that Jesus had four brothers and at least two sisters. Those verses say, “Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this *Man* get all these things?” These brothers and sister were children of Mary that were born to Mary and Joseph after the birth of Jesus. As a result, Jesus was not a full brother but rather a half brother. In Luke 1:35 we read, “And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.” We see that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Matthew 1:24-25 tells us that Mary and Joseph did not have sexual relationships until after the birth of Jesus. As a result, these brothers and the sisters were all born after Jesus.

At this time these brothers had not yet become followers of Jesus. John 7:5 says, “For even His brothers did not believe in Him.” Later they did believe and become followers of Jesus because Acts 1:14 says, “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.” In fact, James later became a key leader at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Acts 15:13, and 15:18-19 say, “And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, “Men *and* brethren, listen to me... Known to God from eternity are all His works. Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God.” When he finished Acts 15:22 adds, “Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, *namely*, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.” Still later James and Judas (Jude) became the writers of the two New Testament books by their names.

Jesus received word that His mother and His brothers were outside and wanted to talk to Jesus. Instead of immediately going out to talk to them, Jesus gave a very important answer. Matthew 12:48-50 says, “But He answered and said to the one who told Him, “Who is My mother and who are My brothers?” And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.” Suddenly we see by the answer of Jesus that He now had a much larger family because He now had a spiritual family as well as a physical family. Jesus still took His responsibility as a physical son because John 19:26-27 says, “When Jesus therefore saw His

mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold your son!’ Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold your mother!’ And from that hour that disciple took her to his own *home*.” One of His last acts before He died on the cross was to ask John to take over His responsibility to care for His physical mother. However, Jesus used the word woman instead of mother to show that they now had a different relationship.

Later the brothers also understood that they had a different relationship with Jesus as a part of His spiritual family. James 1:1 says, “James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.” Jude 1:1 says, “Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ.” Both of these brothers now considered themselves bondservants of Jesus Christ even though they were also his physical half-brothers. Their spiritual relationship with Jesus had become even more important to them than their physical relationship. In the same way we are to understand our spiritual relationship that we have also become bondservants of Jesus Christ.

Jesus introduced that new relationship for all who become followers of Jesus when He asked the question about His mother and brothers and then pointed to His disciples and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.” We learn several things about the new relation that we have with Jesus from the moment that we repent of our sin of unbelief and come to Jesus for salvation by faith. We have become the children of God. I John 3:1-2 says, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

We became a part of a new family, the family of God. Jesus now calls us His brethren. John 20:17 says, “Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and *to* My God and your God.’” Hebrews 2:11 adds, “For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified *are* all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.” We are the sanctified who are now called brethren. That also means we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. Romans 8:16-17 says, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.” This means we have become a part of both a spiritual family and also an eternal family.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand these blessings so that they can explain to others what it means to be a part of the family of God. This is so important especially for those who have not had loving physical families. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand their spiritual family.

43.

Jesus Gave the Parable of the Soils

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand and be able to explain to others what it means to be a part of the family of God. That relationship means that we now have both a spiritual family and also an eternal family. In this topic we will be starting a study of the parables that Jesus gave to explain the mysteries of the kingdom.

We see that the same day that the brothers of Jesus came to visit Jesus that later that day He taught a very large crowd of people. Matthew 13:1-2 says, “On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.” We see that Jesus went out of the house where He had been and went down by the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus sat down by the seashore. We see that large multitudes of people quickly gathered around Jesus. The word translated “multitude” means a large gathering of people. The word also referred to the common people rather than the rulers and leaders. Finally the word spoke of large crowds that gathered from different places so that they were not an organized group.

We see that as the large crowds came together that Jesus got into a boat and sat down in the boat. Meanwhile the crowd of people stood on the shore to listen to Jesus as He began to teach them. Mark 4:1 explains, “And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea.” Here we see that the boat was on the sea so that it was quite a few feet from the land. This made it possible for the entire crowd to hear because the water makes the sound carry so that the people all along the shore would be able to hear what Jesus taught. We see that the entire crowd was facing the sea which made it possible for them to see Jesus as He sat in the boat.

We see that Jesus began to teach the people many things in parables. Matthew 13:3-6 says, “Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: “Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some *seed* fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away.” The word translated “parable” means a story that compares one thing with another. Jesus often used parables about the things that the people all understood to teach spiritual truth that might be hard for people to understand.

In Matthew 13:11 we read, “He answered and said to them, ‘Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.’” Here we see that Jesus used parables to reveal truth to His disciples but hide truth from the religious leaders who did not want to believe in Him.” As a result, we will see that these parables are stories that are teaching about the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. In the New Testament a mystery is used to speak of something that was hidden in the Old Testament but is revealed in the New

Testament. In this chapter we see that Jesus tells these parables to the multitudes and then explains their meaning to His disciples.

In this parable we see that Jesus talked about a sower sowing seed in the ground. It is very possible that there may have been a person within sight of the crowd of people who was scattering seed on his field as Jesus gave this parable. We will see when Jesus explains this parable to His disciples that the focus of the first parable was about the various kinds of ground where the seeds landed as they were scattered. Jesus began this parable by saying that a sower went out to sow seed in his field. In Mark 4:13-14 we read, "And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word." Here we see two key things about this parable. First, this parable is a basic parable that is like a foundation for all of the parables that Jesus taught. Second we see that the seed is the Word of God. Jesus wanted to make sure that the disciples understood these two principles because that would make it easier for them to understand all parables.

In this parable we see that the man sowing his seed was scattering the seed on his field. As he was throwing out the seed, he had seed scattered on four different kinds of soil. The various kinds of soil speak about the condition of the hearts of various people. First, Jesus said that some of the seed fell by the wayside. In the previous chapter we saw that Jesus and His disciples were walking through the grain field. We saw that the people had narrow paths though the fields of grain. These narrow paths had people walking on them each day and they soon became hard as the people walked on them and the sun baked them. As a result, we see that some of the seed fell on these paths. This meant that the seeds just sat on top of the ground. We read that the birds came and devoured the seeds that were sitting on these hard paths. Mark 4:15 says, "And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts."

Second, we see that some seed fell on stony places. This meant that there were rocks under the ground that could not be seen because there would be a tiny amount of soil on the tops of these rocks. These rocks just under the thin layer of dirt would cause the dirt to be warmer than the rest of the field. As a result, the seeds that landed on top of these hidden rocks would actually start to grow faster than the rest of the field because those seeds were in warmer dirt. However, the hidden rocks would make it impossible for strong roots to develop. Within a few days these seeds would have a blade come through the surface of the ground.

Then hot days would come and the sun would quickly dry out the thin layer of soil. The plants would then rapidly die because there were no roots to get water and minerals from the dirt to help the seeds grow into plants. Mark 4:16-17 says, "These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble. In contrast, Psalm 1:3 points out what happens when a seed falls on ground where it can get plenty of water. That verse says, "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper." This verse talks about a tree but the same principle applies. A tree planted by the river will bring forth fruit at the time of fruit, the leaves of the tree will not wither and dry up and that tree will prosper. The same

things happen to seeds that get plenty of water because there are no rocks to block the development of roots into the soil with water.

Jesus explained about two other kinds of soil in Matthew 13:7-9 where we read, “And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” Here we see a third kind of soil. This is soil that has a lot of thorns growing on that soil. Thorns and weeds will always grow faster than the seeds of grain. Mark 4:18-19 says, “Now these are the ones sown among thorns; *they are* the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.” We see that none of these first three soils ever bear any fruit.

