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“The Parables of Jesus”

by Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew

About the Author



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Married to Angelia Tan Chor Lang for the past forty years, God has blessed them with three married children and two grandchildren.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1

MATTHEW 13:1-9

Memory Verse: Matt 13:9

*“And he spake many things
unto them in parables...”*

WHAT IS A PARABLE?

A parable is a short narrative with a spiritual teaching. The parables in the Gospels are true accounts of the people's daily lives in Israel during Jesus' days. A parable is simply defined as an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Thus, parables are everyday events which teach eternal truths. Many tend to use parables as an illustration rather than to study them for their precious truths' sake.

The Greek word translated as *“parable”* is to “throw alongside” or “cast near” something else for comparison. Therefore, parables in the Bible are everyday events placed side by side with spiritual truths. Another way to view parables is that it is an extended simile. An example of a simile is: “He eats like a pig.” The preposition “like” is used to compare the way he eats. An extended simile with many words is called a parable. Therefore, the commonly used phrase in the parables of Christ is *“The kingdom of heaven is like...”* Not all the parables begin with this phrase in the Bible (cf. Luke 16: parables of the unjust steward and the rich man and Lazarus, the beggar). However, the final determinant factor is the content of the parable itself.

The main lesson is usually found at the end of the parable. The parables comprise significant words and embellishments to complete the story. The interpreter needs to distinguish between the two; otherwise, he may arrive at the wrong teaching. Since parables are accurate descriptions of everyday events that Jesus used to teach spiritual truths, the morality or unreasonable way of doing things in some parables is not the emphasis. For example, why would someone cast seeds on the way side, knowing the birds would consume them? This is wasteful. And the parable of the unjust steward seems to condone wrong.

Parables teach easy-to-remember truths. Once the spiritual truth of a parable is learned, remembering the parable reminds us of the spiritual truth. We cannot obey what we have forgotten. Thank God for parables.

THOUGHT: Do I love to study the parables of Jesus?

PRAYER: O Father, give me wisdom to understand Thy parables with a heart of obedience.

THURSDAY, APRIL 2

MATTHEW 13:10-17

Memory Verse: Matt 13:11

*“...because they seeing see not;
and hearing they hear not...”*

WHY PARABLES?

The disciples asked Jesus, *“Why speakest thou unto them in parables?”* (Matt 13:10b). Jesus’ answer was revealing and pointed. Jesus gave us parables with a dual purpose. The dual purpose is stated in Matthew 13:11: *“He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.”*

The first purpose is for the ones who are born again. If they are born-again believers, they would want to know the spiritual meaning taught in the parables. Matthew 13:12: *“For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.”* They may not initially understand the spiritual truths behind the parables, like many portions of God’s Word, but they will not give up. They will keep meditating, praying and searching until they find the truth of God’s Word in the parables. In this way, God uses the parables to confirm a professing believer’s salvation. This desire to know their heavenly Father’s teaching is the work of the Holy Spirit who dwells in them. What obedient child does not wish to know the Father’s instruction and obey?

The second purpose is the opposite of the first. It is to condemn. Matthew 13:13: *“Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.”* Just as the parables can confirm the person’s salvation, they can also condemn. They understand the teaching of Christ from the parables like a sinner understands the Gospel when they hear it, but their response is rejection and not acceptance. The reason is that they do not believe what they hear and understand. The understanding of their mind will condemn them on the day of judgment because they reject what they understand. How can God blame and condemn them if they can justly claim that they do not understand?

The believers may not understand initially, but they will in the end. The unbelievers will not understand because they do not believe. What they understand will also be taken away because of their rejection.

THOUGHT: Have I truly repented of my sins and believed in Jesus?

PRAYER: O Father, help me to love Thee by loving Thy Word always!

FRIDAY, APRIL 3

MATTHEW 13:1-23

Memory Verse: Matt 13:19

*"When any one heareth
the word of the kingdom,
and understandeth it not..."*

THE WAY SIDE (1)

Unlike modern farming, farmers farmed by casting their seeds as they traversed their fields. As the parcel of land is large, pathways are needed to cover the entire land. With constant walking over many years of farming, the ground of these paths is hardened. When a farmer sows, some seeds will fall on these hardened paths. Birds will swoop down and eat them. Matthew 13:4: *"And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up."*

Jesus explains the meaning of the "way side" ground in Matthew 13:19: *"When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side."* The seeds represent the Word of the kingdom. The way-side hardened ground represents the hearer who does not understand. The birds that eat up the seeds (i.e. the Word) represent the wicked one who catches the Word sown in the hearer's heart. The wicked one is the devil. The four types of ground in Matthew 13:1-9 represent the four ways people receive the Word of God, as Matthew 13:9 teaches: *"Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."*

The truth taught here is that when a person hears the Word of God, he understands enough to have a response. Jesus describes it as *"sown in his heart."* But when the response is "I am not interested" or "I do not care" or "I do not believe" or "I do not agree with what God says in His Word," he is like the "way side" ground. He attends church or Bible Study where the Word of God is taught or preached, unlike other sinners who are uninterested in attending church or reading the Bible. However, the interest is not sincere; as he learns God's truth, his response is not acceptance but rejection. The rejection is in his heart, for outwardly, others might think he is a believer because he attends church and Bible Study.

The "way side" ground warns professing believers to stop deceiving themselves and others.

THOUGHT: Am I willing to stop my hypocrisy?

PRAYER: O Father, help me to be true to my soul and open my ears and heart to receive Thy Holy Word, for Jesus' sake!

SATURDAY, APRIL 4

MATTHEW 13:1-23

Memory Verse: Matt 13:21

“...when tribulation or persecution
ariseth because of the word,
by and by he is offended.”

THE STONY PLACES (2)

The second way to hear God's Word is called the “*stony places*” (Matt 13:5). From the surface of the earth, it appears to be good fertile soil. It is damp and dark, like good soil. It has the appearance of fertility, and when the seeds fall on it, it sinks into the earth, giving the farmer the impression that it will bear fruit when harvest comes. Matthew 13:5-6: “*Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.*” Sadly, beneath the fertile-looking soil were stones. Because of the fertile topsoil, the seeds died and grew. Young shoots appear out of the ground. But there was no deepness of earth. No roots were formed beneath the earth. When the sun came, the young shoots dried up and died.

Jesus explains the stony places in Matthew 13:20-21: “*But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.*” These are also found in churches and Bible Studies, for they belong to the same congregation since they are exposed to the same Word. The stony ground represents hearers who say amen when the Word of God is preached because they received the Word with joy. His heart might be warmed within by his nodding of the head in constant agreement with the preacher. He might even shed some tears. He feels good about his response to God's Word. But when persecution (i.e. being threatened) or tribulation (i.e. being pursued) arises because of the Word that he accepts and wants to obey, he fails to obey it. These tribulations and persecutions may include loss of jobs, family, family's love or approval, or freedom or life.

The “*stony places*” warn professing believers to be careful of the delusion of mental acceptance of God's Word without obedience. The experience of suffering for Christ is part of every believer's testimony.

THOUGHT: Am I afraid of persecution?

PRAYER: O heavenly Father, grant me courage in times of persecution so that I may not be a hearer only, but also a doer of Thy Holy Word.

LORD'S DAY, APRIL 5
MATTHEW 13:1-23
Memory Verse: Matt 13:22

*"...and the deceitfulness of riches,
choke the word,
and he becometh unfruitful."*

THE THORNY GROUND (3)

The third type of earth is the thorny ground. Why they did not remove the thorns before planting is not the issue. This was how the farmers sowed in Jesus' time; hence, it is not about correcting sowing methods. Jesus used existing methods of sowing to teach spiritual truths. The seeds fell among thorns and grew side by side with the thorns. Both fought for a limited supply of nutrients from the earth and the seeds grew but did not bear any fruit when harvest came. Matthew 13:7: *"And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them."*

Jesus explains the thorny ground in Matthew 13:22: *"He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful."* He also heard the Word of God like the way side and stony place hearers but is more similar to the stony place hearer, with the Word of God falling on him with a seemingly godly response. The difference was how they rejected the Word of God. In the case of the stony place hearer, the threat of persecution caused him to disobey. However, the thorny ground hearer disobeyed God's Word because of the care of the world and the deceitfulness of riches. The care of the world may seem harmless, like parents providing for their children's daily needs and education. They find their solution in riches because money solves the problem of not having enough for today and tomorrow. Does money solve the problem of lack? The answer is yes and no. It is yes because the problem of not having enough is solved with more money. It is no because the real problem is that at the end of one's life, death awaits. No matter how much money a person has, he will die one day in his sin, and hell awaits him if he is not born again.

The thorny ground hearer is a more deadly and subtle enemy. To disobey God's Word without realising it because of the busyness of making more money results in the fatal sin of delusion. He lives in sin while he thinks he is holy in Christ.

THOUGHT: Am I a Christian in name only?

PRAYER: Father, help me to be a genuine Christian within and without. Deliver me from the sin of ignorance and delusion.

MONDAY, APRIL 6

MATTHEW 13:1-23

Memory Verse: Matt 13:23

*“...received seed into the good ground
is he that heareth the word,
and understandeth it...”*

THE GOOD GROUND (4)

The fourth type of earth is the good ground. The soil looks good above and beneath. It will indeed bear fruits. Matthew 13:8: *“But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.”* If God’s Word is the Gospel of salvation (i.e. the milk doctrine), it will save the sinner. If he rejects it, he has no salvation like the first three types of ground. If God’s Word is about sanctification (i.e. meat doctrines) and he hears and obeys, he is sanctified and conforms more and more to the image of Christ in word and deed. If he disobeys God’s Word, like the first three types of ground, he remains a believer, but his word and life will be like the world and less like Christ. Those around him will stumble, for he has sinned against God.

Jesus explains the good ground in Matthew 13:23: *“But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”* The born-again believer will not remain in sin. He will soon repent, for the Holy Spirit will convict him, and the peace of God will leave him until he repents. When he repents, peace returns. The miserable knowledge of holding on to sin in his heart will drive him to repentance. Once he repents, he learns the blessing of sincere repentance. He has grown spiritually in the aspect of repentance. That is why the spiritual growth of a believer is guaranteed. The difference is that some will grow faster than others, as taught by Christ, in a hundredfold, sixtyfold, or thirtyfold manner. But growth will come, for it is not of man nor the power or will of man, but the power and work of the Holy Spirit in every believer’s life.

When a person hears the Word, believes in God, and receives God’s Word, he becomes a new creature in Christ. The sinful nature that belongs to the depraved sinner is no more. He is given a new Christ-like nature where he is now a servant of righteousness and no longer a servant of sin.

THOUGHT: Does the Lord transform my heart through the Word daily?

PRAYER: O heavenly Father, renew a right spirit within me and use me for Thy glory. Make me a blessing to all the people in my life; for Jesus’ sake, hear my humble cry.

TUESDAY, APRIL 7

MATTHEW 13:24-30

Memory Verse: Matt 13:28

*“...while men slept, his enemy
came and sowed tares...”*

THE WHEAT AND THE TARES

This is the second and last parable taught by Christ which has an explanation. The Parable of the Sower, with the four different types of grounds, reveals how hearers receive the Word of God. The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares shows the present state of the local churches. The ecclesiastical (i.e. church) ministry has not begun yet. But the Lord wanted to teach the disciples that when it does, they must know what the spiritual constituents of the local church witness will be like. In the case of the national witness, it was a witness of millions of the people of God, with believers and unbelievers living together in the Land of Promise. The disciples knew that already based upon Israel's checkered history from the time they came out of Egypt until the present day, with many professing Jewish teachers of God's Word rejecting Christ and His perfect teaching.

Will the church ministry, comprising a much smaller number of the people of God, be different? The Parable of the Wheat and Tares reveal that it will not be, other than the smaller congregations and the global spread of the church witness. The battle for truth and a holy witness rages on. The church will not be perfect like the nation of Israel, which is far from perfect. Christians must not expect perfection inside any local church, but holiness. The existence of believers and unbelievers co-existing in every local church means that problems and sins will occur. Hypocrites and sincere believers will live, serve and worship side by side throughout the existence of the church witness until Christ's return.

Until then, believers must not be devastated when they join a church and experience problems in their church life. They need to be mentally and spiritually prepared for such eventualities. To recede into a shell and stop serving because of wrongful disappointment or leave the church because of wrongful expectations is to sin against self and God when they are supposed to forgive and seek forgiveness when they transgress. Such experiences, and their reaction to them, help determine the reality of their salvation in Christ.

THOUGHT: Have right biblical expectations in a local church.

PRAYER: O Heavenly Father, grant me the grace to have the right attitude when I serve and worship Thee with God's people in church.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8

MATTHEW 13:24-30, 36-43

Memory verse: Matt 13:29

“... *Wilt thou then that we go
and gather them up?*”

THE WHEAT AND THE TARES DESCRIBED

The Parable of the Wheat and Tares describes a man who sowed good seeds in his field. While it was time for men to sleep during the night, the enemy sowed tares in the field and went his way. He thought no one would know as he came at night when all the servants slept. It was when the plants began to bear fruit that the tares were discovered. The servants of the owner reported to their master that they found tares. They asked their master, “*Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field?*” In other words, the servants implied that they only sowed seeds given to them by their master. The fault was not theirs. They asked again, “*from whence then hath it tares?*” The master assured his servants that an enemy did this. No one knew except for the master who owned the field. The servants asked if the master wanted them to remove the tares from his field. The master said the servants could not remove the tares without hurting the wheat. The wheat and the tares were too entangled under the soil. They might look separate above ground, but underneath the earth, the roots of the wheat would be damaged once the tares were pulled out of the ground. The wheat would be ruined since it had not reached full growth. They needed time to mature and more nutrients for the wheat to grow to full term.

The master said to let both of them to grow together until harvest time. The reapers would do the separation. By then, it would not matter if the roots of the wheat beneath the earth were damaged or not, as the wheat would be fully grown and ready for harvest. The separation sequence was to remove the tares and burn them first, then gather the wheat and put it into the barn.

Believers and unbelievers will co-exist in the local church. Some of these unbelievers might even be pastors, elders and deacons who serve in the church diligently. Many may consider them believers because of their knowledge of the Bible and diligent service. Yet this parable warns us not to assume and, at the same time, not be cynical and suspicious of one another in the church. The lesson is to make sure of one's own salvation, for the Lord will reveal everyone's spiritual condition on the last day.

THOUGHT: Am I deceiving myself?

PRAYER: Father, help me make sure of my salvation in these last days.

THURSDAY, APRIL 9

MATTHEW 13:36-43

Memory verse: Matt 13:38

*“...Declare unto us the
parable of the tares of the field.”*

THE TARES IDENTIFIED

The sower is the Son of Man. The field is the world. The good seed are the children of the kingdom. The tares are the children of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed the tares is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world. The reapers are the angels. The Lord did not explain every point of this parable the way He did with the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23. He explained the day of harvest and what will happen to the tares and the wheat on the last day.

We see the significance of these two parables that Jesus explained. In the Parable of the Sower, Christ emphasised the importance of correctly hearing the Word of God. This truth impacts the believer's life from the day of his salvation to the end of his life. In the case of the Parable of the Wheat and Tares, the significance is to warn believers that there are unbelievers who look like believers outwardly. They are found in churches, Bible Colleges, seminaries, and all Christian organisations. They behave and serve like believers and worship and sing like believers. They will fool many, but not the Lord. This is the work of the devil.

The difference will be revealed in the last day. Christ's angels will gather the tares and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. They will be gathered out of Christ's kingdom (on earth where they co-existed with God's children). Their life of sin and iniquity is the basis of condemnation as tares! All of us are sinners, but these are the ones who sin and DO NOT REPENT and do not have their sins washed by the blood of Christ. They stubbornly hold on to their sins of teaching wrong doctrines, and justifying their sinful ways instead of repentance. The only way these tares are not tares is their repentance before God in Christ! For their sins can be removed from their lives only if they have truly received Christ as Lord and Saviour. If their salvation is real, they will not stop repenting whenever they have sinned. They will know they have sinned and not justify their sins as Scripture will be their guide. The Holy Spirit who dwells in them will convict them. If they are tares, their sins remain till judgment day.

THOUGHT: Do I have a repentant heart?

PRAYER: Father, may I repent sincerely for Christ's sake.

FRIDAY, APRIL 10

MATTHEW 13:36-43

Memory verse: Matt 13:39

*"The enemy that sowed them
is the devil; the harvest is
the end of the world..."*

THE WHEAT IDENTIFIED

Matthew 13:24 describes the wheat as "good seed." The word "good" refers to intrinsic goodness. When a sinner repents of his sins and accepts Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour, God transforms him into a good person who can now do good deeds acceptable to God.

The good seeds are sown in the Sower's field. The field is the world. The world belongs to Christ who is the Sower. Christ saves sinners, makes them good, and leaves them on earth to slow the moral decay in His field. Can you imagine a world without any good seed? The evil and anarchy will be unstoppable, and the world will become unliveable, as seen in some major cities where evil reigns! Crime is everywhere, day and night. Many do not dare to come out of their homes.