Fourth, we read about the seed that fell on the good soil. Mark 4:20 says, “But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept *it*, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.” The contrast that we gave to the rocky soil gives us a picture of the good soil. We see that good soil will always bear good fruit. Jesus had said in Matthew 12:33, “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by *its* fruit.” Jesus had then explained in Matthew 12:35, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.” By comparing these two chapters we see that the four kinds of soil actually described the hearts of various kinds of people. The first three kinds of soil are like the evil man because none of them bring forth good fruit. The good soil in this verse describes a person who had come to God in repentance and faith. We see that each person who comes to the Lord in repentance and faith will bear good fruit.

We also see that there are different levels of fruit bearing. In John 15:1-8 we see that the vine bears various levels of fruit as it talks about fruit, more fruit and much fruit. John 15:7-8 says, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.” Jesus will cause our lives to bear much fruit as we learn to abide in Him. That is why Jesus said in Matthew 13:9, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” It was the desire of Jesus that every Christian will really listen to what He said so that there is hearing that produces action as we learn to abide in Him. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that Jesus wants their lives to bear much fruit because Jesus wants their lives to be filled with joy. Jesus explained that joy in John 15:11 where we read, “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full.” As Christians it is also our desire to see the lives of children experience the full joy that Jesus promised. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children develop this joy.

Jesus Explained why He Taught in Parables

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to experience a life that is full of joy. That will happen as their lives bear much fruit because they are abiding in Christ. In this topic we are going to see that Jesus explained to the disciples why He spoke in parables.

The disciples asked Jesus why He spoke to the crowds in parables. Matthew 13:10-12 says, “And the disciples came and said to Him, ‘Why do You speak to them in parables?’ He answered and said to them, ‘Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.’” One of the key things that Jesus wanted the disciples to understand was “Why they did what they did”. It is also important for us to understand “Why we do what we do.” In these verses we see that the disciples asked Jesus later that day why He spoke to the people in parables. It is important to help our children understand this answer that Jesus gave His disciples.

In this verse the word translated “it is given” is the same word that is used in James 1:5 where we read, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” In this verse we see that wisdom is given by God. In contrast, the natural man cannot receive wisdom and understanding of spiritual things. I Corinthians 2:7 says, “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory.” Then I Corinthians 2:14 adds, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.” Jesus said that spiritual understanding regarding the kingdom of God was being given to the disciples but it was not being given to those who lacked spiritual life.

Jesus said that those who have been given spiritual understanding will receive more spiritual understanding. In contrast, those who lack spiritual understanding will have the understanding that they may seem to have taken away from them. Jesus repeated this same thought when He was talking about the kingdom in Matthew 25 shortly before His arrest and crucifixion. Matthew 25:29 says, “For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.” The Old Testament gives us many illustrations of the fact that God gives more wisdom and understanding to those who seek Him and meditate on His Word. Joshua was told in Joshua 1:8, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Psalm 119:97-100 says, “Oh, how I love Your law! It *is* my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they *are* ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies *are* my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts.” The Lord will give understanding to those who seek Him.

Jesus went on to explain that the lack of understanding for those who do not seek God had been predicted by Isaiah. Matthew 13:13-15 says, “Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: ‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.’” This quotation regarding their lack of understanding came from Isaiah 6:9-10.

Jesus pointed out three characteristics of the people of His day and then showed that the people were fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah. First, Jesus said, “Seeing they do not see.” We saw in our previous topic that Jesus had compared the hearts of the people to four kinds of soil. The first three kinds of soil never brought forth any fruit. The people saw Jesus do miracles but those miracles did not transform their lives. The day after Jesus fed the five thousand we see that the people came to Jesus again. John 6:26-27 says, “Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.” Jesus told the people that all they wanted was another free meal instead of seeking for the spiritual food that would give everlasting life.

Second, Jesus said, “Hearing they do not hear.” The people had heard the parable about the four kinds of soil and were entertained by the parable. However, they did not hear that Jesus was teaching them about spiritual life. Many people today read the Bible and can tell you about the history of the Jews or even the life of Christ but they do not come to Christ in repentance and faith so that they can receive spiritual life. As a result, they know the Bible as history but they have no understanding of spiritual life. Like the scribes and Pharisees in the time of Jesus they hear or read the Bible and to them it is just a book about Jewish history.

Third, Jesus said, “Nor do they understand.” In I Corinthians 2:14 we read, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.” Only those who have come to Jesus in repentance and faith are promised understanding. I Corinthians 2:10 says, “But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.” Here we see that only God reveals spiritual truth.

Then Jesus explained from the prophecy of Isaiah that the reason the people could not understand was due to the fact that their hearts had grown dull. The word translated “grown dull” means to make thick to make dull, or to make stupid. Paul quoted these same verses from Isaiah when he spoke to the Jewish leaders in the city of Rome in Acts 28. When Paul concluded quoting these verses from Isaiah, Acts 28:28 says that Paul then said to the Jews, “Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” In addition to hearts that were dull of hearing, the people had ears that had become hard of hearing and eyes that were closed. By quoting this prophecy from Isaiah and saying that it was fulfilled, Jesus made it clear to the disciples that most of the people would not accept Him or His message.

Jesus then pointed out the things that would cause people to come to Him in true repentance and faith. Jesus said that people need to see with their eyes. They need to hear with their ears. They need to understand with their hearts. Then they need to turn and He would heal them. The word translated “turn” means to turn one’s self about or to turn to the worship of the true God. This word is used in I Thessalonians 1:9 which says, “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” This verse gives us a definition of the true meaning of repentance.

After telling the disciples why He spoke to the multitudes in parables, Jesus went on to give the disciples a wonderful promise. Matthew 13:16-17 says, “But blessed *are* your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous *men* desired to see what you see, and did not see *it*, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear *it*.” Jesus told the disciples that they were blessed. Their eyes were blessed because they had the opportunity to see Jesus and the signs which He performed. Their ears were blessed because they had the privilege of hearing the things that Jesus taught. At that very moment they were having the opportunity to hear Jesus explain the meaning of some of the parables that Jesus had just given to the multitudes. We are also receiving that privilege because we are able to read what Jesus taught the disciples about these parables.

Jesus also said that many prophets and righteous men desired to see and hear what the disciples were seeing and hearing. Peter was one of those who heard Jesus speak that day. Later he wrote in I Peter 1:10-12, “Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.” Many of the things that the Old Testament prophets wrote they did not understand especially when they wrote about the salvation that Christ would provide through His sufferings, death, resurrection and exaltation by the Father.

We have been given the Holy Spirit to help us understand the things that Jesus taught and did. Romans 12:2 says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” We also want to help our physical and spiritual children come to an understanding of these things as they grow in their spiritual maturity. May the Lord richly bless you as you teach and explain the teachings of Jesus to your children.

Jesus Explained the Parable of the Soils

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children have their minds transformed as they learn to understand and explain the things that Jesus taught. We saw why Jesus spoke to the multitudes in parables. In this topic we are going to see that Jesus explained the parable of the sower.

Jesus wanted His disciples to understand the parable of the sower. Matthew 13:18-19 says, “Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.” We saw in an earlier topic that the wayside was the word used for the hard dirt paths than went through the grain fields. The seed that landed on the path was quickly eaten by the birds. Now we are going to see the spiritual truth that Jesus was teaching through that part of the parable of the sower. We see that this parable applies to anyone who hears the Word of God, does not understand and immediately forgets the Word.