Until harvest time (i.e. the end of the world), the Sower says to let them co-exist. Believers must remember their importance to Christ and the world, even though the world does not appreciate them, but persecutes them. The world needs to see the good in them to see that the good God created this world and has not given up on them. That is why the good seed must remain until harvest. Through their holy witness and the good works they do, they not only slow the moral decay in the societies they live in, but also save them by sharing the Gospel of Christ with them. Homes, schools and offices will improve because of the impact of the good wheat! Europe, Britain and America are what they are today because of the impact of the good seed. God used the good seed to pass laws and rule nations. Law and order in towns, cities and nations ruled by the good seed will flourish and bring peace and stability so that the worship of God, Christian fellowship and the study of God's Word may continue to bring salvation to a world in sin and death.

As good seed, left behind by the Sower to live side by side with tares, let the good be seen in you by what you say, and more importantly, by what you do. Obey the Good Book and good deeds will flow through every good seed for God's glory.

THOUGHT: What a privilege to be a holy witness for Christ in these last days!

PRAYER: Father, may I show forth Christ's goodness.

SATURDAY, APRIL 11

MATTHEW 13:31-32

Memory verse: Matt 13:31

*"...The kingdom of heaven
is like to a grain of mustard seed..."*

THE MUSTARD SEED: ITS MEANING

The Parable of the Mustard Seed is the first parable spoken by Christ without an explanation. He has taught us how to interpret parables through the explanation given in the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Wheat and Tares. Like the Parable of the Wheat and Tares, this parable is also about the Kingdom of Heaven. This parable reveals to us that the Kingdom of Heaven is found on earth. Even though the Kingdom of Heaven in heaven is indescribably large, it begins on earth like a tiny mustard seed. A man took this tiny mustard seed and planted it in his field. Compared to all the herbal seeds in the Israel of Jesus' time, it was the smallest. When this mustard seed grew, it grew into a tree. Herbal plants grow to the height of bushes. But this mustard seed that Jesus used in this parable grew to look like a tree with a tree trunk, branches and foliage. This mustard tree became the lodging place for birds that came to eat the mustard seeds and find shelter.

The field is the world. The mustard seed is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The man who took the seed and sowed it is God the Father or the Lord Jesus Christ. The growth of the mustard seed into a tree is visible. It starts small when the Gospel is preached. One soul is saved. From that one soul who shares the Gospel with another and the next, the Gospel grows from a family who is saved to a city, a nation, and the rest of the world. The spread will be from small to large. This Parable of the Mustard Seed speaks of a future event from the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 to the present. The growth is guaranteed. It transcends nationality, language, and culture, and no sinner is too sinful to be saved by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The key is the Gospel seed. It must not be tainted or tampered with; otherwise, there will be no true growth. It is the growth of true Christianity, for the devil will fill God's church with tares.

Church history confirms the truth of the Parable of the Mustard Seed. Every continent on earth has heard of Christ.

THOUGHT: The world today, with all her modernity, is due entirely to the spread and impact of the Gospel of Christ.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, grant me the discernment to see Thy Almighty hand in today's events, for Christ's sake.

LORD'S DAY, APRIL 12

MATTHEW 13:31-32

Memory verse: Matt 13:32

*"...but when it is grown,
it is the greatest among herbs..."*

THE MUSTARD SEED: ITS SIGNIFICANCE

John 1:29 says, "...John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." How can Jesus be the Saviour of the world if the world has not heard of what He did on the cross at Calvary? The Parable of the Mustard Seed assures us that God has accomplished this through the Gospel seed. It is a short and simple message of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, who lived, suffered and died for the sins of the world, and rose again for the justification of the sins of all who truly believe. Man has sown many seeds based on his own ideas, as seen in the empires of many great nations of the past and present, but all of them are like tiny bushes in size and longevity. Past empires planted their seed of man's evil goals, aims and philosophies, like the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans, but they were like stunted bushes that shone for a brief moment before they were all destroyed.

But the Kingdom of Heaven begins with the Gospel seed. The Gospel has spread from Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria to the uttermost part of the world as Christ had prophesied. Today, the world knows about Christ. It is a spiritual kingdom on earth today for the Kingdom of Heaven begins in the heart of every believer. There is no land area called the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Because the citizens of heaven are here serving, worshipping and witnessing for Christ, this parable is called the Kingdom of Heaven. Are these not the activities that are also done in heaven?

Innumerable millions of sinners have come to know Christ as their Lord and Saviour since the Day of Pentecost of Acts 2. Salvation is of the Lord. When the Gospel according to Scriptures is preached, the Holy Spirit takes the Gospel seed and works a marvellous work of convicting sinners of their sins and their need for the Saviour. The growth is visibly seen by the world and not just by believers. Just because the Christianity of today has turned apostate does not mean that the teaching of the Parable of the Mustard Seed has not come to pass. It has come to pass and covers the face of the earth for it to become a global apostate Christianity!

THOUGHT: Am I a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to make sure of my salvation.

MONDAY, APRIL 13
MATTHEW 13:33-35
Memory verse: Matt 13:33

*“...The kingdom of heaven
is like unto leaven,
which a woman took...”*

LEAVEN IN THE DOUGH: ITS MEANING

Leaven is yeast. It is microscopic in size. A tiny amount is used with the dough. Once the yeast is kneaded into the dough, it will impact the whole dough. Leaven is used figuratively in many parts of the Bible to refer to something bad, usually sin. Thus, the Feast of Unleavened Bread was ordained by God to be observed annually, reminding Israel of the importance of repentance and removal of sin from their lives. But for the first time in the Bible, leaven is used in this parable figuratively to teach the invisible impact of the Gospel in a sinner's life like yeast working invisibly within the dough.

In this Parable of the Leaven, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a woman who took leaven and hid it in three measures of meal (i.e. 50 pounds or 23 kg of dough). She kneaded the large dough until the whole was leavened.

Unlike the Parable of the Mustard Seed, the impact of the leaven in the dough is invisible to the naked eye. The dough will rise as the yeast feeds on the sugar in the dough, releasing pockets of gas within that are unable to escape. The dough is left to ferment further so that the yeast can keep permeating through the dough. Once it is sufficiently fermented, the dough is placed into the oven for baking. The fire will kill the yeast, stopping it from fermenting further. Once the dough is baked, it is fluffy, soft, and ready for consumption. Once the Gospel begins its work in a believer's life, it takes time for the believer to grow from infancy to maturity where he can be a holy witness and servant of God in Christ.

The Parable of the Leaven describes the work of the Gospel in the sinner's heart, for it works within and is not visible immediately. But it becomes visible later as he grows in grace and knowledge of God in Christ.

In contrast, the Parable of the Mustard Seed describes the growth of Christianity worldwide.

THOUGHT: Has the Gospel of Christ permeated every pore of my being?

PRAYER: O God Most High, help me to make sure of my salvation with fear and trembling, for Christ's sake. Amen.

TUESDAY, APRIL 14

MATTHEW 13:33-35

Memory verse: Matt 13:34

*“...and hid in three measures of meal,
till the whole was leavened.”*

LEAVEN IN THE DOUGH: ITS SIGNIFICANCE

The woman in this parable refers to every evangelist or believer who shares the Gospel of Christ. Leaven is used figuratively in many other passages of the Bible to refer to something bad, but in this parable, it is used to refer to the Gospel of Christ. The meal or the dough refers to the sinner. The work of the leaven in the dough refers to the Gospel working in the sinner's life, sanctifying every part of his being! The inner workings of salvation in a person's heart are invisible, like the leaven in the dough. His mind is transformed immediately after being blessed with Christ's mind at salvation. His heart is filled with the love of God, enabling him to love like God, unconditionally and sacrificially. Slowly, his vocabulary will change to one that is seasoned with salt. His life will manifest holiness as deeds he used to do are replaced by good works.

The Kingdom of Heaven is in heaven, but anyone on earth can enter by believing in the Gospel of Christ as this parable teaches. Salvation impacts every aspect of the believer's life, from his mind (i.e. given the mind of Christ), to his heart (i.e. given the love of God). With these God-given transformations, his sinful nature that enslaved him to sin is now permanently replaced with Christ's nature. According to the Scriptures, he is now a child of God, bearing the marks of godliness. His perspective of life becomes God's perspective with every study of God's Word. He begins to fill his mind (the mind of Christ) with the knowledge of God. He thinks like Christ. In time to come, his good works will resemble Christ's good works. He glorifies God in his life.

His words will change, and so will his life. The places he used to visit (because he considered them delightful), he will now reject. Attending church every Lord's Day for worship, studying the Bible, and fellowshiping with fellow saints delight his soul immensely. These new desires are the evidence of his salvation in Christ. Salvation begins with the Gospel of Christ. Once it starts, the impact of the Gospel permeates every part of the believer, like the leaven that leavens the whole dough, for the glory of God.

THOUGHT: Is my life evidenced by the marks of a true believer?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may all areas of my life glorify Thee.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15
MATTHEW 13:44
Memory verse: Matt 13:44

*“...the kingdom of heaven
is like unto treasure
hid in a field...”*

A TREASURE HID IN THE FIELD: ITS MEANING

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure describes the “accidental” finding of Christ as Lord and Saviour.

It was common in the time of Christ to bury treasures in the field. Banks could not be trusted as bankers could be corrupt and abscond with the treasure. The safety of the treasure in banks is not like today’s bank vaults, where it is nearly impossible for thieves to break in and steal. Another possible reason for burying a treasure in the field was secrecy. The owner of the treasure did not want anyone to know that he was rich for fear of unwanted attention and distant family members coming to borrow money from him.

After burying the treasure that perhaps only his immediate family members might know, a calamity could have happened resulting in the death of the whole family. For example, they could have been killed by robbers, or a natural disaster might have killed them. Whatever the reason, the treasure had been buried in a field that was then owned by no one.

Perhaps after some time, a wild animal might have dug up the earth where the treasure was buried, and a bit of the buried treasure appeared. A man might walk through the field as a shorter route to a certain destination. His mind could be occupied with his own business. Suddenly, his eye caught something shiny in the field. He walked towards it. He dug deeper and found the buried treasure!

In the time of Christ, it was common for a person to rebury the treasure and then try to buy the field with all he had. The parable said that the man sold all he possessed to buy the field.

You may not have been looking for salvation, but Christ found you and saved you!

THOUGHT: Is God’s Kingdom more than this world to me?

PRAYER: O Father, may Thy Kingdom be my greatest treasure all my days, in Christ’s Name I pray. Amen.

THURSDAY, APRIL 16

MATTHEW 13:44

Memory verse: Matt 13:44

*“...and for joy thereof goeth and
selles all that he hath,
and buyeth that field.”*

A TREASURE HID IN THE FIELD: ITS SIGNIFICANCE

You may not seek salvation in your busyness at school or work. Your life is dominated entirely by work. You have no time to think about life and death. You feel like one thrust onto a conveyor belt of life, moving you along a pre-determined societal direction, not of choice but of necessity. The pressure of working life and unending studies plague your heart and mind. The daily grind of working and working is taking its toll on your body, mind and spirit. Dragging your heavy feet out of bed and the main door into the dog-eat-dog world for the rest of your life is a burdensome prospect that has been haunting you. It has gripped your sorrowful heart for ages without a way out in sight.

Suddenly, you hear the message of the Gospel of Christ for the first time. You have not been thinking of anything but your pitiful life of endless slogging. You realise you have sinned against God. You will be cast into hell if you die in your sin. The good news of the Gospel is that God loves you and sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, from heaven to be born of a virgin so that He could be the God-man to die on Calvary bearing all your sins. God raised Him from the dead so that all who accepted His sacrificial death will be saved. By believing in Christ as their substitute, they can have all their sins forgiven by God. You have found a treasure that you did not seek. Knowing that you do not need to go to hell but can enter heaven is a great treasure beyond imagination. God has confronted you with the Gospel of Christ to save you even though you were not looking for Him. He came looking for you!

Do you want to “sell” all you have to “own” this treasure? The sinner must surrender his life completely to Christ to “own” Him. He surrenders his heart, soul, mind and strength to Christ to “own” Christ. He promises not to live his life his way but to seek Christ’s direction on what to do with his life since God has redeemed him in Christ.

The redeemed life is a totally surrendered life. There is no other way to “own” the treasure of Christ.

THOUGHT: Have I surrendered my all to “own” Christ?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to make sure of my salvation with a life totally surrendered to Thee, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

FRIDAY, APRIL 17

MATTHEW 13:45-46

Memory verse: Matt 13:45

*“...the kingdom of heaven
is like unto a merchant man,
seeking goodly pearls...”*

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE: ITS MEANING

Cultured pearls did not exist until AD 1893. Kokichi Mikimoto is credited with introducing cultured pearls. By 1935, 350 pearl farms in Japan produced more than 10 million cultured pearls a year. Pearl prices plummeted.

However, natural pearls have become more desirable than ever before. Some of these beautiful natural pearl necklaces sell for millions today. Natural pearls are found in oysters in open seas.

Pearls are formed when an irritant or particle gets inside the oyster. This natural process of an irritant entering a tightly closed oyster is rare. The pearl farmer plants an irritant inside the mussels in his farm. Once the irritant is inside, the defence mechanism within the oyster or mussel kicks in. A layer of nacre (lustre white substance) envelopes the irritant. Thousands of layers of nacre wrap around the irritant and a pearl is formed. Akoya pearls take between 10 to 14 months to grow to 9 mm. Tahitian pearls take between 18 to 24 months to grow to 10 mm. Australian South Sea pearls take 2 to 3 years to grow to 15 mm. Mussels are used for cultured pearls. In the case of natural pearls, pearl hunters risk their lives by diving up to 100 feet to find goodly pearls. They do not know whether an irritant has managed to get inside one of these oysters. If so, how long is the process for pearl formation so that the pearl will be shiny white and of a good size when opened? It is said that pearl hunters may find only 3 or 4 goodly pearls in one tonne (1,000 kg) of oysters!

The merchant man in this parable was a pearl expert. He already possessed many goodly pearls. However, he knew in his heart there was a pearl of great price out there. He would not stop seeking until he found it. Once he found it, he would sell all he had to purchase it.

Finally, he found it! So, he sold everything and bought it! The pearl of great price is the Gospel of Christ. He “sold” (i.e. surrendered) everything to “buy” it (i.e. receive Christ)!

THOUGHT: Have I surrendered my all to receive Christ?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, save me for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

SATURDAY, APRIL 18

MATTHEW 13:45-46

Memory verse: Matt 13:46

*“...when he had found
one pearl of great price,
went and sold all that he had...”*

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE: ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Unlike the man who found the buried treasure (he was not seeking the Gospel), the merchant sought something hidden. He was seeking the pearl of great price. “Pearls” refer to the religions throughout the ages. The merchant tasted many religions in his time and found they were insufficient. The fear of death did not dissipate. He did not know where he would go after he died. His heart was still gripped by sin, and it frightened him to the core if he were to die in his sins. He hated hurting people, especially his loved ones, but his mouth kept sinning. There was a void within that could not be satisfied. He needed to find the pearl of great price that could answer all his problems and help him overcome his fear of death and his struggle against sin!

Jesus called the pearl he found the pearl of great price because He was comparing only two “pearls” since there is only the broad way through the broad gate that leads to destruction and the narrow way through the strait gate that leads to everlasting life. The use of “great” is Jesus’ way of using the comparative for the superlative.

Since the pearl of great price refers to the Gospel of Christ, the merchant was like a sinner who had tasted many religions in his life and could not fill the emptiness within his soul. He yearned for the pearl of great price. Though all the goodly pearls had their value, none of them was good enough to satisfy his soul fully. One day, he found the Gospel of Christ! The truth of the Gospel is that Jesus Christ died on the cross of Calvary for his sins (so that he need not die) and rose from the dead for his justification. Thus, he sold all he had, i.e. he surrendered his all to Christ by confessing his sins and received Jesus Christ as his substitutionary atonement before God.

The void in his soul was henceforth filled to the full. He had found the precious salvation of Jesus Christ, i.e. the pearl of great price. Pearl is lustre white, symbolising purity. The pearl of great price is priceless and reflects the holiness and purity of the one who wears it. The one who receives Christ wears holiness everywhere he goes.

THOUGHT: Does my Christian life manifest purity and holiness?

PRAYER: Father, help me to be holy, for Thou art Holy.

LORD'S DAY, APRIL 19
MATTHEW 13:47-50
Memory verse: Matt 13:49

*“...the kingdom of heaven
is like unto a net,
that was cast into the sea...”*

A NET CAST INTO THE SEA: ITS MEANING

The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a net. The illustration Jesus used was a net. The description of the net is a seine. A seine is “a large net with sinkers on one edge and floats on the other that hangs vertically in the water and is used to enclose and catch fish when its ends are pulled together or are drawn ashore.” [Merriam-Webster Dictionary] Using this method of catching, the fishermen would scoop up all kinds of sea creatures. When the net was full, they would haul the net to shore. The plural pronoun “*they*” is used here, implying that it was a large and heavy catch that required a few fishermen to draw it to shore. Once they had reached the shore, they sat down and began to separate their catch. The good would be placed in vessels for food or sale. The bad were cast away.

The biblical guidelines for separation are taught in Leviticus 11:9-12: *“These shall ye eat of all that are in the waters: whatsoever hath fins and scales in the waters, in the seas, and in the rivers, them shall ye eat. And all that have not fins and scales in the seas, and in the rivers, of all that move in the waters, and of any living thing which is in the waters, they shall be an abomination unto you: They shall be even an abomination unto you; ye shall not eat of their flesh, but ye shall have their carcases in abomination. Whatsoever hath no fins nor scales in the waters, that shall be an abomination unto you.”*

The person casting the net is omitted on purpose. There were many, as many drew the full net to shore. The focus is on the act of casting the net, what the net catches and the separation. This is the separation that takes place at the end of the world. This parable is similar to the Parable of the Wheat and Tares (cf. Matt 13:24-30; 36-43). The difference is that in the latter, the devil sowed the tares in the local churches. The parable of the net describes what happens when Christianity spreads to the whole world. The spread of the Gospel will result in genuine and false believers within the local churches or Christianity as a whole. In both cases, the separation will be done by angels at the end of the world.

THOUGHT: What kind of professing believer am I?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may I be honest with my soul before Thee, O God Most High, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

MONDAY, APRIL 20

MATTHEW 13:47-50

Memory verse: Matt 13:50

*“...and gathered the good into vessels,
but cast the bad away.”*

A NET CAST INTO THE SEA: ITS SIGNIFICANCE

After the Lord began with the Parable of the Sower (emphasising the right way to receive God's Word), He continued with a series of parables beginning with *“the kingdom of heaven.”* These include: the Wheat and Tares (the devil will sow tares whereas Christ will sow wheat in God's kingdom on earth), Mustard Seed (that Christianity will grow from small to global), Leaven in the Dough (that the Gospel will impact all aspects of the person's life at salvation), Hidden Treasure (that God will seek out and save those who do not seek Him), and the Merchant Seeking the Pearl of Great Price (that sinners will seek the Gospel and find salvation in Christ). The last parable in Matthew 13 is the Parable of the Net where Christ teaches us that the Gospel net will bring in good and bad fish, i.e. there will be true and false believers co-existing within the local church witness.

The local church must not be equated with heaven (where only genuine believers are found) because in the local church, there will be professing believers who need salvation. The Gospel must continue to be preached within the local church. No one must take their salvation for granted. Each must work out his own salvation with great fear and trembling. False believers in the church may think that they are believers because they live outwardly among genuine believers. And they may be made leaders in local churches to the detriment of the spiritual wellbeing of believers. All spiritual leaders must be carefully evaluated according to the biblical criteria for the safety of God's people and God's work within the church.

Outward signs of Christian faith, such as service, study, memorisation, and even the teaching and preaching of God's Word, do not make a sinner a believer. This truth must be constantly declared in these last days of great deception. The angels will reveal the separation of the good and bad fish at the end of the world.

We cannot wait for the day for it will be too late to repent when the separation begins! We need to know now if we are a good fish!

THOUGHT: Do I bear the evidence of a genuine believer in my life?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to know if I am truly born again or not, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

TUESDAY, APRIL 21

MATTHEW 13:51-52

Memory verse: Matt 13:52

“...is like unto a man that is an householder

*...bringeth forth out of his
treasure things new and old.”*

DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

At the conclusion of this wonder treatise on the Doctrine of the Kingdom of Heaven via the parables, Jesus asked a very pointed question of His disciples, *“Have ye understood all these things?”* (Matt 13:51). Obviously, Jesus referred to all the parables in Matthew 13 as He used the plural *“all these things.”* With two of the seven parables explained by Christ, the disciples could understand the remaining five parables without further explanation from Him.

Understanding means knowing the meaning of all the parables they have applied and experienced. Jesus followed the affirmation of the disciples with a simile where He said that *“...every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old”* (Matt 13:52). The believer who understands the parables is compared to a scribe. A scribe was a copyist of the perfect Bible. Because he copied the Bible, he was also known as a “lawyer” (one who knew the law of God well). Their meticulous manner of copying the Holy Scriptures resulted in them remembering many portions and even books of the Bible. He who knew the Word of God well and understood the parables of the Kingdom of Heaven was like a house manager who brought forth new and old treasures, referring to both the New (not written then) and Old Testaments.

There is no contradiction between the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament teaches the Messiah’s first coming as the Saviour of the world, whereas the New Testament affirms that the Messiah has come. The parables reveal this complete truth that the disciples had to acknowledge if they truly understood then.

All believers will love the *“treasure,”* i.e. the Word of God, all sixty-six books of the Bible. He understands all of them, obeys them and shares (i.e. *“bringeth forth”*) them with others. Some portions of the Bible are easier to understand than others, where meditation and prayer are always required as the Bible is a spiritual Book that gives and sustains life.

THOUGHT: Do I share the Word of God accurately?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may Thy Holy Spirit illuminate my eyes to behold wondrous truths out of Thy Holy Word for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22

MATTHEW 18:21-35

Memory verse: Matt 18:22

*“...Lord, how oft shall my brother
sin against me, and I forgive him?”*

HOW MANY TIMES SHOULD I FORGIVE?

What is forgiveness? Forgiveness involves at least two parties. The context of forgiveness is a rift in the relationship between the two parties. An offence has been committed against one party, or both parties may be at fault. For reconciliation to occur, there must be the elements of repentance and forgiveness. In the relationship between God and sinful man, the offender is always man, never God. However, for reconciliation to occur, man must repent of his sin, even when God is ready to forgive.

The forgiveness of God is of infinite depth and value. He forgives all sins through Christ because of the infinite value of Christ's death. This truth was affirmed by God when He raised Jesus Christ from the dead on the third day Jesus died. The ever readiness of God to forgive means that there is no bitter spirit in God, but tenderness and compassion, like a father waiting patiently for His prodigal son to return to His loving embrace. This readiness to forgive is one-sided. On God's part, He waits for the sinner to come through the Gospel of Christ that He offers them. The offence against God is one-sided, committed by man alone.

The heart of the believer must be the same as God. He must have the same readiness to forgive regardless of the number of times he is hurt by the same person who commits the same sin against him. Peter thought seven times was sufficient, but the Lord had to re-educate His disciple by teaching him that he had to forgive seventy times seven, which equals infinity!

The basis of every believer is the forgiveness he receives from God that costs Jesus Christ His life's blood! He must keep on forgiving as he has been blessed with a forgiving heart and spirit. The moment a sinner becomes a believer and experiences the most excellent forgiveness from the holy God Almighty, the forgiving spirit dwells within the believer so that the readiness to forgive is always present, just like his Heavenly Father's heart! The Holy Spirit who dwells in him helps him to forgive.

THOUGHT: Do I have a forgiving heart like my Heavenly Father?

PRAYER: Grant me the grace to forgive all who sin against me, O God, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

THURSDAY, APRIL 23

MATTHEW 18:21-35

Memory verse: Matt 18:27

*“Then the lord of that servant
was moved with compassion...”*

THE FORGIVING KING

The parable of the Unforgiving Servant is also a Kingdom of Heaven parable. The king is God or the Lord Jesus Christ. The servants refer to all professing believers. The context is an account taken by the king of one particular servant who is the focus of this parable. He owed the king an amount listed as *“ten thousand talents”* (Matt 18:24). One talent equals six thousand pence. An average worker is paid six pence a week. Based on this amount, a ten-thousand-talent debt requires the same worker to work 2,747 lifetimes (assuming one worked seventy years in one lifetime) to pay the debt. The servant owed the king an amount impossible for him to pay. The judgment of the king was, *“...forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made”* (Matt 18:25).

The servant and his family (for the next few generations) had to become slaves for the rest of their lives until the full amount was paid. Voluntary slavery for families to pay off a debt was common in the time of Christ. The servant fell down and worshipped the king and pleaded for *“patience”* (Matt 18:29, i.e. to be long-suffering), and he would pay all. The king knew that the servant could never pay the whole amount. The only way to clear his impossibly enormous debt was for the king to forgive him the debt out of compassion. The king did precisely that. By forgiving him, the king suffered the loss of the ten thousand talents!

The divine justice of God demands payment. Forgiveness always results in someone bearing the cost of the sinner's iniquities. If I forgive someone who borrowed \$100, I suffer the loss of \$100. God the Father sent the Lord Jesus Christ to bear the sins of the world. Christ Jesus, born of the virgin Mary, lived a perfect life according to the Scriptures, suffered and died on the cross to redeem sinners of their sins. God raised Him from the dead for the sinner's justification. The sinners receive God's mercy, and Christ will forgive all their sins! The King forgives for Jesus' sake.

THOUGHT: Have I experienced forgiveness from the King?

PRAYER: Forgive me, O Father, for all my sins, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

FRIDAY, APRIL 24

MATTHEW 18:21-35

Memory verse: Matt 18:26

*“...Lord, have patience with me,
and I will pay thee all.”*

THE FORGIVEN SERVANT

The forgiven servant must have been elated to have an impossibly heavy financial burden lifted from his frail shoulders. The servant should never forget such a gracious forgiveness immediately after the judgment of being condemned to generations of servanthood for the whole family.

But he did forget.

Soon after he left the king's presence, the forgiven servant found one of his fellow servants and demanded payment of one hundred pence (i.e. nearly seventeen weeks or four months of wages) that was owed him. He seized him by the throat and said, *“Pay me that thou owest”* (Matt 18:28). To look for his fellow servant who owed him money was not wrong. Demanding money from his fellow servant who owed him was also not wrong. However, the seizing by the throat was wrong. His king did not mistreat him. His fellow servant *“fell down at his feet, and besought* (i.e. begged) *him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all”* (Matt 18:29). The servant did not worship him as he was not a king, but he did beg for more time to pay, as what he said was exactly the same as what the forgiven servant had said to the king a moment ago. The forgiven servant refused to give him more time to repay the debt but threw him into prison until he paid the debt. In other words, the servant's time in prison was commensurate with the amount of money owed him! Who else could repay him the debt other than his wife and children?

The harsh behaviour of the forgiven servant demonstrated an unforgiving heart and spirit. The forgiven servant had the legal right to throw his fellow servant into prison because the debt owed was real. However, the treatment of his fellow servant ought not to be based on legal right but a compassionate heart. How quickly had he forgotten the enormous debt that was forgiven him by the king!

To be forgiven of a debt must result in forgiving others who are indebted to you. To genuinely experience God's forgiveness, the believer must reciprocate the same forgiveness.

THOUGHT: Am I able to forgive all sins committed against me?

PRAYER: Help me, O Father, to forgive as Thou hast forgiven me.

SATURDAY, APRIL 25

MATTHEW 18:21-35

Memory verse: Matt 18:35

*"Shouldest not thou also
have had compassion
on thy fellowservant..."*

BE FORGIVEN TO FORGIVE!

The forgiven servant had become the unforgiving servant based on what he did to his fellow servant! What the forgiven servant did to his fellow servant exposed his failure to receive forgiveness from God through Christ. This is the spiritual truth of this parable.

The fellow servants of the forgiven servant saw what he did to his debtor and were saddened. They went to their king and reported to him what they had seen the forgiven servant do to his debtor. The forgiven servant was summoned before the king. The king rebuked him severely for his ingratitude. The king had forgiven him an impossible debt because he asked. But should he not have done the same when his debtor asked the same? Should he not have shown compassion to his fellow servant just as the king had shown him compassion? The king was wroth (i.e. enraged) by what the forgiven servant had done, and he was delivered to the tormentors until he paid all the debt that he had owed the king. The king did not rescind his forgiveness. Rather the forgiven servant did not receive the king's forgiveness in the first place.

God's forgiveness cost Christ's life. When a person receives and experiences God's forgiveness in his heart, he can now forgive every sin, iniquity and transgression committed against him by any man. The ability to forgive all is God's gracious gift to all His children, without exception.

No matter how deep the wound is, he must forgive even when the person does not approach him to seek forgiveness. In his heart, he must have already forgiven. But unless he comes with an apology, the blessing of forgiveness that results in healing and reconciliation will not materialise.

However, the believer must protect his heart from anger and bitterness that may result in sin if he does not forgive. The anger will eat within him like cancer. He cannot worship, pray or serve God with joy and peace.

The ability to forgive all sinners is God's gift to His children.

THOUGHT: If I do not forgive others, it is evidence that God has not forgiven me.

PRAYER: Help me, O Father, to forgive everyone just as Thou hast forgiven me for Christ's sake. Amen.

LORD'S DAY, APRIL 26 MORNING

MATTHEW 19:27-20:7

Memory verse: Matt 19:27

*"Behold, we have forsaken all,
and followed thee;
what shall we have therefore?"*

DO YOU SERVE WITHOUT CONDITIONS?

The life of sacrifice is a life of not seeking material things. The motive behind every deed and business is not to make money. There is no desire to be rich. Self-advancement in society is vanity. Growing the business to global status is foolhardy. However, serving for nothing earthly is unthinkable in many hearts, even Christian hearts. Peter asked on behalf of the disciples who had forsaken all to follow Christ, *"...what shall we have therefore?"* (Matt 19:27). Jesus' reply focused on the future and the present.

In the future, *"when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory"* (Matt 19:28), so will all the disciples of Christ. They will judge the people of the world who are unbelievers including Israel represented in Matthew 19:28 as the *"twelve tribes of Israel"*. The twelve tribes represent all the unbelieving in Israel. Fellow believers will not judge those who believe in Christ. The twelve Apostles exclude Judas Iscariot, who was replaced by Matthias in Acts 1. These twelve Apostles represent all believers because all believers believe in the Old and New Testament as God's Word, including all the Old Testament saints.

In the present, many believers who have forsaken houses, brethren, sisters, fathers, mothers, wives, children or land for Christ's sake will have received an hundredfold and eternal life. The largest family every believer has on earth is the church family. Testimonies abound on how believers have rallied around fellow believers in need. Food, clothing and a roof over their heads have been provided for them when loved ones were killed or incarcerated for their faith.

Serving God is not measured by who started serving first; many who started serving first came in last. Many started last but came in first. It is not about how long a person is a Christian but whether he is a genuine Christian. The Jews were first to receive God's grace and truth, but they rejected Christ. The Gentiles are the last, but they will become the first if they accept Christ as Lord and Saviour.

THOUGHT: Is there any other way of serving the Lord than to surrender all?

PRAYER: O Father, God Most High, help my heart be sincere and serve Thee sacrificially and unconditionally till Christ returns. Amen.

LORD'S DAY, APRIL 26 EVENING

MATTHEW 20:1-16

Memory verse: Matt 20:4

*"For the kingdom of heaven
is like unto a man that
is an householder..."*

NO TWO SERVANTS SERVE THE SAME

The Parable of the Hired Servants depicts a daily wage worker's working day in Jesus' time. Many strong and able men would go to the marketplace to look for work. The householder would go early in the morning to hire labourers to work in his vineyard. A daily wage of one penny was agreed upon with the labourers he hired early in the morning. When he found he needed more labourers, he hired more around the third hour (i.e. 9am). With this second group, the amount to be paid to them was not discussed, other than being told to trust the householder to give them what he thought right. The labourers agreed and laboured in the vineyard. The householder made the same arrangements he had made with the third-hour labourers, with the sixth-hour (i.e. noon), ninth-hour (i.e. 3pm) and eleventh-hour (i.e. 5pm) labourers. All the later labourers accepted the terms of trusting the householder to pay them what he thought was right.

Some may serve longer than others because they live longer or have come to know Christ earlier. But it should not be the length of time that concerns us. Our manner of service is more important. The motive of service must trump the length of service lest we forget and serve with sinful motives.

All believers are unique and uniquely prepared by God for His service. When and for how long we serve Him are in our Heavenly Sovereign's plan. The fact that we can serve after salvation is a privilege of the highest order. Before salvation, we served sin. Now we serve God and Christ, constrained by His love for us and our love for Him. Is this not the abundant life that Christ promised to all His disciples?

Have we forgotten that we serve the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Saviour of the world and Creator of the heaven and the earth? No servant of God serves the same in terms of length of time as another, but all must serve with the same motive of love.

THOUGHT: May I never forget to serve with the right heart, and not be distracted by how long I serve.

PRAYER: Father, help me to serve Thee faithfully.

MONDAY, APRIL 27

MATTHEW 20:1-16

Memory verse: Matt 20:15

*"Is it not lawful
for me to do what
I will with mine own?"*

SERVE AS UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS

It is true that God rewards all His faithful servants, but rewards must never become the motive for the believer's service. To serve for eternal rewards would render the service unacceptable to God. It becomes wood, hay and stubble to be burned up on Judgment Day. Peter asked a question in Matthew 19:27 on behalf of all believers. Believers have a tendency to serve for rewards as this has been the way of the world since the fall of man.