We see that this parable is really about the way that Satan works to deceive people in an effort to steal, kill and destroy. The word translated “understand” means to bring together or to join together in the mind. In Luke 24:45 we read, “And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.” In this verse there are two different words that could be translated understanding or understand. The word used in this verse that is translated understand in Matthew 13:19 is translated comprehend in this verse. As a result, we see that Satan wants to take away the Word of God before a person can even think about and comprehend the Word that they have heard.

The word translated “snatches away” means to seize, to carry away by force or to snatch. Here we see that the goal of Satan is to take away the Word from the thinking of a person before that person can even think about the Word. John 10:12 says, “But a hireling, *he who is* not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them.” In this verse we see that the wolf catches the sheep before the sheep even realize that he is there to destroy them. In the same way when a person hears the Word of God Satan wants to get them thinking about something else so that they do not even think about the meaning of the Word that they have heard. Such people are not even really listening because their thoughts are about others things while someone is sharing the Word. That is why the hearts of some people are compared to the hard dirt of the path. They hear and forget.

Jesus then explained the meaning of the stony ground. Matthew 13:20-21 says, “But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.” The heart which is like stony ground has a different response than the heart that is like the hard path. The heart of a

person that is like stony ground hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy. We notice two positive things about this person. First, this person hears the Word of God. Second, this person receives the Word of God with joy. The word translated “hear” means to hear and consider what has been said or to understand. The word translated “receive” means to take in order to carry away or to receive. This person does not refuse or reject the Word immediately.

However, this person is lacking one thing. We see that this person has no root in himself. Mark 4:26-29 says, “And He said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.’” Followers of Jesus will sow some seed that does not sprout because it does not develop roots. Colossians 2:6-7 says, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” Those who receive Christ are those who have taken root in Him.

Those who have no root in themselves are those who have not taken root in Christ. They are like the house that was built on the sand and not on the rock. Matthew 7:26-27 says, “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.” These people will profess to be Christians for a period of time as long as everything is going good in their lives. The word translated “tribulation” means something that puts pressure on a person like affliction, trouble or distress. However, when tribulation or persecution comes because of the Word of God, these people stumble and turn away from Christ.

Jesus went on to explain the meaning of the thorny soil. Matthew 13:22 says, “Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.” We see that those who have hearts that are like thorny soil also hear the Word but the Word does not take root in their hearts either. In this case we see that the Word is choked by other things. The word translated “cares” means anxiety or things that cause a person to worry. Luke 21:34 says, “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.” In that passage Jesus is talking about the time of His return. However, the verse shows us that people can become so concerned about the cares and problems of this life that they fail to prepare for the future.

In addition to the cares of this world, we also see that the deceitfulness of riches can choke the Word. I Timothy 6:9-10 says, “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” People in this group may also claim to be Christians for a period of time. However, their concern about the things of this world or the desire for riches causes the Word to be choked so that the Word never takes root in their hearts.

Then Jesus explained the meaning of the seed in the good ground. Matthew 13:23 says, “But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” When a person sows seed in a field most of the seed lands on the good soil where the seed is able to take root, grow and bear fruit. Isaiah 55:11 says, “So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” In this verse we see that the Word of God will accomplish the exact purpose that God has for His Word. It will not return to Him empty. Instead it will accomplish the will of God. It will prosper in the lives of those in whom He is causing the Word of God to take root.

In our verse we see that those who receive the seed on good ground have several things happen in their lives. First, we see that they hear the Word of God. Romans 10:17 says, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Then Hebrews 4:12 adds, “For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” When a person really hears the Word of God, we see that the Word reveals the thoughts and intents of the heart to that person. Then I Corinthians 14:25 tells us what the Word does when it reveals the condition of the heart. That verse says, “And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.” Here we see that the Word is able to produce repentance and faith in the heart of a person.

Second, we see that those who receive the seed on good ground understand the Word. This is the result of the ministry of the Holy Spirit working in the lives of those who truly hear the Word of God. I Corinthians 2:10 talks about the Word and says, “But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. Here we see that it is the Holy Spirit that gives understanding to those in whose hearts the Word takes root. I Corinthians 2:11-12 goes on to say, “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.” Ephesians 2:8-9 explains, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

Third, we see that when the Word is received that it bears fruit in the lives of those who receive the Word. In fact the Word also causes their lives to become very fruitful. When one seed bears a crop that is thirty, sixty or a hundredfold that is considered a very good crop. This shows us that God wants individuals to become Christians and to pass on the Word of God to others so that the Word bears fruit in their lives as well. We want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that as the Lord works in their lives, the Lord also wants to work through their lives as they learn to share the Word of God with others. The Lord wants to help them become reproducing Christians. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to become reproducing Christians.

Jesus Gave Parables about Tares and the Mustard Seed

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children come to understand that the Lord wants to work both in their lives and then through their lives. The desire of the Lord is to see Christians bear much fruit. In our topic today we are going to see that Jesus also gave other parables about the kingdom.

Jesus next compared the kingdom of heaven to a man sowing good seed in his field. Matthew 13:24-26 says, “Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared.” The word translated “tares” talks about a kind of weed that looks almost exactly like wheat when it is growing. The word is used seven times in the New Testament and they are all in this chapter. However, when the heads of grain appear the tares are black in color and are weeds instead of heads of grain. As a result, there are hard to tell from grain while they are growing until the heads of grain begin to appear.

Since this parable is about the kingdom of heaven, it is the Lord who sows the good seed and in this parable the seeds are the sons of the kingdom. We see that the enemy is the one who sows the tares. The word translated “enemy” can refer either to man or to Satan and speaks of one who hates God. In explaining this parable Jesus said in Matthew 13:39, “The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels.” From this verse we see that Satan is clearly the enemy mentioned in this chapter. In Acts 13:10 we see that Elymas is called a child of the devil. In that verse we read, “And said, ‘O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?’” In that chapter we see that Elymas was certainly trying to do the work of Satan and hinder Sergius Paulus from coming to Christ. Satan is certainly doing everything that he can to keep his followers from coming to Jesus in repentance and faith. As a result, we have both believers and unbelievers in the world today.

We go on to read in Matthew 13:27-30, “So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.’” We saw above that the servants who are the reapers of the harvest are the angels. In these verses we see that the angels can see that tares (unbelievers) are in the world but we also see that they asked Jesus how the unbelievers had gotten into the world. This is one of several places that the Bible makes it clear that angels do not know and understand all things that happen in the world.

We also see that the angels did not know about the way that Jesus would deal with the

unbelievers. In fact we see that the angels asked if they should gather the unbelievers immediately. We see that Jesus explained to the angels that they were to wait until the end of the age before gathering the unbelievers. II Peter 3:9 explains why when that verse says, “The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” In this verse we see that the Lord is longsuffering and patient. His plan is to give people time and the opportunity to repent. Those who do repent will not face judgment at the end of the age because all of their sins will be forgiven and blotted out by the blood of Jesus Christ. Those who do not repent are experiencing the patience of God as the Lord gives them this opportunity to turn from sin to God.

We see that Jesus said that there would be both believers and unbelievers until the time of the harvest. Then will come the time of the judgment of all unbelievers. Jesus described that time of judgment by saying that He will tell the angels that are the reapers at the end of the age to gather the tares first and bind them in bundles to burn them. This judgment is described in Revelation 20:11-12 where we read, “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.” Here we see that all unbelievers will each be judged individually for the particular sins that they have committed.

In contrast, we see that the wheat will be gathered into the place that Jesus has prepared for all believers. This is a prepared place for prepared people. In John 14:2-3 Jesus told the disciples, “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if *it were not so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also.” In fact we can look forward to a new heaven and a new earth. Revelation 21:1 says, “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.” Then Revelation 21:4 adds, “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” We see a very different future for those who are wheat (believers) and those who are tares (unbelievers).