But for believers, their service must never be for rewards. They are to leave it to the Lord to give what is right, like all the servants except for the earliest group who served with a fixed agreed payment. Their sinful heart was revealed at day's end when payment was made by the householder to all the servants. He deliberately began from the last to the first. He paid all the labourers one penny, from the labourers who worked from the eleventh hour to the one who worked from the third hour. All of them were contented since they accepted work based on the householder's decision to give what he thought was right.

When the first group of labourers came, they thought that they would get more than one penny since they had worked the full twelve hours from 6am to 6pm. The householder gave them one penny too. They murmured against the householder. They said that the eleventh-hour labourers worked only one hour, but they had worked throughout the day including working under the hot sun. How could the householder pay the labourers who worked only one hour the same as them!

The reply of the householder was to one of them who murmured. He called him friend and said that he did not defraud him as he paid them according to what was agreed from the beginning. He told them to take their wage and leave. Is it not lawful for him to give whatever he desired from what he possessed? Is the eye of the first labourer evil because the householder is good? The labourer felt unfairly treated because he laboured for money. But to the ones who laboured unconditionally, trusting in the householder's goodness, whatever payment they received was good since they accepted no payment when they laboured.

THOUGHT: Do I serve for rewards?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may I never compare with others.

TUESDAY, APRIL 28

MATTHEW 21:23-32

Memory verse: Matt 21:27

“...Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.”

PARABLE OF TWO SONS: SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS WARNED

The context was Jesus' teaching in the Temple, a domain that belonged only to the priests and the elders of the people. Those religious leaders confronted Jesus and asked Him, *“By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?”* (Matt 21:23). Instead of answering their question directly, Jesus asked them a question, saying that if they answered Him, He would also answer their question. Jesus asked, *“The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?”* (Matt 21:25). These leaders said they could not tell because if they answered that John came from heaven, why did they not believe him? If they said he came from men, they feared the people who believed that John was a prophet. Jesus' reply was He would not tell them by whose authority He entered and taught.

Jesus gave the parable of the two sons. He did not begin this parable with the phrase, *“the kingdom of heaven.”* This parable was a rebuke of the religious leaders. There would be no Kingdom of Heaven for these religious leaders if they did not repent of their sins and receive Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah who would die on the cross for their sins. They would not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. They thought they were the spiritual leaders of God's people and Jesus was a trespasser of the sole authority to teach God's truth. They did not ask Jesus with a desire to find out the truth. They asked from a self-righteous perspective, seeking only to correct others because they believed they were right and others were wrong. Jesus knew their motive behind the question. They did not come to learn but to find fault.

Jesus had always answered the questions of those who were sincere. Such came to find the truth because they wished to learn and obey, like Jesus' disciples. But when they asked with ulterior motives, it was best to answer them with a question like Jesus. Their refusal to answer Jesus evidenced their insincerity.

THOUGHT: Do I ask questions to learn, to show off or to find fault?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may I always be teachable when taught and have the humility to learn from everyone Thou sendeth into my life, for Christ's sake. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29
MATTHEW 21:23-32
Memory verse: Matt 21:32

*“...when ye had seen it,
repented not afterward,
that ye might believe him.”*

THE PARABLE OF TWO SONS: NOT TOO LATE TO REPENT

Despite the failure of the chief priests and the elders in refusing to answer the question asked by Jesus, Jesus still wanted to help them find the truth. The Parable of the Two Sons began with the owner of a vineyard who had two sons. He asked the first son to “...go work...” (Matt 21:28) in his vineyard. The first son said that he would not, but afterwards, he repented of his rejection and went. The owner went to his second son and asked him to work in his vineyard. He told his father that he would go. But he did not go. Then Jesus asked the high priests and the elders which of the two sons had done the father’s will.

They answered, “*The first*” (Matt 21:31). The first son represents the sinners who know they need salvation. The second son represents the high priests and the elders. They think they do not need salvation because they are already servants of God and therefore already saved. The owner is God the Father. The vineyard is the world.

Jesus said that the publicans (tax collectors) and the harlots would go into the Kingdom of Heaven before the high priests and the elders. The reason was that they had believed in the preaching of John the Baptist, but the high priests and the elders did not believe even after seeing the transformed lives of these sinners who were regarded as the “scum” of society. The high priests and the elders refused to admit that they were wrong and needed to be saved, for to do that, they had to believe John’s ministry, that he was a prophet sent by God.

The parable of the two sons was meant to rebuke the high priests and the elders. As long as they were alive, they could still repent. They preached so much of God’s Word, but they did not live according to God’s Word. Affirmation with the lips without obedience is worse than denial with the lips at first but repentance and obedience afterward. Preachers and teachers of God’s Word, including all professing Christians, must take heed of this parable and make sure of their own salvation by a life of obedience to God’s Word.

THOUGHT: Do I talk Christianity only or do I also live the life of a Christian?

PRAYER: Father, help me to be a hearer and a doer of Thy Word.

THURSDAY, APRIL 30

MATTHEW 21:33-46

Memory verse: Matt 21:38

*"There was a certain householder,
which planted a vineyard...
and let it out to husbandmen..."*

PARABLE OF THE HUSBANDMEN: A NECESSARY REBUKE!

This is another parable without the phrase "the kingdom of heaven." The target audience is the same as before: the chief priests and elders. Jesus directed this parable emphatically against them. They understood Jesus targeted them (cf. Matt 21:45). Instead of repentance, they sought to lay hands on Him, but they dared not because they feared the multitude.

Rebuke is good for the soul of every sinner. Jesus rebuked them because the chief priests and elders needed to see the sins in their hearts. Their self-righteousness had blinded them. Their system of religiosity had blinded them into thinking that they were already, for hundreds of years, on their way to heaven. Despite the clear teaching of Jesus as Christ, as evidenced by the many miracles they could not deny, they refused to accept. They stubbornly held on to their pride and arrogance, to their own damnation if they did not repent soon.

The parable of the Two Sons revealed to them that the door to salvation was still open if they believed. Jesus' rebuke was to shock them from their spiritual stupor that had numbed their minds and hardened their hearts their whole life. Perhaps with this shock treatment, they might stop and look deep into their hearts and be saved from their sin.

Many of us think that because we know and teach the Bible, we must be Christians. Those who have theological degrees and are ordained or hold high positions in seminaries and Bible Colleges like a principal or president think they are Christians. They are no better than the Pharisees and chief priests in Jesus' time. They believe the same. They felt they have nothing to repent of because they think they know God, and God must also know them since they handle the Word of God! How foolish and blind are the eyes of sinful men. A man must be born-again to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. He is one who lives the life of Christ in the midst of his fellowmen. Through his interaction, his faith is turned from theory to reality.

THOUGHT: Do I walk in Christ or talk only?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to know my salvation by my walk and not by my talk, for Christ's sake. Amen.

FRIDAY, MAY 1

MATTHEW 21:33-46

Memory verse: Matt 21:44

*“...He will miserably destroy those wicked men,
and will let out his vineyard unto
other husbandmen...”*

PARABLE OF THE HUSBANDMEN—DON'T REJECT CHRIST

Jesus Christ must not be ignored. The chief priests and the Pharisees present understood the Parable of the Husbandmen as confessed (cf. Matt 21:45). They understood Christ's parables, plural! It must include the parable of the Two Sons. Both of these parables do not begin with the phrase “Kingdom of Heaven”. They are parables of warning and rebuke to Christ's enemies. Christ's desire to save sinners included these spiritual leaders who saw Him as their enemy. Despite this hatred for Christ and their desire to “*lay hands*” on Him (cf. Matt 21:46), Jesus still wanted to save them from their sins.

The householder is God the Father. The husbandmen were the chief priests and Pharisees. The servants were the prophets God sent throughout Israel's history to rebuke Israel of her sins. The son of the householder is Jesus Christ. The persecution and killing of the servants by the husbandmen refer to the long history of Israel putting God's prophets to death and persecuting them. In this parable, Christ was warning them that they would kill Him, God's Son. Yet, despite knowing this, Christ did not stop them. The enemies of Christ also did not stop themselves and repent! The hardness of man's heart is revealed in this parable through the response of the enemies of God.

Christ warned them after the parable that Christ is the head of the cornerstone despite the rejection of the enemies of God. Their rejection of Christ will not change what God would make Christ to become. Christ is the One whom God has made the absolute standard for anyone to enter His Kingdom of Heaven. If anyone hurts Christ, they hurt themselves. If they leave Christ alone, Christ will not leave them alone. He will judge them and find them guilty if they die in their sins before God. Christ will grind them to powder, i.e. He will cast them into hell when they stand before Him on Judgment Day. If anyone thinks he can escape God's judgment by hurting Christianity or by ignoring Christ, he deceives himself. Christ cannot be ignored!

THOUGHT: Is it okay not to attack Christianity but reject Christ?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may I never ignore Christ but believe in Him all the days of my life, in Jesus's name, I pray. Amen.

SATURDAY, MAY 2
MATTHEW 22:1-14
Memory verse: Matt 22:2

*“And Jesus answered and spake unto
them again by parables...”*

PARABLE OF THE BANQUET – SALVATION FOR ALL

In succession, Jesus spoke to the chief priests and Pharisees, a third parable. This third Parable of the Banquet begins with the well-known phrase “*the Kingdom of Heaven*.” Jesus wanted them to enter the kingdom of heaven despite their resistance and murderous hatred for Him! That was why Jesus spoke this third parable, emphasising an invitation to salvation. The king’s invitation to his son’s marriage garnered three different responses. He sent out his servants to save them.

Usually, everyone likes to attend the marriage of very important people, how much more that of a king’s son! There is no invitation grander than the king’s invitation! The privilege given to the guest is a most honourable one. We know that in life, a limited number of people are invited to a dinner hosted by the president or prime minister. Their close friends, associates, and perhaps all the very important, influential, wealthy people in society are invited. When they receive the invitation, they will not dare to reject it but feel honoured to be invited.

In this Parable of the Banquet, the first group invited rejected the invitation, and some even killed the servants who sent them the invitation. The next group of guests was the riff raffs of society, good and bad ones. They came. And the king noticed that one of them did not have the wedding garment on. So, the king cast him out of the banquet and into outer darkness, where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Salvation for everyone, Jews and Gentiles alike, is the same. It is only through Christ alone. From the Old to the New Testament, all must believe in Christ to be saved. OT saints look forward to Christ’s death by faith through the animal sacrifices from Adam onwards. NT saints look back to the completed work of Christ at Calvary, also by faith.

Whenever the Gospel is offered, know that God is offering you salvation. Accept God’s offer!

THOUGHT: How many times have you rejected the Gospel?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, save me for Jesus’ sake, in Jesus’ Name I pray. Amen.

LORD'S DAY, MAY 3

MATTHEW 22:1-14

Memory verse: Matt 22:3

*"And sent forth his servants to call
them that were bidden
to the wedding..."*

PARABLE OF THE BANQUET – SALVATION OFFERED

The king is God the Father. The son is the Lord Jesus Christ. The servants ("doulos" - slaves) are the prophets who bring the Gospel (verse 3-10). The wedding banquet is salvation. The servants ("diakonos" - minister) are the angels. The guests are the Jews and the Gentiles. The wedding garment is the garment of the righteousness of Christ. These are the meanings of the key elements in the parable.

The King sent His servants to call them who were bidden to attend the wedding banquet. To invite someone to have a prepared meal together in one's home was the highest form of intimacy and fellowship in the Middle East in the time of Christ. How much more when it was the King, and in His palace! The King sent forth the servants with the focus on the wedding banquet, not the act of sending, but the purpose. These guests must consider themselves very important to the King, or He would not invite them. The King expected these guests to be grateful and count themselves privileged to be allowed to attend such a grand, once-in-a-lifetime wedding banquet. How could anyone be so proud or foolish as to reject such a grand, once-in-a-lifetime experience of eating the King's food and being in the King's presence? It was not everyday that any commoner could feast in the King's presence and eat the King's food for free. They were not asked to bring anything or to pay anything. Everything was freely provided for. All the guests needed to do was to come! The best food had been provided for them to eat to their heart's content!

Is this how you see salvation, as an offer from God to have fellowship with Him? Is there any other way to see a privileged offer that is better than this one? Note that the offer of salvation is to undeserving sinners like us. We must never see salvation as a favour that we do for God. It is the greatest honour that God can do for any of His creatures, and He does it only for us finite, sinful mortals who have sinned against Him from the moment of our existence in our mother's womb. Despite all we have done against Him, He sent His servants to offer salvation to us.

THOUGHT: How grateful am I to be saved by God in Christ?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to show my deepest gratitude to Thee by living faithfully for Christ till the end, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

MONDAY, MAY 4

MATTHEW 22:1-10

Memory verse: Matt 22:8

“But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth...”

PARABLE OF THE BANQUET—OFFERED TO JEWS

No Christians dare to deny that the Jews are God’s people. Israel is the only nation that God created and designed personally from the beginning. Their entire existence, from what kind of clothes to wear, food to eat, what their holy days were, the place and manner of worship, the location and design of the tabernacle for worship, who could be priests, and what they wore, how old they had to be when they began and ended their service, etc. were all ordained by God. God would not allow just about any man to contribute to the testimony of His people, for they had to live according to His laws so that the holy image of Christ might be seen in how the nation lived. With such a blessed beginning and preparation, the Jews would be the best people to recognise the Messiah when He comes and believe His teachings and claims.

Instead, they rejected Him from the beginning. God sent His servants (prophets) to bring the Gospel of salvation. The Jews showed no interest. Then the King sent more servants explaining that the banquet had been prepared. Instead, the people were disinterested; some even persecuted and killed the servants. The King punished them, killed the murderers, and burned their cities. This was a reference to the destruction of Israel (722 BC) and Judah (586 BC). This present generation of Jews does not have to end in rejection and destruction!

The prepared banquet signifies the urgency needed to make the decision. Once the banquet was over, the door to entering the Kingdom of God was shut. It is over when the sinner dies in his sin. It is over when the Lord returns in glory to judge this world. The message from Christ was clear to the high priests and Pharisees. They wanted to arrest Him, but He wanted to save them from their sins! The heart of the Saviour has always been one of love and salvation. He does not desire any sinner, including His enemies, to die in his sin. His mission from heaven, initiated by God the Father, was to come to earth to die for the sins of the world without exception. He loved them when they hated Him. What a Saviour! Those who attack Christ’s Name or the Bible are attacking Him.

THOUGHT: Will you reject and attack Jesus or believe in Him?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for saving a sinner like me.

TUESDAY, MAY 5

MATTHEW 22:11-14

Memory verse: Matt 22:12

“...Bind him hand and foot,
and take him away, and cast him
into outer darkness...”

PARABLE OF THE BANQUET – OFFERED TO GENTILES

The wedding banquet was ready. The King told His servants to go to the highways to invite as many as possible to attend the banquet. Both good and bad were accepted. When the king came to see the guests, he saw a man without a wedding garment. It was customary for such a grand wedding of the King’s son that wedding garments were given to guests so that all would look the same, and none would regard others as more or less important because of their garments. The King called him “*friend*” and asked why he did not have the wedding garment on! He was speechless. The King then called his servants (the “*diakonos*” - servants) to bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth (a picture of hell!).

This is a picture of the Christian church where many Gentiles would accept the invitation as guests to the banquet of the King. Christ described the Gentiles as “*bad and good*.” The “*bad and good*” refers to bad and good people in society such as those who have been to prison and those who have not. They did not make excuses or hurt or kill the servants (i.e. “*doulos*” - slaves) but accepted the gracious invitation. This is likened to all who attend church and worship God every Sunday. They participate in all the church activities and may even be part of the church leadership. Some, like the pastors, may be theologically trained and preach God’s Word. But some are not born again in Christ as they do not have the wedding garment on, i.e. the garment of the righteousness of Christ.

The blood of Christ must wash all before they can enter the kingdom of heaven. Church attendance, serving in the church even as elders and deacons, being ordained as pastors, preaching and teaching God’s Word mean nothing to God if the sinner does not have the garment of Christ on him! He will undoubtedly be cast into hell when he dies in his sin.

In this present climate of fallen Christianity, believers are surrounded by many professing believers inside and outside the church. Be sure to have the garment of Christ on.

THOUGHT: Make sure of your salvation with fear and trembling.

PRAYER: Father, help me to be sure of my salvation.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6

MATTHEW 25:1-13

Memory verse: Matt 24:4

*“And this gospel of the kingdom
shall be preached
in all the world...”*

PARABLES OF TEN VIRGINS AND TALENTS – CONTEXT I

The return of Christ has always been foremost in God’s mind throughout the Holy Scriptures. Christ’s first coming to save must culminate in the return or second coming of Christ. The first coming was to save sinners. The second coming is to judge the sinful world.

The judgment of God is final, and the world will never be the same again. This judgment will be by fire. The world will be burned by fire, and everything in it will be burned. The warning from God demonstrates His great concern and care for every sinner. Before Jesus gave the Parables of the Ten Virgins and Talents, He gave us the context. Understanding the context is crucial to understanding the parables correctly.

The context has to do with the signs that must come to pass before the Temple’s destruction and Christ’s second coming. Matthew 24:5-13 reveals the signs that had to come to pass before the Temple was destroyed. The Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Romans when the Jews rebelled. The signs have been fulfilled already. Matthew 24:14-28 reveals the signs that must come to pass before Christ’s second coming. Some of the signs have been fulfilled today. These include the Gospel preached worldwide (v 14), and false Christ and false prophets will arise and do signs and wonders to deceive the world (v 24). The Gospel has reached all the continents of the world many times over as Christmas is celebrated globally. It does not mean that the world will be saved. The false Christs and false prophets are seen in the ecumenical movement, especially in the Roman Catholic church, Charismatics and neo-evangelicals. Their brand of Christianity projects a false Christ, not the Christ of the Bible.

But the sign of the abomination of desolation of Daniel’s prophecy (v 15) and the Great Tribulation (v 21) have yet to be fulfilled.

Are you aware that these signs prophesied by Christ 2,000 years ago are being fulfilled in your lifetime?

THOUGHT: Are you ready for Christ’s return?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, open my eyes to see the signs of Christ’s return and be ready to meet Him, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

THURSDAY, MAY 7
MATTHEW 25:1-13
Memory verse: Matt 24:36

*“...he answered and said,
Verily I say unto you,
I know you not.”*

PARABLES OF TEN VIRGINS AND TALENTS—CONTEXT II

After revealing the signs that must come to pass in answer to the two questions of the disciples, Jesus warned them of the need to always be prepared. The return of Christ is definite. The return of Christ has two aspects. The first is Christ's return for His church, called the first resurrection for those who have died in Christ, or the rapture for those who are alive when Christ returns for His church. In the twinkling of an eye, this is invisible to the rest of the world. The second is glorious for the world to see when the clouds open and Christ, with millions of His glorified saints and angels, descends from heaven to earth to fight His enemies at the Battle of Armageddon. The context of Matthew 24:29-35 points to the second aspect. The world ends, the day of salvation is over, and the day of judgment begins. All the righteous and holy will be holy and righteous forever, and ushered by Christ into heaven. All who are wicked and evil will be wicked and evil forever, and be cast into hell. The urgency to accept the invitation of Christ to be saved is focused.

The exact time of Christ's return is deliberately withheld. God in His infinite wisdom, keeps this date and time from His children for their spiritual well-being. Imagine knowing the exact date and time of Christ's return; the believers will be slothful to the end, and then, just a day before Christ returns, they repent! Such carnality must not be found in a genuine believer's heart. God wants all believers in every century to be watchful, and live in holiness and righteousness according to the Holy Scriptures so that any moment Christ returns, they are always ready to meet Him. To do that, they must be holy as God is holy, in every aspect of their lives.

We must be ever-ready for Christ's return, as this prophecy was given by God 2,000 years ago. Any Sunday could be our last Sunday for worship! We must make sure of our salvation. Then, we must ensure our service is faithful, and faithfully carry the cross Christ has designed for His disciples.

THOUGHT: If Christ returns tomorrow, what would I be doing today?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me always to live in light of Christ's soon return for Christ's sake. Amen.

FRIDAY, MAY 8

MATTHEW 25:1-13

Memory verse: Matt 25:2-3

*“And five of them were wise,
and five were foolish.”*

PARABLE OF TEN VIRGINS—THE MARRIAGE

The Parable of the Ten Virgins is a kingdom of heaven parable about salvation. The ten virgins are the professing believers in the local church. The bridegroom is Jesus Christ. The marriage is the return of Christ for His church. The focus of this parable is on vigilance. Every genuinely born-again believer must be vigilant in preparing for the bridegroom's coming.

The Jewish wedding in Jesus' time, as described by Albert Barnes in his commentary: “Marriage ceremonies in the East were conducted with great pomp and solemnity. The ceremony of marriage was performed commonly in the open air, on the banks of a stream. Both the bridegroom and bride were attended by friends. They were escorted in a *palanquin*, carried by four or more persons. After the ceremony of marriage succeeded a feast of seven days if the bride was a virgin, or three days if she was a widow. This feast was celebrated in her father's house. At the end of that time the bridegroom conducted the bride, with great pomp and splendour, to his own home. This was done in the evening, or at night, Jeremiah 7:34; 25:10; 33:11. Many friends and relations attended them; and besides those who went with them from the house of the bride, there was another company that came out from the house of the bridegroom to meet them, and welcome them. These were probably female friends and relatives of the bridegroom, who went out to welcome him and his new companion to their home. These are the virgins mentioned in this parable. Not knowing precisely the time when the procession would come, they probably went out early, and waited until they should see indications of its approach.”

The ten virgin's duty was to always be prepared for the bridegroom's coming. The belief in the certainty of his coming is revealed by how the ten virgins prepared themselves. If they truly believe, they would ensure they have sufficient oil regardless of the time of the bridegroom's coming. It is the bridegroom's prerogative what time he chooses to come. The virgin's duty was to wait to join the wedding party when the bridegroom finally came. Without the light, they would be locked out.

THOUGHT: Are you well prepared for Christ's return at any time?

PRAYER: Father, keep me ready for Christ's return.

SATURDAY, MAY 9

MATTHEW 25:1-13

Memory verse: Matt 25:4

*“...Behold, the bridegroom cometh;
go ye out to meet him.”*

PARABLE OF TEN VIRGINS–THE WISE VIRGINS

As mentioned before, parables are descriptions of real-life situations with spiritual significance where Jesus did not comment on the morality or ethics of the parables. This was how parables were used to teach spiritual truth, citing current life experiences in Jesus' time. With this in mind, it was not a blemish on the part of the wise virgins not to share their oil. That was the custom. The five wise virgins represent born-again believers. Their preparation showed that they believed in the certain coming of the bridegroom. They prepared sufficient oil to light their lamp regardless of the time the bridegroom came. They had to provide evidence of their belief and readiness for the bridegroom's coming with everlasting preparedness. The bridegroom's coming represents Christ's return.

Believing in Christ's return implies believing in Christ's death and resurrection. To believe by giving to God a mental agreement is not pleasing to Him. It must be obeyed, as evidenced by a prepared life, as exemplified by the wise virgins. If we believe that Christ is returning, we have to give an account of how we have lived. All areas of our lives must glorify God. My relationship with my spouse must be one of the husband loving his wife as Christ loved the church and gave His life for the church. The wife must submit to her own husband as unto the Lord as he is the head of the home, just as Christ is the Head of the church. Children must honour and obey their parents in the Lord. Believers must render holy service, constrained by our love for Christ and His love for us. Learning to forgive all the time and under every circumstance in life, as God has forgiven us in Christ, is the norm for every believer.

The wise virgins knew the reason for their waiting and prepared for it thoroughly. They understood their purpose of waiting for the bridegroom's coming. They were ready when the midnight cry came that he was coming. The urgency and the brevity of time given to them to prepare meant that they had to have the extra oil applied to their lamp. There was no time to run off somewhere to buy more oil. There was no last-minute preparation. It was now or never! Thank God they were ever ready!

THOUGHT: What if Christ returns tonight? Am I ready?

PRAYER: Father, help me be wise and always ready to meet my Saviour.

LORD'S DAY, MAY 10

MATTHEW 25:1-13

Memory verse: Matt 25:9

*"And the foolish said unto the wise,
Give us of your oil..."*

PARABLE OF TEN VIRGINS—THE FOOLISH VIRGINS

The word for foolish is where we get the English word "moron." It means someone who is stupid. He is not stupid because of his IQ, for the Bible is not about the intelligence of the mind. This is a lack of spiritual intelligence. God describes the five foolish virgins as stupid because their action demonstrates they believed in the definite coming of the bridegroom. Otherwise, why were they waiting throughout the night with the other five wise virgins? They understood the custom of the Jewish wedding. They knew the bridegroom could come any time, day or night. They knew from prior Jewish weddings what was required of them in their preparation for the coming of the bridegroom. They knew they could not ask for extra oil from others, for they would be rejected. It was their personal responsibility to be completely prepared for every eventuality. The moment the call of the bridegroom's coming came, if they were late and the door was shut, they would never be allowed in. The last-minute purchase of extra oil would probably mean they would be shut out. All the many hours of waiting would be for nothing if they were not allowed in. Why did they not prepare themselves, having known all these possible scenarios of being rejected? Is this not foolish?

To have the door shut means not being allowed entrance into heaven. The foolish virgins are the professing believers who attend church regularly. They study the Bible. They listen to God's Word every Lord's Day. They sing hymns about God and Christ. They are baptised and partake in the Lord's Supper regularly. They may even have theological degrees and preach and teach God's Word passionately. They share the Gospel fervently. They may even have led some sinners to Christ. They could have been ordained as elders or pastors, and warned others of the coming of Christ to judge the quick and the dead. Having done all to help others enter heaven and then to find themselves cast out of heaven, does it not make them fools? They are so close to entering heaven, knowing the way, but they do not walk in the way that they have been telling many to. What a tragedy of tragedies! The result is to be cast into hell forever!

THOUGHT: Am I a fool?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to be true to my own soul and not live in self-delusion, but make sure of my salvation, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

MONDAY, MAY 11
MATTHEW 25:1-13
Memory verse: Matt 25:13

*“Watch therefore,
for ye know neither
the day nor the hour...”*

PARABLE OF TEN VIRGINS–VIGILANCE

Vigilance is a sustained experience that must last a lifetime. One slight moment of drowsiness or lapse in vigilance may render an entire life of vigilance null and void. The enemy can destroy the holy witness tomorrow if not today, once the guard is down!

Every believer must see his life as a race to the finish line. Until he crosses the finish line, the race continues. The same zeal and fervency he starts with must remain constant till the race is run. To keep this zeal and fervency alive, he needs vigilance. Can you imagine a runner running a race well for 99% of the distance, but when he is ten metres from the finish line, he collapses? He has fainted because of weakness.

The believer who lives a holy life from the day of his salvation has become a godly witness for Christ with many looking to him as their example to follow. Can you imagine the fallout if he fails them and the Lord close to the finish line? They have witnessed his vigilant life of fervency in witnessing, the study and defence of God’s Word, the clear teaching and preaching of God’s doctrines, and his copious amount of Christian literature. These can all be thrown away because he stumbles at the end of his life. Many may throw away the baby with the dirty bath water.

The holy image of Christ he carries is marred so badly by his failure to be vigilant. He has not guarded himself from himself! He has failed the Lord and God’s people miserably. Even after he repents, the damage to his witness for Christ is probably irreparably marred. He has little time left to witness all over again like when he was in his thirties. Neither does he have the energy to fight the good fight of faith as a disgraced servant of Christ. He is forgiven by God and God’s people. But he has become a negative example of one whose life is a warning of what can happen to a believer if he fails to be vigilant. Vigilance is not an option. The holy image of Christ we bear is at stake. Sinners and believers need us to be vigilant, and so does Christ!

THOUGHT: Will you be vigilant for the rest of your life?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me be vigilant all the days of my life. This is my heart’s desire, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

TUESDAY, MAY 12
MATTHEW 25:14-30
Memory verse: Matt 25:15

*“...to every man according
to his several ability;
and straightway took his journey.”*

PARABLE OF TALENTS—TO THE FAR COUNTRY

The parable of the Ten Virgins teaches the importance of vigilance. The parable of the Talents teaches how to be vigilant. To obey the Lord and agree with Him that it is important to be vigilant is not good enough for Him. He needs to teach us how to be vigilant.

The parable of the Talents begins with a man travelling into a far country. He called his own servants and delivered unto them his goods. To one he gave five talents, to another two and to another one. The man gave to his own servants according to his servants' own abilities. Immediately after entrusting them with his goods, he took his journey into the far country.

The man here is Jesus Christ. His own servants represent all professing believers. Talent is a unit measure of weight. It is between 34 and 40 kg. A talent of gold is worth much more than a talent of silver. The talent represents the possessions, time and abilities of the professing believers.

The certainty of the man returning was a fact known to all the servants. When he would return was not made known to them. They had to be vigilant and expect him to return at any time. While they waited, the man expected them to trade with the good entrusted to them. The goods belonged to the man. The servants had no reason not to work hard as the master had given them power over his goods in different ways. If the master had not given them his goods to trade, the servants might have a reason to be slothful while waiting for his return. Now, they had no excuse to be lazy as they waited patiently. It was not for the servants to spend time in any way they liked because they were servants of the master even when he was physically absent. They had to be diligent not only when the master was watching. The servants, as long as they were still the master's servants, needed to use their time wisely, especially during those daily hours when they were supposed to work. They might be permitted to rest at night after work. However, they still needed to spend their rest time wisely.

THOUGHT: My life, time, possessions, and all I have belong to God.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, grant me the wisdom to spend my days wisely for Thy glory and blessing of others, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13

MATTHEW 25:14-30

Memory verse: Matt 25:29

“... Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things...”

PARABLE OF TALENTS–THE FAITHFUL

The master entrusted different amounts to his three servants. He gave more to the more dependable, capable and trustworthy people. The master was very wise. He understood that not everyone could cope with more talents. To be given more means one has to work harder. He would need to sacrifice more of his time and energy. He would have to work more efficiently and be very wise in his decision-making because of the greater trust expected of him by his master.

Both the servants who were given five and two talents traded well. The servant who received five talents traded and made five talents. The servant with two talents traded and made two talents. The master made the right choice by entrusting his servants with the right amount. When he returned, both servants reported the amount they had made to their master. The master’s commendation for both of them was the same, *“Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”* Faithfulness was the focus of the master’s commendation. At the end of the accountability, the master said in verse 29, *“For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.”*

Every believer cannot fail in their earthly service to the Lord. All they need to do is to be faithful to what and where the Lord has called them to serve. They need to use their time, possessions and spiritual gifts wisely. Every believer has the Holy Spirit’s help. They cannot fail to be faithful unless they choose to. God has blessed all believers with the mind of Christ to understand and obey the Bible. He has also given believers the love of God to protect them from sinning against Him when they are persecuted for righteousness’ sake as they serve. The results or productivity is not the focus but faithfulness. God will give some more time, possessions, or spiritual gifts, but all will be judged the same: faithfulness. Do not compare but complement one another and serve the Lord faithfully.

THOUGHT: Have I given my best to my Master?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to be faithful all the days of my life till Christ returns in glory, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

THURSDAY, MAY 14

MATTHEW 25:14-30

Memory verse: Matt 25:30

*“...cast ye the unprofitable servant
into outer darkness...”*

PARABLE OF TALENTS–THE UNFAITHFUL

The master gave to the unfaithful servant one talent. He gave him the least that could be given to his servant so that he could not make excuses for not being given any responsibility. If the master had not given him a talent, the servant could have used that as a legitimate excuse for doing nothing. It is very much like today's employment, where the employee is assigned a task so that he would not sit around idling in the office.

The master gave him one talent, the least and most straightforward task compared to the other two servants. The servant could have even given the amount to the money changer and at least earned some interest that would earn him his master's commendation. How much effort would it have taken to hand the money over to the money changer, obtain an official receipt, collect the one talent plus interest and return the whole amount to the master? Absolutely no effort at all! The servant was slothful!

Furthermore, he could have begged forgiveness for his laziness after returning the one talent, but he did not. Instead, he used his master's bad character as his excuse, and he buried his one talent! If what he had said about the master was true, how could the other two servants trade so well? Using his own argument against him, the master said that if what he had said was true, all the more, he should have worked hard, but he did not! The master punished him severely. He took everything from him and cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth. The unfaithful or unprofitable servant represents professing believers who claim to serve Christ. There is no excuse for laziness. Every believer serves Christ in the world by pointing sinners to Him. They do so by sharing the Gospel through their lips and lives of holiness. They also serve Christ in the church when they exercise their spiritual gifts. They build up the faith of fellow believers as labourers with God. Their lives are built up when they receive the service from fellow believers. This mutual building up of one another's faith is God's work through the Word of God and the Holy Spirit.

THOUGHT: Faithfulness originates from a life of holiness.

PRAYER: Father, may I not be deceived.

FRIDAY, MAY 15

MATTHEW 25:14-30

Memory verse: Matt 25:23

*“...but from him that hath not
shall be taken away
even that which he hath.”*

PARABLE OF TALENTS–DILIGENCE

Diligence is the biblical evidence of vigilance. To be vigilant is not to sell everything we have and go up a mountain dressed in white, staring up into the heavens, waiting for Christ to return! Such Hollywood foolishness disdains and mocks the return of Christ. This is the devil's work. Many, especially unbelievers, will think that Christianity is a religion only for fools!