Jesus then gave another parable in which He compared the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed. Matthew 13:31-32 says, “Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.” A mustard seed is a very small seed. In fact it is the smallest seed of all of the herbs in the land of Israel and the surrounding countries. However, it can grow into a very large plant. A mustard plant can grow as large as fifteen feet in height so it can become a very large bush even though it starts out as a tiny seed.

Because the mustard seed is so small, it is used to illustrate two different things in the New Testament while at the same time it grows to a very large size. As a result, it is used two different ways in the New Testament. The mustard seed is only mentioned five times in the

New Testament. In three of the passages it is used to illustrate the growth of the kingdom of God. Then in two passages it is used to illustrate the need for growth of faith. The disciples asked Jesus why they could not cast out a demon. Jesus answered in Matthew 17:20, “So Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.’” In this verse we see that Jesus said that if the faith of the disciples was only as big as a mustard seed that nothing would be impossible for them.

In Mark 4 and Luke 13 Jesus compared the kingdom of God to a mustard seed to illustrate the growth of the kingdom of God just as it is used in Matthew. Mark 4:31-32 says, “*It is* like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.” Jesus is the One who planted a mustard seed. The field where He planted the seed is the world. In the time of Jesus the number of people who were true followers of Jesus was very small. All of the disciples of Jesus except Judas were from Galilee and they were looked down on by the religious leaders in Jerusalem. Acts 4:13 says, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.” Even the Sanhedrin was forced to admit that Jesus had dramatically changed the lives of those men.

However, in the years since the time of Jesus that message has spread around the world and there are followers of Jesus throughout the world. That is why Jesus said that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. The kingdom will not be complete until Jesus comes to rule for one thousand years and completes His rule on earth. Revelation 20:6 says, “Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.” The number of people who have come to Christ in repentance and faith through the years since He returned to heaven involves hundreds of millions of people and that number continues to grow daily around the world.

We also see that the tree shoots out large branches. Jesus said that makes it possible for the birds of the air to nest under its shade. Both the book of Daniel and the book of Ezekiel use birds to give us a picture of the Gentiles. Daniel 4:20-22 says, “The tree that you saw, which grew and became strong, whose height reached to the heavens and which *could be seen* by all the earth, whose leaves *were* lovely and its fruit abundant, in which *was* food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and in whose branches the birds of the heaven had their home—it *is* you, O king, who have grown and become strong; for your greatness has grown and reaches to the heavens, and your dominion to the end of the earth.” Jesus showed that the kingdom of God will also include the Gentiles. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that the kingdom of God will include people of all nations. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand these things.

Jesus Gave a Parable about Leaven

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the parables that Jesus gave about the kingdom of heaven (God). That topic included the tares and the mustard seed. In this topic we will look at the parable of the leaven and see how Jesus used leaven to illustrate the kingdom of heaven. We will also see why Jesus spoke in parables.

We see that Jesus gave another parable about the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 13:33 says, “Another parable He spoke to them: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.’” Leaven (yeast) was used to teach both the spread of evil and the spread of good in the New Testament. In Matthew 16:11-12 we read, “How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?— but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” In these verses we see that leaven is used to describe the false teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

In contrast, Luke 13:20-21 says, “And again He said, ‘To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.’” In these verses and our verse in Matthew we see that leaven is used in a good sense to speak of the spread of the kingdom of heaven (God) in the world. The kingdom speaks of the rule of Christ over the earth. The kingdom will reach its full fulfillment when Christ rules on the earth for one thousand years just before the final judgments. Revelation 20:4 says, “And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” This time is still future.

However, in Luke 17:20-21 we read, “Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.’” In these verses we see that the kingdom of God is in the hearts of all those who place their trust in Christ. At the time that Jesus was here on this earth that was only true in the lives of a small group of people. It was like a tiny amount of yeast being placed in a large amount of bread dough. However, Jesus was telling in advance that those who are true believers in Him would spread throughout the world until there are believers in every tribe and nation. During the time of the tribulation, Revelation 7:9 says, “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands.” Here we see that the kingdom of God will be in the hearts of people of all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues.

We go on to see that Jesus spoke in parables to fulfill the words of the prophet. Matthew 13:34-35 says, "All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: "I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world." The parables in chapter 13 of Matthew had all been kept as a secret from the followers of God throughout the Old Testament. As a result, Jesus was teaching new things that were not known in the Old Testament. At the same time Jesus was explaining the parables to His followers. This also resulted in truth being hidden from the multitudes and revealed to His disciples. At the same time Jesus was also fulfilling this promise from the Old Testament.

After giving these parables to the multitudes, Jesus sent the multitudes away. Matthew 13:36-42 say, "Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, 'Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.' He answered and said to them: 'He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked *one*. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.'" We see that once the large crowd was gone that the disciples asked Jesus to explain the parable of the tares.

Jesus then explained that He is the One who sows the good seed. Luke 19:10 says, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." We share the Word with people day by day. The Son of Man places us as Christians in the world to share the Word of God. In that way the Son sows the Word and causes it to enter their hearts as people hear the Word. John 16:8 says, "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." This verse and the following verses tell us that Holy Spirit then uses that Word to convict of the sin of unbelief, convince those who hear that Jesus is the Righteous One and convince them that Satan has already been judged. He convinces that those who continue to follow Satan will share in his judgment. Finally John 6:44 says, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." The Father then draws people to Jesus. In this way the whole Trinity is involved in the work of transforming lives.

We see that the field is the world and that we as Christians (the sons of the kingdom) are the good seed. Mark 4:14 says, "The sower sows the word." Jesus is both the sower of the Word of God and He is also the sower who places us in this world to share the Word of God with those who are not Christians. That is why I Corinthians 3:9 says, "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, *you are* God's building." Paul, Silas, Timothy, Apollos and others had shared the Word of God in Corinth. They were God's fellow workers as they shared the Word. In the same way we become God's fellow workers as we share the Word of God with others. In fact we see in the previous paragraph that we have the privilege of working with all three members of the Trinity as we share the Word of God. We share the Word and Christ places the Word in the hearts of those whose hearts are good soil. We share the Word and the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness and judgment. We share the Word and the Father draws people to Christ in repentance and faith.

Jesus went on to explain that the tares are the sons of the wicked one. We are given a warning in Hebrews 3:13 which says, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.” This verse shows us that there are people who have an evil heart of unbelief which causes them to depart from the living God. The phrase an “evil heart” is used six times in the Bible. The other five are all in the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah 18:12 says, “And they said, “That is hopeless! So we will walk according to our own plans, and we will every one obey the dictates of his evil heart.” Here we see that those who have an evil heart are those who walk according to their own plans and obey the desires of their evil heart. Genesis 6:5 says, “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.”

Some of those who are tares also become false teachers that Satan uses to try and deceive others. II Corinthians 11:13-15 says, “For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.” We see that all who have hearts of unbelief will be gathered by the angels at the end of the age. Then we see that they will be burned with fire. However, many of those who have unbelief have not been false teachers in addition.

That is why Jesus went on to make it clear that all would be gathered that offend or practice lawlessness. In I Corinthians 1:22-23 we read, “For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” Whether people are Jews or Gentiles, Romans 3:10 makes it clear that “There is non righteous, no, not one. Then Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” The only ones who do not have offenses listed against them are those who have had their sins blotted out by the blood of Christ. Acts 3:19 says, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” Those whose sins are blotted out have eternal life.

Then Jesus described the judgment of all those who sin and do not repent. He said that they will be cast into the furnace of fire where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Revelation 20:15 says, “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to explain clearly to others that they will escape this eternal judgment if they will come to God through Christ as they turn from sin to God by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain these things.

Jesus Gave Three More Parables

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain the parable of the tares so that they can clearly explain to others how they can be set free from eternal judgment. This happens by coming to God in repentance from their unbelief and through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. In this topic we will see that Jesus taught the disciples three more parables as He talked with them.

First Jesus gave a parable about a hidden treasure. Matthew 13:44 says, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. In this parable we see that the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. Christ explained to the Pharisees in Matthew 17:20-21, “Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.’” The Pharisees were looking for a political kingdom because they wanted to see the Romans expelled from their country immediately and a descendent of David placed on the throne as a political ruler. Revelation 20:1-6 tells us that an earthly kingdom is still in the future.

As a result, Jesus told the Pharisees that they were looking for the wrong thing because the kingdom of God was to be within them. This meant that they were to come to God in repentance for sin and faith in their hearts. This is a key to remember in order to understand this parable and the next parable. In this parable we see that the kingdom is like a treasure hidden in a field. In that day because there were no banks the people would sometimes bury their precious metals like gold and silver. Sometimes many years later a person might be digging a hole and suddenly find that buried treasure. Here we see that he would cover the treasure and go and sell everything that he had in order to buy that field. According to Jewish law such a treasure belonged to the person who owned the field so if he purchased the field the treasure would belong to him.

Isaiah 65:1 says, “I was sought by *those who* did not ask *for Me*; I was found by *those who* did not seek Me. I said, ‘Here I am, here I am,’ to a nation *that* was not called by My name.” Romans 10:20 quotes this verse from Isaiah to point out the fact that there would be many Gentiles who would turn to Jesus even though they had not been seeking for Him. At the time of Christ we see that most of the Jews were spiritually blind and refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Romans 11:25 says, “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” The Gentiles were found by Jesus even though they were not looking for Him.

Then we see that Jesus gave a parable about a pearl of great price. Matthew 13:45-46 says, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.” This parable is

similar to the previous parable with one big difference. In the previous parable the man who found the treasure was not looking for a treasure but found it unexpectedly when he was digging in the field. In this parable we see that a merchant is looking for beautiful pearls. In his case he was searching and found a pearl of great value and sold everything he had in order to buy the pearl of great value. God had said through Isaiah in Isaiah 55:6-7, "Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." Here we see that the Jews were invited to seek the Messiah.

At the time of the coming of Jesus to this earth, some of the Jews were looking for the coming of the Messiah. Simeon said when Jesus was presented to the Lord as a baby in Luke 2:29-32, "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to *bring* revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel." Then we see that Anna knew those who were looking for the coming of the Messiah because Luke 2:38 says, "And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem." Those who were looking in redemption in Israel were looking for the coming of the Messiah. Those who were looking for the Messiah turned to Jesus and received Him by repentance and true faith. They became a part of the kingdom because of the fact that the kingdom of God was within them.

We saw that most of the Jews rejected Jesus at his first coming. However, there will be a time in the future that the Jews will turn to Jesus. Romans 11:26-27 says, "And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.'" When Christ comes the second time to be the ruler of the earth for one thousand years as described in Revelation 20:1-6 we see that there will be both Jews and Gentiles in that earthly kingdom. Romans 11:32-33 says, "For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out!" As a result, during the 1000 years described in Revelation 20:1-6 the Kingdom of God will be an earthly kingdom.

However, one day the Kingdom of God will become an eternal kingdom. Isaiah 51:6 says, "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, the earth will grow old like a garment, and those who dwell in it will die in like manner; but My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will not be abolished." Then Isaiah 9:6-7 says, "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of *His* government and peace *there will be* no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this." Here we see that the kingdom of God will last forever.

We see that Jesus also gave the parable of the dragnet. Matthew 13:47-51 says, "'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind,

which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Have you understood all these things?’ They said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord.’” In that day a dragnet was used by fishermen as they fished for fish. The fishermen would put weights on the net and then drag the net along the bottom of the Sea of Galilee. Such fishing would gather both fish that were good and could be used and also fish unfit to eat as well as other things near the bottom of the sea.

Jesus used those dragnets and fishermen to illustrate what will happen when the time of judgment comes. The fishermen gathered the good fish into containers. In the same way Jesus will gather all true believers into His eternal kingdom. However, they are also those who only pretend to believe in Jesus. God told Samuel in I Samuel 16:7, “But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For *the LORD does not see* as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.’” At the end of the age Christ will reveal the hearts of true believers and then the angels will go and separate the wicked from the just. The just are described in Romans 5:1 where we read, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” All who come to God through Christ in repentance and faith have been justified or made just.

In contrast, Romans 3:21-24 says, “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” All those who have remained in their sins have not been made just. Jesus said that they would be cast into the furnace of fire where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Revelation 20:15 says it this way, “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” In these verses we see that the judgment of all those who choose to reject Jesus will experience judgment for all eternity because of the choice that they have made.

Then Jesus asked His disciples the question, “Have you understood all these things?” Here we see that Jesus knew that it was very important for His disciples to understand the parables about the kingdom because they would need to be able to explain them to others when Jesus returned to heaven. We see that the disciples told the Lord that they did understand the parables that He had given to them that day. We will see in the next topic why it is so important that everyone who becomes a disciple of Jesus is able to explain the parables as well as the many other things that Jesus taught His disciples. In the same way it is important for us to help our physical and spiritual children grow in their understanding so that they can pass on what they have learned to others. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to understand the things Jesus taught.

Jesus Defined the Characteristics of a Disciple

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to be able to explain the parables about the kingdom of heaven so that they can explain them to others. That means we must help them develop a clear understanding of those parables. In this topic we will see that Jesus defined the characteristics of a disciple.

We see that Jesus defined what a disciple is like. Matthew 13:52 says, “Then He said to them, ‘Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure *things* new and old.’” Many of the times that scribes are mentioned in the New Testament we see that they join the Pharisees in opposing Jesus. However, the word is also used in a positive way to speak of a religious teacher that was known for his ability to teach accurately regarding the kingdom of heaven (God). In Matthew 23:34 Jesus said, “Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city.” In Mark 12:32-33 we read, “So the scribe said to Him, ‘Well *said*, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.’”

First, since this verse talks about a scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven, in this verse the word is used to speak about all those who will teach accurately concerning the kingdom. As a result, when this word is used positively, it describes one who has become a disciple of Jesus and is able to accurately teach others about Him. Second, we see that every scribe instructed has become the head of a spiritual household. In the book of Acts we read about a number of entire physical households turning to the Lord. A spiritual household includes people we lead to Christ and help them grow spiritually.

Acts 16:14-15 says, “Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ So she persuaded us.” Just a few verses later in acts 16:30-34 we read, “And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his *family* were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.” Paul had a spiritual household that included many sons in the faith like Timothy, Titus and many others.

Third, a disciple is one who has a treasure. Luke 6:45 says, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart

brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” Colossians 2:2-3 says, “That their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and *attaining* to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” When we come to Christ by grace through faith we receive Christ as a treasure in our hearts. In turn Christ gives us the Holy Spirit to teach us and help us to understand spiritual truth. As that spiritual truth is something that becomes rooted in our hearts we are able to share with others what we are learning and what we have learned in the past. That is why we are able to share things both new and old.