However, when born-again believers observe Christ's return with vigilance and diligence, the impact is the power of God in Christ manifested. Believers live in holiness, godliness, and righteousness according to the Holy Scriptures. Their godly lives reflect the presence and love of God so that all who repent of their sin can be saved. This is the primary reason why God saves His beloved children and leaves them in this sin-filled and spiritually dead and dark world of evil where they will be persecuted for obeying their heavenly Father. Their humble suffering for Christ will be the mirror testimony of what happened to Christ but did not happen to them at Calvary's cross, where the just suffered and died for the unjust. With such a Christ-centred life of humility, the Gospel will have the most potent impact through the power of the Holy Spirit taking the word of God and bringing salvation.

Every believer's diligence in evangelism and service must be motivated by the God-given responsibility of witnessing for Christ and not self. He cannot live for himself in his diligence, seeking his own things and fulfilling his own ambitions. He is saved to bear witness for Christ, always giving and doing his best in all that his heavenly Father lays in his hands to do for His glory. His diligence manifests the greatness of Christ's salvific work in his life as well as its potent availability to all if only they, too, would believe. Vigilance without diligence is vanity. Diligence without vigilance is a life of temporary holiness. All believers must be vigilant and diligent to be pleasing in God's sight on the day of Christ's return.

THOUGHT: Be vigilant and diligent for Christ till His glorious return.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may I be ready to the end for Christ's sake. Amen.

SATURDAY, MAY 16

MARK 3:22-30

Memory verse: Mark 3:22

*“...He hath Beelzebub,
and by the prince of the devils
casteth he out devils.”*

A KINGDOM DIVIDED? – THE CONTEXT

The context is critical in understanding Mark 3:22-30. Why did Mark record the charge of the scribes against Christ that He cast out devils by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of the devils? The Gospel of Matthew provides the background. Matthew 12:22-24 *“Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.”*

The demon that possessed the man struck him blind and dumb. They could not see the demon that was in him. But the result of the demonic possession was blindness and dumbness. To others, this was just a physical issue. But to Christ, this was a grave and spiritual issue. Not all sicknesses are because of demonic possession; neither are dumbness and blindness. They could simply be physical in nature, and medical treatments can help bring about healing and complete recovery.

However, to the child of God, all things are spiritual in that he has become a spiritual person when Christ baptised him with the Holy Spirit at the point of his salvation. From his salvation onwards, the Holy Spirit dwells in him forever, making him a spiritual person. He no longer wrestles against flesh and blood but against spiritual wickedness in high places (cf. Eph 6:12). He fights his spiritual battles by praying without ceasing, knowing that God is the One who helps him. It is not a matter of demon possession, for the believer can never be possessed by any demon because of the Holy Spirit who dwells in him. God can use medicine to heal him or other sources to protect him, including unbelievers and people in high places. God is almighty and the believer experiences God's divine protection all his life. After the healing, the scribes came to confront Christ about the power He demonstrated in casting out the demon, resulting in the healing of the man from blindness and dumbness. They charged Him for using the power of the devil to heal this man.

THOUGHT: Demon possession is as real then as it is in the present.

PRAYER: Father, thank You for the Holy Spirit who dwells in me.

LORD'S DAY, MAY 17

MARK 3:22-30

Memory verse: Mark 3:23

*“...if a kingdom be divided
against itself, that kingdom
cannot stand.”*

A KINGDOM DIVIDED?—THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE?

The scribes from Jerusalem were of highest honour since they came from the capital city, the holy city. They believed they were on God's side, and God was on their side. Since they viewed Jesus as their enemy, He could not be on God's side. The scribes could not deny the reality of the miracle. The devils obeyed Jesus. The evidence was the restoration of the man's speech and hearing. Perhaps there was no visible sign of the devils leaving the possessed man, but the healing could not be denied. Since the devils obeyed Jesus and He was not on God's side, He had to have exercised the power with the devil's help! Beelzebub (i.e. the Lord of the dung) was the nickname given to the Devil. Beelzebub is of Chaldee origin. It is a parody of Baalzebub, which means the Lord of the Flies.

The serious nature of their accusation against Jesus condemned them to hell if they did not change their mind and see Him as their Lord and Saviour. Such a seriously biased view of Christ is not uncommon today! An initial, distorted view of Jesus Christ, whether in rejection or acceptance, has always been a serious transgression because the only Name under heaven that can save a sinner from hell is Christ. Once a sinner holds to a view for years, it is almost impossible to change, for to change an age-old view means to deny a lifetime of living. He has to admit that he has been wrong for a long time and has been teaching others erroneously. That is one of the most humbling and challenging things to admit. His pride stands like Mount Everest, blocking him from entering heaven because he has failed to admit his erroneous view of Christ!

Such was the case with the scribes. Their accusation of Christ as from Beelzebub only brought about an offer of salvation from a very gracious Christ. He wanted to save them from their sins when they tried to kill Him with their malicious prejudice. The salvation of the scribes must be the correct premise to approach this unusual parable of Christ and interpret it correctly.

THOUGHT: Is the kingdom of Christ divided? If not why is there division in the church?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, open my eyes to know Christ according to the Holy Scriptures, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

MONDAY, MAY 18

MARK 3:22-30

Memory verse: Mark 3:27

*“...if Satan rise up against himself,
and be divided, he cannot stand...”*

A KINGDOM DIVIDED? – ILLOGICAL LOGIC!

Jesus used three levels of argument to demonstrate the illogical logic of the scribes. How can Satan cast out Satan? If Jesus is Satan and the devil is Satan, how can someone cast himself out? This is an impossibility. Jesus followed up with the kingdom's logic. If Satan sent his demons to possess humans globally to do his evil work, and then cast out the same demons to deliver them, such a kingdom would not stand, i.e. it would self-destruct. Jesus' final logic was the house logic. If Satan sent demons to possess an individual and then cast out the demons in that person, he would then have neutralised his own work. Likewise, such foolish, self-destructive acts would bring down his own house. Satan would not stand if he kept undoing his work, which he had taken time and trouble to do. To destroy or rob a strong man's house, one has to bind the strong man before he can ransack the house. The robber has to be an outsider, and not an insider to rob the house. The strong man would not bind himself. If he has bound himself, who will rob the house? This is the illogical logic Jesus used to help the scribes see the foolishness of their argument. Jesus is not Beelzebub nor does He receive His power from Beelzebub. He is an outsider who is against Satan and his demonic forces and deeds.

If Jesus is right in His argument, then the scribes would be wrong to assume that God is on their side since Jesus' miracle could not be denied, not even by them. If God is on Jesus' side, then all that Jesus taught is from God and must be true. He is who He said He is, the Son of God! The demons, including Satan obeyed only the Creator who created them. The conclusion by the argument of Christ is that He is God and the Creator of the heavens and the earth! The scribes who prided themselves in their pedigree, knowledge of the Bible, and good works needed to evaluate their pride-filled position that they were on God's side, and anyone against them had to be on the devil's side, thus their enemies. When we are rebuked by God, we ought not to regard Him as our enemy like the foolish scribes, but be teachable always.

THOUGHT: Am I truly confident that I am on Christ's side?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to be teachable always and be sure of my faith that it is based truly on the Christ of the Bible.

TUESDAY, MAY 19

MARK 3:22-30

Memory verse: Mark 3:28-29

*“...All sins shall be forgiven
unto the sons of men...”*

A KINGDOM DIVIDED?—UNPARDONABLE SIN?

An unpardonable sin is a sin that cannot be pardoned even if the person repents of that sin before God in Christ! Is there such a sin? Some say that it is a sin against the Holy Spirit. But every sin man commits is a sin against the Holy Spirit just as much as it is a sin against Christ and God. When Ananias lied to Peter, the charge against him was that he sinned against the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 5:3). There is no such sin as an unpardonable sin. The view of an unpardonable sin is based on popular theology, not the Holy Scriptures. It is a dangerous error because this view undermines the infinite worth of Christ's death on the cross. Christ's death at Calvary has the power to cleanse and forgive any and every sin committed by sinful man. To say there is a sin that not even the blood of Christ can cleanse is an abomination to God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead because Christ's salvific work can forgive all sins.

The context of Mark 3:22-30 is the scribes rejecting Christ and saying that He was of Beelzebub, and sinning against the Holy Spirit, the One whom God sent to convict all sinners so they can be saved. If the scribes were to see the light, repent in the future, and believe in Christ, they would be saved like all sinners. Have we not rejected the Gospel several times, before the grace of God convicts us again, then we repent and receive Christ as Lord and Saviour? The parallel passage is Matthew 12:24-32. In Matthew, Jesus warned them that the sin against the Son of man can be forgiven but the sin against the Holy Ghost cannot be forgiven. Jesus meant that when we sin against a fellow man, we can find him and seek forgiveness by paying the penalty for our sins. But when we sin against the Holy Ghost, where can we find Him to seek forgiveness? Even if we can find Him, what can we give Him to make restitution for our sins? There is nothing man can give to God that is not created and owned by God. Only in and through Christ can a sinner be saved. But these scribes said that He came from Beelzebub! Christ wanted to convict the scribes of their foolishness so that they might not reject Him but be saved.

THOUGHT: If there is an unpardonable sin, the worth of Christ's death will not be infinite.

PRAYER: Father, help me to know the truth that sets me free from all errors.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 20

LUKE 5:33-39

Memory verse: Luke 5:34-35

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

NEW UPON THE OLD—NOT TIME YET!

The context of this parable begins with the question of the scribes and Pharisees, *"Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?"* (Luke 5:33). This was a loaded question designed to get Jesus into trouble. They deliberately pitted their disciples with the disciples of John the Baptist against the disciples of Jesus. Projecting an impression of correctness was a mixture of right and wrong. Jesus' disciples were pitted against John's disciples from God, whereas the disciples of the Pharisees were of men. John the Baptist was God's forerunner in preparing the hearts of the people of Israel to receive Christ as their Lord and Saviour; hence, his ministry was one of baptism of repentance. The disciples of the Pharisees followed their oral traditions that distorted the understanding of God's Word, resulting in salvation by doing God's work.

Jesus could not ignore such a deadly attack. He could not contradict John, or else He would deny John's ministry from God. Furthermore, fasting and prayers were biblical practices. Jesus had to rebuke the error of the Pharisees and, at the same time, honour the teaching of John and agree with his disciples on fasting and prayer. The answer from Christ was ingenious. Luke 5:34-35 *"And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days."* Jesus took this opportunity to enhance His teaching even more in rightness. Jesus aimed to reveal Himself to the world that He was indeed Emmanuel i.e. God walking in their midst. When He described Himself as the bridegroom, He was emphasising His teaching that He was the promised Messiah of the Old Testament who was there and standing in front of them. After He returned to heaven, Jesus' disciples would fast and pray, but not then! Jesus answered the question of His enemies perfectly, agreeing with John and distancing Himself from the Pharisees' errors.

THOUGHT: From God's Word, all believers will have Jesus' wisdom and discernment.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, open my eyes to see and obey Thy will in my life according to the Holy Scriptures till Christ returns. Amen.

THURSDAY, MAY 21

LUKE 5:33-39

Memory verse: Luke 5:36

*“...No man putteth a piece of
a new garment upon an old...”*

NEW UPON THE OLD—NO MIXTURE!

The Lord could have stopped without giving them the parable, but His heart was for their salvation, even the salvation of His enemies. The parable taught the disciples, Pharisees, and scribes that Christ's teaching and their teaching cannot coexist. In short, Christ was not trying to correct the teaching of the Pharisees and the scribes, or mix His teaching with theirs even though their teaching was based on the Old Testament, albeit a distortion. Their teaching was characterised by the rejection of Jesus as the Christ. Therefore, no matter how they tried to understand and teach the Old Testament, they taught like blind men. Their teaching would either be superficial, without any spiritual value, or entirely incorrect as they did not have the indwelling Holy Spirit illuminating their minds.

This parable of Jesus has two parts. The first concerns tailoring. If there is a tear in an old garment, a patch is required to fix it. The patch used will not be new (in terms of age i.e. a new piece of cloth). Otherwise, the unequal expansion and contraction of the old and new would cause the tear to become larger. The best patching material to use is an old piece with the old. Jesus deliberately used the new material because His teaching was new, but the teaching of the Pharisees was old. There was no compatibility between the two. If anyone were to try to join the two opposing teachings, i.e. accept and agree with the teachings of the Pharisees and Jesus, he would wound himself as the contradiction within him would rob him of peace. He would live a life of hypocrisy, pretending to be a child of God outwardly but remaining a child of the devil inwardly.

Doctrinal errors have been a dangerous but common experience in these last days. Marrying error with the truth of God's Word is pervasive within Christendom. Thus, the prophecy of the falling away of Christianity before the return of Christ has been fulfilled (cf. 2 Thess 2:1-3). Make sure of your salvation by ensuring all the truths of God's Word are understood correctly and obeyed heartily.

THOUGHT: Are you diligent enough to ensure your understanding of the Bible is rightly interpreted?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to love Thee by loving Thy truth always. For Christ's sake, hear my cry. Amen.

FRIDAY, MAY 22

LUKE 5:33-39

Memory verse: Luke 5:38-39

*“...new wine must be
put into new bottles;
and both are preserved.”*

NEW IN THE OLD—NO STORAGE!

The second part of Jesus' parable pertains to the storage of wine. It was customary in those days that new wine had to be stored in new bottles. The reason was obvious to all in the days of Jesus. Wine ferments once it is not stored in refrigerated conditions. This is the nature of grape juice. Fermentation of the grape juice turns the juice into wine with a low percentage of alcohol. The consequence is the emission of carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide causes the leathery wine bottle to expand. Since it is new wine in a new, supple, leathery bottle, it expands and will not burst like an old, stiff, hardened leathery bottle. The old leathery bottle will crack and burst. It is only good for putting in old wine that has gone through the whole fermentation process and no longer emits carbon dioxide. Using this common experience in storing wine, Jesus said, “*no man putteth new (i.e. fresh) wine into old bottles.*” Jesus also added that new (i.e. fresh) wine must be put into new bottles. When new wine is put into new bottles, both are preserved. All who believe in Christ alone to save them is like the new wine placed in new bottles. The truth of Christ with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit will keep the saint saved forever. He will not then believe in salvation through the good Christian works of the Pharisees. Neither can salvation by good works (old wine) be placed in the new bottle (salvation by grace in Christ). The two cannot mix.

However, it takes time for the Pharisees and their followers to reject the errors and find the truth. Christ taught this in verse 39, where He said that anyone who has drunk old wine would not immediately desire the new as he thinks the old is better. This refers to the Pharisees who struggled to believe in the teaching of Christ that all they needed to be saved from their sin was to believe in Christ. They still believed that their old way of salvation through Christian good works was better because it still felt good to them. This is true of salvation for all people. It is hard to suddenly acknowledge that their perception all their lives is wrong and that they now need to repudiate all of it before they can receive Christ as their Lord and Saviour. But this is what salvation entails. The new cannot be contained in the old, like new wine is never put into old wine bottles.

THOUGHT: Do I truly have Christ alone as my Lord and Saviour?

PRAYER: Thank You, Father, that Christ alone is my Lord and Saviour.

SATURDAY, MAY 23

LUKE 6:37-45

Memory verse: Luke 6:38

“Judge not,

and ye shall not be judged:

...forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.”

BLIND LEADING THE BLIND – A DEADLY DANGER

Jesus Christ spoke the parable of the blind leading the blind as part of the Sermon in the Plain (cf. 6:17). The similarities between the Sermon on the Mount and this sermon are obvious. But we must carefully note the dissimilarities for our spiritual blessings. Jesus taught in Luke 6:37-38 that believers must take heed how they judge, condemn and forgive for God will judge, condemn and forgive them in the same manner. The earlier verses of Luke 6 reveal to us how Jesus was judged and condemned by the Pharisees and scribes for breaking the Sabbath.

The Pharisees and scribes saw themselves as the protectors of God's laws. Anyone who broke them (according to the oral traditions that interpreted and misapplied the law) had sinned. Jesus Christ answered and corrected them, but not to their liking. Jesus taught the Sermon in the Plain after He had called the twelve disciples to follow Him. They had to know the truth as they followed Christ.

Jesus taught them to be kind, magnanimous, and careful of a vengeful and judgmental spirit. When the believer is kind, kindness will return to him, overwhelmingly. Luke 6:38 *“Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.”* Jesus illustrated this using a dry measure. When someone pours wheat into a container and wants to give a good measure, he would press it down and shake it to make room for more wheat to be put in, until it overflows. This pictures the return of blessings to the one who gives generously to God's work or God's people, because he loves the Lord Jesus Christ. He must not be motivated by the return itself for that would be a sin. He must be motivated only by his love for Christ, and God's work and people.

This is the context of the Parable of the Blind Leading the Blind. Let the truth we obey be accompanied by a heart of love and consideration for others.

THOUGHT: Am I a miser or a generous giver?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to love Thee not in word only, but by my generosity, for Christ's sake. Amen.