After Jesus finished teaching these parables about the kingdom of heaven, we see that He left that area. Matthew 13:53-56 says, “Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, that He departed from there. When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, ‘Where did this *Man* get this wisdom and *these* mighty works? Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this *Man* get all these things?’ So they were offended at Him.” Here we see that Jesus made His last recorded visit to the town of Nazareth where He had lived most of His life.

Jesus had often read the Old Testament in the synagogue in Nazareth as He grew up. Luke 4:16 says, “So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.” Here we see that it had been His custom for many years to read the Old Testament scriptures in this synagogue. As Jesus began His public ministry we see that He was teaching in the synagogues throughout Galilee. Matthew 4:23 says, “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.” Now as He returned to Nazareth we see that Jesus began teaching in the synagogue just as He had done in towns throughout Galilee.

However, instead of listening and learning from the teaching of Jesus, the people began to question where He had learned wisdom and received power to do mighty works. By these questions they were asking what right Jesus had to teach them. The older people had known Jesus since He was a young boy and they did not want to accept His teaching. They chose instead to remind one another that they all knew His whole family. They had known Joseph as the one who served as a carpenter in their town. They knew Mary by name as they had known her since she was a child. Luke 1:26-27 says, “Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name *was* Mary.” The fact that all of the people knew Jesus is an indication that the town was a fairly small town where everyone knew the others who lived in the town.

The people of the town also knew all of the half-brothers and half-sisters of Jesus. These would have been children that were born to Mary and Joseph after the birth of Jesus. Matthew 1:24-25 says, “Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.” Jesus had four half-brothers and two or more half-sisters that were

born to Mary and Joseph after the birth of Jesus. As we mentioned in an earlier topic, two of the half-brothers, James and Judas, wrote the New Testament books of James and Jude.

The people of Nazareth were forced to recognize that Jesus spoke with great wisdom. The thing that they did not understand was where Jesus had received that wisdom. However, we see that they used that as an excuse not to believe what Jesus taught. Here we see an example of the fact that many people will use excuses when they do not want to believe. Hebrews 3:12 was written as a warning to the Jews when that verse says, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.” Here we see that a heart of unbelief is an evil heart that causes a person to depart from the living God. That was what had happened among the people in the synagogue of Nazareth that day. It is also the one sin that keeps a person from receiving eternal life. The Holy Spirit convicts those who are not Christians of that sin. John 16:8-9 says, “And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me.” Those who continue to live in unbelief until they die will experience eternal judgment.

Jesus went on to say in Matthew 13:57-58, “But Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.’ Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.” The word translated “without honor” means less honored, dishonored or despised. In these verses we see that Jesus said that the place where He experienced the greatest rejection was in His own country. In fact Jesus made a similar statement in John 4:44 where we read, “For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country.” Here we see an attitude that many people have shown through the years. They feel that someone that they have known since the person was a child is not able to teach them the Word of God because of the fact that they are younger. Paul said to Timothy in I Timothy 4:12, “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” In this case we see that Paul told Timothy that he could change that attitude among Christians by providing an example of godly character.

We also see how Jesus handled the unbelief in the town of Nazareth. We see that Jesus chose not to do many miracles in that area because of that unbelief. John 20:30-31 says, “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” The miracles that Jesus did were signs to the Jews that He was the Messiah and came from God. The people of Nazareth had already made up their minds that they would not recognize Jesus as the Messiah who came from God. As a result, Jesus did not try to give them additional signs in an effort to try and change their minds. Instead He allowed them to make the choice to continue in their unbelief. We want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that there are some people who will continue in their unbelief and only God is able to change their hard hearts. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to understand why there are those who choose to continue to reject Jesus because of their unbelief.

Jesus Heard about the Murder of John the Baptist

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that there will be those who will continue to reject Jesus because of their unbelief. In this topic we will see that Herod gives us a real example of one who continued in his unbelief regardless of what he heard or saw.

In Matthew 14:1-5 we read, “At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus and said to his servants, ‘This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him.’ For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put *him* in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife. Because John had said to him, ‘It is not lawful for you to have her.’ And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.” In these verses we see a good example of how guilt affects a person who is guilty of committing sin. Herod heard about the ministry of Jesus and immediately thought that John the Baptist had risen from the dead. We will see how that guilt affected him each time He heard about Jesus.

As soon as Herod began hearing about the preaching and miracles of Jesus the first thought that he had was that John the Baptist had risen from the dead. This was due to the fact that Herod had murdered John and every time he heard about Jesus it made him wonder if John had risen from the dead. He also wanted to see Jesus perform miracles in front of him. As a result, he had a great desire to see Jesus for a long time. Luke 23:8 says, “Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long *time* to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him.” We see that the first way that Herod was affected by the fact that he had killed John the Baptist was that his life was controlled by guilt.

Second, we see that Herod was living a life that caused shame. Herodias was the daughter of Aristobulus, the son of Herod the Great. Herod and Philip were half-brothers of Aristobulus which meant that both Herod and Philip were uncles of Herodias. This meant that in addition to taking the wife of his brother that Herod was also committing incest with his niece. Mark 6:20 says, “For Herod feared John, knowing that he *was* a just and holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.” The fact that Herod did many things to protect John from Herodias showed that Herod knew that Herodias also hated John. Herod was controlled by shame for his lifestyle because he was living both in incest and had taken the wife of his brother. He knew that John was a just and holy man and knew that the things John said to him were right but he was unwilling to change because of his own desires so his life had become controlled by shame.

Third, this same verse says that Herod feared John. This makes it clear that his life was also controlled by fear and so his actions were based on fear. These three things: fear, guilt and shame completely controlled his life. We see that these same three things controlled Adam when he sinned. Genesis 3:10 says, “So he said, ‘I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was

afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.” I was afraid – fear. I was naked – shame. I hid myself – guilt. These are the three changes that happened to Adam within his spirit when he sinned. These same three things now completely controlled the spirit of Herod. Every time he thought about John these three things took complete control of him. That was why his first reaction every time he heard about Jesus was that John had risen from the dead. That was why he was so anxious to see Jesus.

The fear of Herod was not of John. He wanted to put John to death because he did not like to be reminded of his sin. At the same time Herodias had an even stronger desire to put John to death. However, these verses tell us that Herod feared the multitude. He was afraid of the people because the people considered John to be a prophet. I John 4:18 says, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” This verse tells us that perfect love casts out fear. The opposite is also true. A lack of love causes a person to become totally controlled by fear. Here we see that Herod was living in total fear because he knew when he heard John that John was telling him the truth.

The fact that Herod was living in total fear explains why he did what he did. Matthew 14:6-8 says, “But when Herod’s birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. Therefore he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, ‘Give me John the Baptist’s head here on a platter.’” These verses show us that Herodias was looking for the opportunity to get rid of John because she was also living with that same guilt, shame and fear. She did not like to be reminded of her lifestyle either.

One day Herodias saw her opportunity to get rid of John. Mark 6:21-25 says, “Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief *men* of Galilee. And when Herodias’ daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, ‘Ask me whatever you want, and I will give *it* to you.’ He also swore to her, ‘Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom.’ So she went out and said to her mother, ‘What shall I ask?’ And she said, ‘The head of John the Baptist!’ Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, ‘I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.’” Herodias had taught her daughter how to dance in a way that would please Herod and these other government officials in the region of Galilee especially in view of the fact that they were probably also drinking.

In his efforts to impress all of the other government officials Herod promised the girl that he would give her whatever she wanted up to half of his kingdom. This was not a true statement because Herod had no kingdom to give as he was a governor under the authority of the Roman government and not the king of a kingdom. As a result, his words were totally designed to impress the other people who were there. The girl had no idea what to ask from Herod. That is why she went and asked her mother what she should ask Herod to give her. This was the opportunity for which Herodias had been hoping. She knew that Herod would keep his promise in his efforts to impress these other government officials because he would bring shame on himself if he broke his oath. Here we see that Herodias knew how to get what she wanted from Herod.

We go on to read how Herod felt but what he still did that day. Matthew 14:9-12 says, “And the king was sorry; nevertheless, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he commanded *it* to be given to *her*. So he sent and had John beheaded in prison. And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought *it* to her mother. Then his disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus.” Here we see that Herod felt sorry. There are two different kinds of sorrow. II Corinthians 7:9-10 says, “Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.” Herod certainly did not experience godly sorrow because his sorrow did not lead him to repentance. Instead he experienced the sorrow that produces death.

That day Herodias got exactly what she wanted. When a person is driven by fear, guilt and shame, that person will not do what is right. Instead the person will always commit sin. That was exactly what happened that day. Herod had made a promise that meant nothing because he had no kingdom to give. However, he was determined to keep that promise because of the other government officials that had come to his birthday feast and were celebrating with him. As a result, he immediately commanded a soldier to go to the prison and get the head of John the Baptist. Mark 6:26-28 says, “And the king was exceedingly sorry; *yet*, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother.” Here we see that Herod tried to show that he kept his word and sent an executioner to kill John and bring the head to the girl. She then took the head to her mother.

This is an example of one reason why people will do things that they know are wrong and which cause them to experience extreme guilt for the rest of their lives. They are being driven by their fear, guilt and shame which causes them to be exceedingly sorry. However, they do what they do because they are trying to impress the people that are around them. Luke 23:11-12 says, “Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked *Him*, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other.” Here we see that Herod and his men of war treated Jesus with the same contempt that they had shown to John. We also see that the actions of Herod and his soldiers changed the relationship between Herod and Pilate. Both men were acting out of total fear, guilt and shame when they condemned Jesus to death even though they knew that Jesus was innocent. They now became friends because they had joined together in doing evil in order to please the Jewish religious leaders.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why people who join together to do evil will become friends. They do what they do because their lives have become driven by fear, guilt and shame. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand these consequences of a sin nature.

Jesus Fed the Five Thousand

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand why people can feel sorry for what they have done and still continue to do the same things. We saw that this is the result of being driven by fear, guilt and shame. In our topic today we are going to see that Jesus fed a crowd of five thousand because they were in a deserted area where there was no food for them to eat.

The disciples of John the Baptist buried the body of John when they heard about his death. Then they went and told Jesus what had happened. Matthew 14:13-15 says, “When Jesus heard *it*, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself. But when the multitudes heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities. And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick. When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, ‘This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food.’” Jesus and the disciples heard that John had been murdered. Then Jesus and the disciples left that area and went to a deserted place.

However, the people also heard that Jesus had left the area by boat and immediately the people began walking around the north edge of the Sea of Galilee to get to the area where Jesus had gone. Luke 9:10-11 says, “And the apostles, when they had returned, told Him all that they had done. Then He took them and went aside privately into a deserted place belonging to the city called Bethsaida. But when the multitudes knew *it*, they followed Him; and He received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who had need of healing.” Here we see that Jesus heard about the murder of John the Baptist about the time that the disciples arrived back to report to Jesus after He had sent them out two by two to preach the kingdom of God. The disciples gave Jesus a report of what they had done and what they had taught.

Then Jesus took them aside into a desert place so that they could get some rest. This deserted area was in the general area of Bethsaida which was on the northeast corner of the Sea of Galilee. The people arrived in the deserted area at the time when Jesus and the disciples were coming out from their place where they had rested and talked. We see that this was a very large crowd of people that had gone around the north end of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was moved with compassion for the people as He saw them there. He healed their sick that needed healing and then He spoke to them about the kingdom of God. In Luke 17:20-21 Jesus was asked a question. Those verses say, “Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.’” The Pharisees were asking about the future kingdom when Christ will rule and so Jesus pointed out that the present kingdom is within the heart of those who trust in Him.

Jesus spoke to the people for the rest of the day. As it was getting closer to evening the disciples became concerned because they thought about the fact that the large crowd of people

would soon be hungry. As a result, the disciples reminded Jesus that this was a deserted area. They then said, "Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food." Instead of telling the people to leave, Jesus gave the disciples an answer. Matthew 14:16-21 says, "But Jesus said to them, 'They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.' And they said to Him, 'We have here only five loaves and two fish.' He said, 'Bring them here to Me.' Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes. So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained. Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children." Here we see that Jesus chose instead to teach the disciples an important lesson.

Jesus told the disciples that the people did not need to leave. Instead Jesus told the disciples to feed the people. That caused the disciples to make various responses. Jesus asked Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" John 6:6 says, "But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do." Here we see that Jesus was continually training His disciples by asking the disciples questions that would make them think and learn to look to Jesus for guidance. Instead of answering the question Philip gave a financial report and said they could not afford to buy food for all of the people. John 6:7 says, "Philip answered Him, 'Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.'" Andrew gave a different answer. He told Jesus what was available. John 6:8-9 says, "One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, 'There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?'"

We see that Jesus took the five loaves and two fish. Then He gave the disciples the responsibility to gather the people in groups so that the food could easily be distributed to them. Luke 9:14-15 says, "For there were about five thousand men. Then He said to His disciples, 'Make them sit down in groups of fifty.' And they did so, and made them all sit down." Here we see that Jesus used this opportunity to help the disciples learn that they could organize large crowds by dividing them into smaller groups. Jesus then prayed and blessed the loaves and fishes. Mark 6:41 says, "And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave *them* to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among *them* all." Here we see that Jesus helped the disciples learn that they could participate in ministry even though Jesus had to do the miracle that made that ministry possible.

We see the size of this miracle when we read that all of the people ate until they were filled. Jesus then had the disciples gather up the food that remained. John 6:12-13 says, "So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, 'Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.' Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten." At the close of His ministry Jesus would tell the disciples that He was sending them out to make disciples. He wanted them to understand the principle that every person is much more important than bread. Every person who repents of sin and turns to Christ needs to be gathered into a body of Christians where the new Christian can grow and mature. Jesus made it clear to the disciples that He did not want anything to be forgotten. We see that there was enough food left over that the disciples were

able to gather twelve baskets of left over food. Matthew 14:21 says, “Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children. Jesus continually used everything that happened to teach and train the disciples to prepare them for future ministry.

Once the people had all eaten and were satisfied Matthew 14:22-23 says, “Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there.” Here we see that Jesus had other lessons that He was teaching both to the crowd and to His disciples. With the entire crowd still in that place, Jesus told the disciples to get into the boat and go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. As a result, the crowd all saw the disciples get into the boat and start across the water.

Once Jesus had sent the disciples on their way Jesus turned to the crowd of people and told them that it was time for them to go home as well. The crowds all listened to Jesus and headed back around the north side of the Sea of Galilee to get back to the towns where they lived. Once the crowds were gone we see that Jesus went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Jesus often showed by His example the need to get alone to spend time in prayer to the Father. Early in the public ministry of Jesus Mark 1:35 says, “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.” On that particular morning the disciples had gone looking for Jesus and found Him praying. John 18:1-2 says, “When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered. And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples.” Here we see that the disciples had often gone with Jesus when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus teaches us a very important lesson about our own prayer life by His example. Jesus made it clear that we also need to spend time alone with the Father in prayer. Matthew 6:6 says, “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.” We see that as the evening came that Jesus was alone praying to the Father. Jesus knew the importance of spending time alone in fellowship with the Father. This was a time of intimate fellowship with no other interruptions. We will see in our next topic that Jesus actually spent several hours in prayer that night. Jesus shows us by His example the importance of having regular times of fellowship with the Father and the Son. I John 1:3 says, “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” In the same way we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to enjoy regular fellowship with the Lord as they spend time in prayer and meditation on the Word of God. That is a key in helping them in their spiritual growth and development. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children by your example the importance of fellowship with the Lord.