LORD'S DAY, MAY 24

LUKE 6:37-45

Memory verse: Luke 6:40

*"...but every one that is perfect
shall be as his master."*

BLIND LEADING THE BLIND—BOTH WILL FALL

Generally, people like to tell others what to do. One does not seem to realise that when he does so he is conforming the other person into his own image, except when the counsel is according to the Holy Scriptures. When the counsel is according to the Holy Scriptures, he teaches the person to be like Christ. He conforms more and more to the image of Christ every time he obeys godly counsel.

However, when the unconverted gives worldly counsel, or counsel of man, it is the blind leading the blind. Both of them will fall into the ditch, i.e. into hell in the Christian context. All his so-called wisdom leads to vanity and death. There is no deliverance from sin and death outside of the Christ of the Bible. Any professing believer who teaches doctrines outside of the Bible is saying he is above his Master i.e. Jesus Christ. But the Lord says this is impossible because no one can be above Christ.

When the believer is perfect, i.e. obeying God's Word, Jesus says he shall be as his Master, i.e. like Christ. He has been blessed with the mind of Christ at salvation. He can understand the Bible and fill his new mind with the knowledge of God. He speaks and behaves like Christ when he lives his life in light of God's Word. Like his Master, he can lead others because he is no longer spiritually blind. He shares with the sinner the Gospel of Christ. He teaches other believers more of God's truth, helping them to be more like Christ in all their relationships as if Christ Himself was teaching them. His holy life evidences the work of the Holy Spirit who dwells in him.

All born-again believers must ensure they live holy lives even as they teach others who Christ is according to the Bible. They must study the Word of God diligently and thoroughly. They can be like Christ if they teach all things from the Bible. They must think twice before they tell anyone what to do for fear of becoming the blind leading the blind, and both falling into the ditch. In these last days, with more professing believers than genuine believers, all professing believers must take care of their own salvation before they tell others they can be saved in Christ.

THOUGHT: Is my life lived according to the Holy Scriptures?

PRAYER: Father, may I not lead anyone blindly into hell.

MONDAY, MAY 25

LUKE 6:37-45

Memory verse: Luke 6:41

“...cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou... pull out the mote that is in thy brother’s eye.”

BLIND LEADING THE BLIND—JUDGE SELF FIRST

One of the hardest things to do is to judge self first before judging others! Censorious and pride-filled judgments are common in the world, and sadly in the church too. Those who say that God commanded man not to judge one another live in delusion and speak a lie. God has always taught His children to make righteous judgments and also to judge in the right way. Luke 6:41-42 teach believers how to judge the right way.

Before a believer judges another, he must first judge himself. When he judges himself, he begins with his salvation which is by God’s grace alone. God’s mercies spare him from hell. God’s grace saves him from hell and leads him into heaven. He was a depraved sinner from birth to the point of salvation. The beam in his own eye refers to his struggle against sin and reminds him of his weaknesses. In this manner, he protects himself from self-righteous judgment. The “I-am-better-than-you” approach to judging others is avoided. The believer’s judgment of another is now one of empathy. He genuinely understands how his brother is struggling to overcome his sin. He helps him overcome it too. He does this out of love for him and nothing else.

He shares his struggles with his brother and how the LORD helps him overcome his sins. The LORD can help him too. His approach is to save a soul from sin, not to condemn. He realises the spiritual struggle in the whole judgment. It is not to gloat over a fallen brother, but to defeat the evil one and help a drowning brother to save him from death and destruction. With this attitude, he exercises patience, gives his brother time to repent, and continues to help. As long as he sees his brother struggling to overcome his sin, he tarries alongside him to help him.

But if his brother stubbornly refuses to repent of his sin, then he needs to exercise church discipline and bring him to the attention of the elders of the church. The brother has taken the membership oath to submit his spiritual well-being to the leaders whom God has appointed over him. They will be the better people to help him.

THOUGHT: There is a very fine line between censorious and righteous judgment.

PRAYER: Father, may I always judge myself before judging others.

TUESDAY, MAY 26

LUKE 6:37-45

Memory verse: Luke 6:45

*"For every tree is known
by his own fruit."*

BLIND LEADING THE BLIND—WHO IS A GOOD MAN?

Nature is God's perennial illustration of His existence and truth. In this parable of the Blind Leading the Blind, Jesus taught that a good (i.e. intrinsic goodness) tree cannot bring forth corrupt fruit and a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit. The impossibility of the fruit-bearing is applicable to spiritual fruit-bearing. Man knows that every fruit tree is known by its own fruit. No man would gather figs from a thorny tree or grapes from a bramble bush. He would be foolish to do so!

Likewise, a good (i.e. intrinsically good but with a focus on his deeds) man from the good treasure of his heart will bring forth good fruit. (NOTE: The meaning of "good" is the same as in the "good man" above.) The evil man will bring forth the evil treasure of his heart, evil fruit! This truth is inviolable like the fruit trees.

No sinner begins with a good heart. All sinners are born with an evil heart and can only bring forth evil fruit. His good deeds may appear good to his fellow men but in God's eyes, they are like filthy rags. He cannot by his "good works" enter heaven.

The Holy Spirit dwells in him after he is genuinely born again in Christ. He has been made good through the atoning work of Christ. The Spirit enables him to do holy work. Holy work is good work, for by the believer's good work, people around them can see Christ in them and glorify God. Sinners glorify God when they become saints. God's children glorify God when they are blessed by the believer's good work. From the good heart flows forth good words and good works done according to Scriptures. Their counsel is based on God's truth. All believers must experience this in their lives as a clear evidence of their salvation.

If a person's life is not lived according to the Holy Scriptures and his counsel is unbiblical, then he is not God's child. He has been led by the blind, for the gospel of the blind did not save him even though he might have believed it sincerely. Impacting others for Christ by our good works is why God saved us, left us behind, and has not brought us to heaven yet.

THOUGHT: Do good works characterise your heart and your life?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, strengthen my faith in Thy Word, the Truth.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 27

LUKE 10:25-37

Memory verse: Luke 10:25

“...What is written in the law?
how readest thou?”

THE GOOD SAMARITAN—SEEKING SALVATION?

Doing good works as a means of entering heaven has been taught and believed for centuries. Good works can be categorised into two types. Good works, as determined by man, are good works done according to what is good in man's eyes. Man defines what he understands to be good, he does them, and it is good enough for him; it must also be good enough for God, so he thinks and reasons. Man believes that if he does these good works sincerely and to the best of his ability, God is pleased and will let him enter heaven. He follows in the footsteps of Cain. Both he and his good work were both rejected by God. The second type of good works is that which is revealed by God to man. They are all found in the Bible. They are called Christian good works (both in the Old and New Testament Scriptures, for argument's sake). In Christ's time, no man was better than the Pharisees, scribes, or lawyers. They were the students, teachers and protectors of the written Word of God. The scribes or lawyers knew the Bible as they religiously and diligently copied it. None of the men who thought they could enter heaven by doing good Christian works were better than the scribes and Pharisees. That was what Christ meant when He said that unless man's righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven (cf. Matt 5:20).

Such a scribe stood up and tempted Jesus in Luke 10:25. He asked Jesus, “*Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*” Perhaps the trap for Jesus was whether Jesus would say anything that might contradict the Law of Moses since he probably thought of himself as more knowledgeable than Christ. It could also be to trap Jesus by bringing Him over to his side if Jesus were to conclude at the end of the conversation that the scribe was already on his way to the kingdom of heaven through his good Christian works. He called Jesus “*master*” instead of “*rabbi*” which was what Nicodemus called Jesus. “*Rabbi*” is more respectful whereas “*master*” (i.e. “teacher”) means that Jesus Christ was no better than an ordinary teacher. A *rabbi* is a respected teacher of God's Word. Sadly, this scribe pretended to seek salvation in order to tempt Jesus.

THOUGHT: Did you indeed seek to be saved by Christ?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help my unbelief as I now seek to make sure of my salvation in Christ, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

THURSDAY, MAY 28

LUKE 10:25-37

Memory verse: Luke 10:37b

*“...they will not endure
sound doctrine; but after
their own lusts...”*

THE GOOD SAMARITAN—RIGHT AND YET WRONG!

Instead of allowing Himself to fall into their snare, Jesus helped the scribe to be saved from his sin, not by good works but by believing in Christ. To arrive at this conclusion, Jesus wanted the scribe to answer His question in this manner, *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.”* With this answer, Jesus said to the scribe, *“Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.”*

The scribe's answer was correct, for all who have believed in Christ as their Lord and Saviour have this love of God in them. They can all love God with all their heart, soul, strength and mind, and their neighbour as themselves. This is the result of salvation but not the means of salvation, for no sinner can love God and his neighbour in this manner on his own. Therefore, Christ said that the scribe answered rightly. But then He also told him to do it, and he shalt live, i.e. have eternal life. Jesus knew that the scribe would understand that if he were to love God completely as he had described, he had to love his neighbour as himself.

Loving God in such a complete manner cannot be seen or measured accurately. There is no tangible yardstick to measure such a love for God outside of loving one's neighbour. Firstly, God cannot be seen. How do you love someone who cannot be seen? Secondly, how does one measure such a complete love toward God in practical terms? Can he give his life? What about giving all his possessions? If God demanded these of him to show his love, how and to whom does he give these? But the measure of such a love for God is measured by his love for his neighbour. He loves his neighbour as himself, not more than himself. To love one's neighbour more than himself, that neighbour becomes his idol. The way to love his neighbour as himself without compromising and sinning against him and God is to love God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. To love his neighbour as himself means that what he wants for himself in terms of eternity and faithfulness, he also wants for his neighbour.

THOUGHT: Have you been loving your neighbour as yourself?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to love Thee by loving all my neighbours as myself, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

FRIDAY, MAY 29

LUKE 10:25-37

Memory verse: Luke 10:31

“...when he saw him,
he passed by on the other side.”

THE GOOD SAMARITAN—THE PRIEST!

The priests were the most holy of all Israelites. The LORD made them so when He appointed them as the only people on earth who could mediate between Himself and man. The priests had to be present to kill the offerings and present them to the LORD when worshippers brought their offerings. No one else was permitted to do it, not even the kings of Israel. Therefore, the priests had a unique spiritual responsibility to keep themselves holy and not do anything that might disqualify them from the spiritual service. If the priests touched a dead person, they became unclean for seven days. Numbers 19:11: *“He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days.”* The priest had much to “lose” in terms of his holy work if he approached the man who might be dead. He would have to touch him in order to ascertain if he was dead or near death. The Bible, in verse 30, describes him as half dead. Hence, the priest in the parable passed by on the other side, i.e. he did not even go near the injured man. He had no intention to help, for he felt that maintaining his spiritual cleanliness was more important than going near that injured man.

But we see that the parable in verse 31 said that he *“came down... that way.”* Since the parable begins by saying that the injured man went down from Jerusalem, we must assume that the priest also came down from Jerusalem. This means that, very likely, the priest would have completed his priestly duties in Jerusalem. He was returning home and not going up to Jerusalem to carry out his priestly duties. Therefore, his reasoning about contaminating himself by touching the dead body did not apply. He had no reason not to help the injured man. If he was dead and the priest touched him, then the priest would be unclean for seven days at home, and after going through the cleansing process, he would be spiritually clean to resume his duties. Also, he was not the only priest in Jerusalem who could perform priestly duties. Wasn't helping the injured man more important even when he had to go up to Jerusalem for ministry? The man was seriously injured and needed help, especially salvation help!

THOUGHT: Will I help someone in car trouble on my way to church for worship?

PRAYER: Father, grant me wisdom to make right decisions.

SATURDAY, MAY 30

LUKE 10:25-37

Memory verse: Luke 10:32

*“...which stripped him of his raiment,
and wounded him, and departed,
leaving him half dead.”*

THE GOOD SAMARITAN—THE LEVITE!

Like the priests, the Levites devoted their lives to the work of the Temple. They assisted the priests during offerings when worshippers brought their sacrifices. They also studied and taught God’s Word in Old Testament times. That was why they were not given any land but lived in 48 Levitical cities. They were supported by the tithes of the twelve tribes of Israel. They taught the Word of God and assisted the priests in spiritual work at the Tabernacle and later in the Temple.

In the time of Christ, some of the Levites were probably also scribes since scribes were the experts in the Law of God. Verse 32 said, *“likewise a Levite,”* which implies that he, too, came down from Jerusalem after assisting the priest at the Temple. The Levite did better than the priest in that he came and looked. He stopped and went closer to the injured man to look at him. If the man were dead, he would not have contaminated himself spiritually as long as he did not touch him. His response was the same as the priest’s; he ignored the injured man and passed by on the other side.

The Levite also had no legitimate reason not to help the injured man. Even if he had, like the priest, would the spiritual uncleanness that prevented them from doing the work of the LORD be a legitimate reason not to help an injured man?

We are busy people rushing from one place to another with a purpose; otherwise, we would not leave home. How vital is that purpose to us in an incident requiring immediate attention, and would we forgo or delay our important business to help? The help rendered must come with no expected return of personal gain or praise.

In this parable, we may look askance at the priest and Levite as “bad” or “uncaring” people, but we are often more like them than we care to admit. How frequently have we stopped to help someone at the expense of fulfilling our personal agenda?

THOUGHT: Is there an agenda so critical to you that you would not forfeit it to help someone in trouble?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, prepare me always to help others.

LORD'S DAY, MAY 31

LUKE 10:25-37

Memory verse: Luke 10:33

“...a certain Samaritan,
as he journeyed...
he had compassion on him.”

THE GOOD SAMARITAN—THE SAMARITAN!

Based on the wording of verse 30, “A *certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho...*” we can assume that the injured man was probably a Jew. A Samaritan would not be coming down from Jerusalem, for Samaritans were regarded as outcasts to Jews. The animosity Jews had for Samaritans was mutual. Jews would not pass through the city of Samaria as they travelled from north to south or south to north. They would instead take the longer route and travel around the outskirts of Samaria.

If he was a Jew, then the kindness shown to him by the Samaritan stranger would be even more significant. He overcame his animosity to help the injured Jew. He also disregarded his agenda to stop and care for a Jewish stranger. He furthermore put aside his safety for robbers might be hiding and they could use the injured man as bait to lure some unsuspecting soul and rob him too. He ignored all these concerns and cared for the injured man because he had compassion on him. His compassion was genuine as seen by the extent of his care for the injured man. He treated his wounds, put him on his own beast, brought him to an inn and told the innkeeper to care for him till he recovered after paying him two pence the next day. Before he left, he also said that if two pence were insufficient to care for him, he would return to pay the balance. After relating the parable, Jesus asked the lawyer whom he thought was the neighbour to the injured man. The answer was “*He that shewed mercy on him.*” He did not even wish to mention the word “Samaritan!” Jesus told him to go and do likewise.

If the love of God had been in his heart, he would have behaved like a Samaritan. To love God is to love all men, including our enemies. If they are in trouble, we must help them when possible. There must never be a callousness in our hearts where we do not help, for not doing so may result in the person dying in sin to be cast into hell forever.

THOUGHT: Can I overcome all prejudices and set aside my rights, so that I can show compassion to others?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to love all men just as Thou has loved the world and sent Jesus to die for the world, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

MONDAY, JUNE 1

LUKE 11:1-13

Memory verse: Luke 11:4

*“...Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come...”*

THE MIDNIGHT FRIEND—LESSON ON PRAYER

The disciples saw Jesus praying. After He had finished His prayer, they asked the Lord to teach them to pray just as John the Baptist taught his disciples. Learning from Jesus directly was the norm. It was the right request because if the Master needed to pray, how much more the disciples? The prayer Jesus taught them was similar in composition to the one He preached in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matt 6:9-13).

All prayer must be to God the heavenly Father, through the finished work of the Son and with the help of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in all believers. Prayer is like a child crying to the Heavenly Father for help. This is a novel concept taught by Christ to His disciples, for the God of the Old Testament dealt with Israel from the perspective of a reverential God, with the Mount Sinai experience foremost in their thoughts. Israel approached God with fear and trembling. Seeing God as a loving, gracious heavenly Father whom they could approach at any time of the day or night was not Israel's experience. They knew not to approach God in sin, or severe punishment could befall them. However, with a father-child relationship taught by Christ, He revealed a close and intimate relationship between God and His church.

Then Jesus proceeded with the rest of the prayer, teaching the disciples to pray continually for God's glory and their daily needs. They had to disregard iniquities in their heart when they prayed; otherwise, God would not hear their prayers—one of the most difficult sins to repent before God, is the sin of an unforgiving spirit. The believer who has tasted salvation that cost Jesus' life must also forgive every sinner who sins against him. In this manner, he protects himself from sinning against God because an unforgiving spirit stems from a heart that is not born again. Unforgiveness leads to anger and hatred, and ultimately to murder.

This pattern of prayer includes praising God in all we ask, praying for a life of faith, trusting in God to provide daily, a heart of flesh to forgive every sin, and discernment to stay away from evil people and all temptations.