Jesus Walked on the Water

In our last topic we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand the importance of spending time alone with the Lord for fellowship by spending time in prayer and meditation on the Word of God. In this topic we will see that Jesus rejoined the disciples as they were trying to get the boat back to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus had told the disciples to cross the Sea of Galilee while He sent the crowd of people away and spent time alone with the Father in prayer. Matthew 14:24-27 says, “But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.’” In these verses we see that the disciples had been on the Sea of Galilee a long time that night.

Matthew explains the reason why it took the disciples so long that night to cross the Sea of Galilee. It was due to the fact that there were large waves and the wind was blowing in a different direction than the direction that they wanted to go as they crossed the sea that night. The Sea of Galilee is nearly 700 feet below sea level. Mount Hermon was only about 40 miles north of the Sea of Galilee and that mountain is over 9000 feet high. That meant that there was a drop of almost 10,000 feet in only 40 miles in the river valley. As a result, they can get some very severe winds on the Sea of Galilee that can cause waves of as much as twelve feet high. The Sea of Galilee is about 12 ½ miles from north to south and about 7 ½ miles from east to west. The result with strong winds blowing meant that the winds had driven the boat into the middle of the Sea of Galilee when it was more normal to cross within a mile or two of the shore.

By the time Jesus went walking across the sea toward the boat where the disciples were it was the fourth watch of the night (3a.m. to 6 a.m.). That meant that the disciples had been in the boat for nine or ten hours trying to get across the sea. Suddenly the disciples saw something coming across the water toward them. They said, “It is a ghost!” The word translated “ghost” is the Greek word from which we get our English word phantom. The disciples did not know what they were seeing but they did not even think of the fact that it might be Jesus. The result was that they were filled with fear. Jesus immediately turned their fear to joy as He spoke to them. Jesus said, “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.” Here we see that Jesus made it clear to the disciples that they did not need to be afraid because it was He. This statement reminds us that we do not need to be fearful because Jesus is also with us at all times. Hebrews 13:5 says, “*Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have.* For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”

Peter was not certain it was Jesus when he heard the words of Jesus. Matthew 14:28-33 says, “And Peter answered Him and said, ‘Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.’ So He said, ‘Come.’ And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the

water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind *was* boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, 'Lord, save me!' And immediately Jesus stretched out *His* hand and caught him, and said to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?' And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Truly You are the Son of God.'" Here we see that Peter said that if it really was Jesus that Jesus should ask Peter to walk to Him on the water. Jesus just replied, "Come."

We have seen that Peter was a man of action. When Jesus told him to "Come", Peter immediately got out of the boat and started walking across the top of the water to go to Jesus. Suddenly Peter started looking around and realized what he was doing. He heard the sound of the wind and saw the size of the waves of water. Once he started looking at the waves and listening to the wind he was no longer looking at Jesus. He immediately became filled with fear. Then Peter started to sink into the waves because he had taken his eyes off Jesus. He immediately prayed the shortest recorded prayer in the Bible. He cried out, "Lord, save me!" One thing that we see from this prayer is that a prayer does not have to be long in order for Jesus to hear and respond to our prayer.

Jesus immediately reached out His hand and caught Peter as Peter was sinking into the waves. Then Jesus made a statement to Peter followed by a question, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" The word translated "O you of little faith" is used five times in the New Testament. Jesus used it in Matthew 6:30 as He talked about worry in the Sermon on the Mount. The other four times that Jesus used this word it was in various situations where He was talking to the disciples. This shows us that worry was a common problem among the disciples when they first began to follow Jesus. In Matthew 8:26 Jesus spoke to the disciples when they were worried that they were going to drown in the middle of a storm on this same Sea of Galilee. Then Jesus made the statement here to Peter as He rescued Peter from the waves. Finally Jesus spoke to the disciples in Matthew 16:8 when they were worrying because they had forgotten to bring any bread.

From all of these uses of this phrase we see that worry is associated with little faith. In four of the times Jesus was speaking only to the disciples. Jesus followed this statement by asking Peter a question, "Why did you doubt?" Here we see that the reason Christians worry is the fact that they doubt God. That is why Philippians 4:6-7 says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Here we see the solution to worry. We are to make our requests with thanksgiving to God. Thanksgiving is based on trust rather than doubt. Trust will cause us to experience the peace of God.

Jesus and Peter then got into the boat with the rest of the disciples. As soon as they got into the boat, the wind stopped blowing. This was the same thing that had happened the previous time that Jesus said, "O you of little faith." Matthew 8:26-27 says, "But He said to them, 'Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?' Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. So the men marveled, saying, 'Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?'" The disciples had been following Jesus for a shorter time and so they were

amazed. However, we see that this time caused the disciples to have a greater understanding of Jesus. This time we see that the disciples worshiped Jesus. Here we see that the more the disciples saw as they observed Jesus the more they understood who He is. They expressed their worship by saying, “Truly You are the Son of God.” This was one of the events that helped the disciples to grow in their understanding of the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. In the same way, we all need to continue to grow in our understanding of what it means for Jesus to be the Son of God.

We go on to read in Matthew 14:34-36, “When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret. And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent out into all that surrounding region, brought to Him all who were sick, and begged Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched *it* were made perfectly well.” The Sea of Galilee was known earlier as Lake Gennesaret and there was also a town by that name on the northwest side of the Sea. As a result, the area around that town was known as the land of Gennesaret. “The word “Gennesaret” means harp and that is why the sea was also known by that name because the lake was in the basic shape of a musical harp. This meant that the boat reached the shore about five miles south of the city of Capernaum. John 6:21 tells us, “Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.” Once Jesus got into the boat it immediately went from the middle of the lake to the shore.

The men in the area of Gennesaret recognized Jesus immediately when they saw Him. Then they sent word to the people throughout that area to let the people know that Jesus had arrived in their area. At once all of the people that had sick family members in that area came bringing those who were sick to be healed by Jesus. The people who brought these sick to Jesus just requested permission for the sick to touch the hem of the robe of Jesus. Sometime earlier a woman had been healed by just touching the border of the robe of Jesus. Luke 8:43-44 says, “Now a woman, having a flow of blood for twelve years, who had spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any, came from behind and touched the border of His garment. And immediately her flow of blood stopped.” People had apparently heard about this miracle and so they just asked for permission for the sick to touch the border of the robe of Jesus.

We read that all who touched the hem of the robe of Jesus were made perfectly well. The word translated “were made perfectly well” means to save or to cure a person who is sick. We see that every person that touched the border of the robe of Jesus were cured of whatever disease or illness that they had. When Jesus had healed the woman mentioned earlier, Jesus said to the woman, in Matthew 9:22, “But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, ‘Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well.’ And the woman was made well from that hour.” In the case of that woman we see that she received both physical and spiritual healing that day. We want to help our children learn to explain to others the need for spiritual healing and not just physical healing. Spiritual healing means that the sin of unbelief has been forgiven and a person has received spiritual life. That is something that has eternal results. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain to others how to receive spiritual life.