THOUGHT: Can I forgive just as God has forgiven me in Christ?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, teach me to pray the Lord's Prayer all my life so that I may live a life of faith, trusting in Thee all the days of my life.

TUESDAY, JUNE 2

LUKE 11:1-13

Memory verse: Luke 11:2-4

*“...And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.”*

THE MIDNIGHT FRIEND—PRAY BIBLICALLY

Jesus taught His disciples to pray in a manner that Old Testament saints were not taught. Addressing God as “Father” was unthinkable, for Israel approached Him as the holy and righteous Almighty God. They were fearful and very respectful of approaching the Almighty who appeared to them in “...thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled” (Exod 19:16).

In Luke 11, the disciples asked Christ to teach them to pray. He began by addressing God as our heavenly Father. Then, the goal of prayer was to hallow God’s name. To pray for God’s kingdom to come is to pray for God’s justice to prevail on earth, as God’s justice always prevails in heaven. Pray for God’s will to be done on earth, because God’s will is always done in heaven. This prayer is based on a father-child relationship that was an entirely new idea for the disciples.

The prayer taught by Christ here is similar to the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 where the Lord taught us that all believers must pray according to the pattern revealed in the Lord’s Prayer. The reason is that prayer is the most essential tool given by God to all His children to help them be victorious in their spiritual battles. They must never indulge in self-confidence, for they will surely fail. How can believers’ self-confidence help them in the face of the cunning devices of the devil, who is the father of lies? If they pray and ask God for guidance and direction before making decisions, God will help them make the right decisions in their Christian life. That is why God commanded all His children to pray without ceasing. The pattern of prayer taught in Luke 11:2-4 is that every believer must pray for their prayers to be heard and answered by God.

How potent and blessed prayer is in every believer’s life! God has given all His children direct access to His presence at any time of the day or night. No matter how small or complex a problem is, God’s children can bring it before His holy presence. He desires His children to always run to Him in prayer, for He desires to hear and answer their cries.

THOUGHT: Will I also ask Christ to teach me to pray?

PRAYER: O Heavenly Father, may I never stop communing with Thee.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3

LUKE 11:1-13

Memory verse: Luke 11:8

*“...yet because of his importunity
he will rise and give him
as many as he needeth.”*

THE MIDNIGHT FRIEND—PERSISTENT PRAYER

If every prayer uttered in faith by God’s children is answered immediately, the believer’s relationship with God would be fleeting and cold. The heart and groaning within the believer’s soul would be void of passion for God and Christ. It would become a disdain for “easy come, easy go.” Thank God that God desires all His children to persevere in prayer. By persevering in prayer, the conviction of the person’s heart is revealed. He is determined to make that request sincerely rather than perfunctorily. If he is not sincere, he will soon stop praying. His concern for what he prays for is shallow. However, the opposite is true when he is deeply concerned for someone or something to the point of desperation, like David, who fasted and prayed for his son’s recovery, who was sick unto death.

Persevering in prayer is needful in every believer’s communion with God. Knowing the right way to pray to God is the beginning of biblical prayer. But learning to persevere in prayer is the heart and soul of a sustained communion with God, like a loving child spending uninterrupted time with his loving father. The parable describes a man who requested three loaves of bread to feed a friend who arrived at his home at midnight. The Jewish custom is to provide food for guests when they arrive. He asked only for a loan of three loaves, not a gift. But the reply from his friend was to stop troubling him as his door was shut, his children were with him in bed and he did not wish to get up from his bed.

The Lord said that even though his friend came at midnight to ask, he would not let him have the three loaves. However, because of his friend’s importunity, i.e. troublesome request, he would rise and give him as many as he needed. He understood the Jewish culture of feeding a friend who came at any time of the day or night. His friend would not stop asking for a loan of three loaves until his request was granted. He would remain outside the door until he got his three loaves. How much more when we pray persistently to our God, who is more than a friend! He is our heavenly Father who delights in hearing and answering prayers. Let us pray without ceasing.

THOUGHT: Do I pray without ceasing?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, teach me to persevere in my prayers.

THURSDAY, JUNE 4

LUKE 11:1-13

Memory verse: Luke 11:13

“...how much more shall
your heavenly Father give the
Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”

THE MIDNIGHT FRIEND—PRAYER ANSWERED

If the friend would not open the door to help a friend, but for his persistent request, he relented and gave him all he needed, how much more would our heavenly Father give to His beloved children who ask persistently?

Our heavenly Father wants His children to ask, not perfunctorily but passionately with heartfelt conviction. To capture this truth, Jesus used a sequence of verbs that is best quoted: *“And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened”* (Luke 11:9-10). Ask, seek and knock are crucial in every believer’s prayer so that he would know God heard him when the prayers are answered. The believer’s walk with God is strengthened. His faith and trust in God is deepened. These are the spiritual results of our prayers that God desires for all His beloved children if only they would pray without ceasing from the heart! God has guaranteed us that He would hear and answer. The question is not whether God would hear and answer, but whether His children would ask, seek and knock!

Pray without ceasing; your heavenly Father will always give you what is best for your spiritual well-being. You ask for bread, fish or egg, and your heavenly Father will provide you with bread, fish and egg. If we who are evil know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more shall our loving and gracious heavenly Father give us the very best, even the Holy Spirit who dwells in all believers. Praying for the help of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life is the best prayer request a believer can ever ask God for. The Holy Spirit will comfort, strengthen, illuminate, guide, fill, direct, grant discernment, lead and come upon the believer so that all will do the will of God. Pray always according to God’s Word and will by faith, and the answers from God are always yes. All believers must focus on this truth of receiving an affirmative answer from God every time they pray. When the answer comes, the believer experiences the presence of the heavenly Father in his life.

THOUGHT: Do not stop praying.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to always pray in faith.

FRIDAY, JUNE 5

LUKE 12:13-21

Memory verse: Luke 12:14

*“...Man, who made me a judge
or a divider over you?”*

THE RICH FOOL—ABUNDANT LIFE?

Is a rich life measured by the abundance of what one possesses? Materialism has been the bane of society since the fall of man in the days of Adam. The plague of materialism that grips every sinner's heart continues to infect the new and younger generation. With the world shrinking by the minute because of the internet and AI, materialism has reinvented itself into a very desirable plague that knows no bounds. From the youngest to the oldest, life is measured by the abundance of what one possesses in terms of the invisible dollar through stocks, shares, and cryptocurrencies. Teenagers dream of becoming multi-millionaires, sparing no effort to pursue the deceitfulness of riches until it is too late, when youth has evaporated and is replaced by grey hairs and years of regret. Foolish men will not learn from past generations' mistakes but doggedly repeat them at more incredible speed and with great destruction like moths flying headlong toward open flames!

A man came to Jesus and asked Him to speak to his brother to divide the inheritance. He did not get much or anything from the inheritance that was given to his brother. He came to Jesus for intervention so that his brother might relent and give him some if Jesus were to ask.

Jesus' reply was an emphatic NO! Christ's mission from the heavenly Father was to be the Saviour of sinners from sin, not to arbitrate over inconsequential matters of the flesh. The warning from Christ is very apt for all and not only for this man. The life of man does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. The sin of covetousness is the plague that has caused many to fall into this deception. Many have paid for this foolish vanity with their lives. Like the rich fool who wanted to tear down his old barns and build bigger ones to store his bumper harvest, not realising that he would die that very night.

Naked we came into this world, and naked we will leave this world. Think and care for your soul more than for your body, which will soon perish.

THOUGHT: The pastoral ministry is not an occupation but a vocation.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to keep my mind and eyes on all things eternal for Christ's sake. Amen.

SATURDAY, JUNE 6

LUKE 12:13-21

Memory verse: Luke 12:15

*“...for a man’s life consisteth
not in the abundance of
the things which he possesseth.”*

THE RICH FOOL–IS ABUNDANCE SINFUL?

If a man works hard diligently and honestly, is it wrong to have an abundance of material things? God blessed His servants like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and King David with much material wealth. If being wealthy is a sin, then God would become a sinner.

God created the world. God created everything in the world for man’s enjoyment. The world has no intrinsic value in terms of real wealth. It is just a wonderful world for man’s food and pleasure. The problem is not in the world, for the world cannot sin, but man can, and do sin. Therefore, having abundance of material things, man foolishly believes he is wealthy and more successful than his fellow men. Such notions of better or greater material wealth are like two men comparing nothing with nothing! Man has forgotten that naked he came into the world, naked he will leave. Just because he can eat “better” food than his neighbour, does not make him richer or better. It just gives him more choices in what he eats. For him to feel great about himself because he has more choices in life is myopic. Soon, he will die like everyone else. Where will he be?

Man’s attitude toward the world has changed. Before man became a sinner, he saw the world with innocent eyes. He enjoyed the world God had created for him with no desire for ownership or greed. The world was like a garden where man could find food and drink for perfect pleasure without experiencing sin. However, when sin entered, man could no longer look at the world and enjoy it as he used to. The world has become a place that reveals man’s sinful nature and desires. Man’s greed and wicked deeds against other men centre on the things of the world. Take the past empires of man, for they are all defined by the size of their influence and ownership, ignoring the tens of thousands of souls killed, lives ruined, and families destroyed.

Abundance is not a sin in itself, but when sinful man measures himself by his abundance, he has sinned against his own soul. He is motivated by the love of money, which is the root of all evil.

THOUGHT: Am I motivated by salary, i.e. the love of money?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me never to take my eyes away from Christ and seek only all things eternal, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

LORD'S DAY, JUNE 7

LUKE 12:13-21

Memory verse: Luke 12:20-21

*"So is he that layeth up
treasure for himself,
and is not rich toward God."*

THE RICH FOOL—THE REASON HE IS A FOOL

The word for "fool" refers to one who lacks understanding. He fails to reflect on his life and makes decisions based on an uncertain tomorrow, often influenced by past experiences that have left him with a sense of always having a tomorrow. The rich fool was focused on his bumper harvest and the larger barns needed to store them, so he assumed he would live long enough to enjoy his newfound wealth! He considered tearing down the old, smaller barns and building larger, newer ones. New investments to cater for new wealth occupied his mind. He said to himself in Luke 12:19, *"And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry."*

In his mind, his future was secured safely with his newfound wealth. His present improved carnal lifestyle would continue with his new and larger barns filled with his plentiful harvest. His mind was thoroughly focused on eating, drinking and merry-making. Then God said to him that he was a fool because he failed to realise that *"this night thy [his] soul shall be required of thee [him]: then whose shall those things be, which thou [he] hast provided?"* (Luke 12:20).

God called him a fool, not because he had wealth. God called him a fool because he was content with a wealth he could not hold on to. He worked so hard only to have another enjoy his hard-earned wealth. Furthermore, he should have known that his life was not in his hands. He had no control over many things in the present and future, so it was foolish to say to his soul that his future was secured. With this foolish notion, he wanted to live in carnality till he died. His life of sin would condemn him to hell as he would die in sin.

The rich man did not reflect on his life. He allowed his lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes to blind him to a hedonistic life of materialism that consumed his soul like a canker. The seductive powers of worldliness, with all its loud philosophies of "never enough" continue to plague humanity.

Has it seduced you, dear reader? Are you a fool?

THOUGHT: What do I say to my soul daily? Eat, drink and be merry?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me not to be a fool for Christ's sake.

MONDAY, JUNE 8

LUKE 12:31-48

Memory verse: Luke 12:31

*“...for it is your Father’s good pleasure
to give you the kingdom.”*

READY FOR CHRIST’S RETURN?—EVIDENCE #1

God gave biblical prophecies to His children, not to the rest of the world who reject Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. If they are not interested in His first coming, they are not interested in His return. His children must take heed to study and understand their heavenly Father’s revelation. Their present life must then be lived in light of His revealed truth; otherwise, they will be charged with mocking God by pretending to study and understand His prophecies.

Prophecies are not to be understood as merely future events, the way a person understands the weatherman’s prediction. Prophecies are understood as the future deeds that God will do, just like when a father tells his children that by the end of the year, the family is going on a holiday. The children know that their father has the means to bring the family on that holiday. Do we believe that God has the power and means to bring to pass all that He has revealed to us?

The believer’s attitude toward his material possessions is the first evidence of his readiness. Before salvation, the dependence on material possessions was the global norm. A person’s future needs depend on his present and future earnings. He strives, by hook or by crook, to amass as much as he can for fear that he might starve or be in want after retirement. He behaves like an orphan with no one to help him.

But after salvation, he becomes a child of God. He now has his heavenly Father, who has promised to provide for all his physical needs for the rest of his life as he focuses on his spiritual well-being. Matthew 6:33: *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”* If God calls him to sell all that he has to follow Him, he will do so obediently and cheerfully. In his heart, he knows that his real treasure is no longer in things material but all things spiritual. Learning to stop trusting in the abundance of what one possesses is the work of the Holy Spirit. The more God’s child understands His goodness and greatness, the easier it is for him to trust Him. This trust must last a lifetime, regardless of the many changes in life.

THOUGHT: Where is my heart’s treasure?

PRAYER: Father, may I lean on Thee alone, and not on material wealth.

TUESDAY, JUNE 9

LUKE 12:31-48

Memory verse: Luke 12:37

*“For where your treasure is,
there will your heart be also.”*

READY FOR CHRIST’S RETURN?—EVIDENCE #2

Having surrendered his life to Christ and learned to live by faith daily, the believer needs to know God’s will for his redeemed life. His personal ambitions and desires for his life have ceased to exist. To hold on to his own ambitions and do whatever he wants with his life reflect one who is not ready for Christ’s return. He lives in carnality and sin. He thinks he is a believer, but he is not.

A believer will have his loins girded about his waist for easy mobility and battle. This phrase is commonly used to describe the need for urgency in biblical times. They wear long robes, so to take larger steps in running or fighting, they need to gird their loins. Their lights will be burning too. These are figures of speech to describe the spiritual preparedness of believers. Their minds are rooted in God’s Word, enabling them to think godly thoughts. Their reasons and evaluation of people and life circumstances are based on the Bible. Their desires are heavenly and spiritual. They know their Lord Jesus Christ will return soon. He has entrusted them with tasks to do. His return is assured. They must be ready at any time, day or night. Nothing must be left to chance.

To be watchful means to be awakened out of sleep, commanded to remain awake and not go back to sleep. A believer watches over his holy witness for Christ. He ensures his life is lived according to the Holy Scriptures. He studies God’s Word daily to ensure that his witness for Christ is grounded in the Bible. Otherwise, he will misrepresent Christ in front of his neighbours and loved ones. All believers will never desire to present a false Christ.

To be ready refers to a life of holy service. He is busy with the work of his Lord, knowing that the moment He returns, he can serve no more. He understands fully the precious nature of his time of service on earth. Every minute wasted is a minute lost forever. He must redeem the time, for he has wasted enough of his time on earth in the pursuit of carnality as an unbeliever. He must be ever ready for Christ’s return.

THOUGHT: Am I ever ready for my Saviour’s return, day or night?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for saving me from my sins and for leaving me on earth to serve Thee, in Christ’s name. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10

LUKE 12:31-48

Memory verse: Luke 12:45

*“Blessed are those servants,
whom the lord when he cometh
shall find watching...”*

READY FOR CHRIST’S RETURN?—EVIDENCE #3

The desire for readiness to meet the Lord is the third evidence. Believers know the Lord is God, who is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. When they meet Him, they know every thought and motive behind every word and action will be judged without error. The only way for them to be righteous at the end of that fearful judgment is to be cleansed by the blood of Christ with a heart of sincere repentance. All believers who live in this manner daily and every moment of their lives will have no fear of meeting the Lord. The Lord will see Christ in them for they are in Christ.

However, who are the ones who are fearful of meeting the Lord? They are the ones who have something to hide. They do not repent when their sins are brought to their attention. They behave as hypocrites. In the presence of others, they talk and behave like Christians. They pray biblically correct prayers. They pass themselves off as believers marvellously and will dupe many in the church. They do not have the fear of God in their heart because their hearts are dead in sin. They cannot see their folly because their spiritual eyes are blind. Their hearts are like those that Christ described in Luke 12:45. Thinking that the LORD is delaying His coming, they fool around all the time. They think that the moment right before Christ comes, they can repent, and all will be well! A born-again believer will not think so foolishly, as this tests God and God knows it well.

Living a life pleasing to God is the life that is ever ready to meet the Lord, which is why God revealed Christ’s inevitable return to His children. Our preparation, or lack of it, reveals the reality of our salvation, or lack of it. Remember to ensure that this desire to meet the Lord remains regardless of how our circumstances might change. This preparedness must remain constant.

He who is always prepared will rule with Christ one day. This is Christ’s assurance in this parable. The motive is to be prepared because we love Him and not because of the reward of ruling with Christ.

THOUGHT: Am I ever prepared to meet Christ, day or night?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, let my heart, mind and eyes remain fixed on Jesus as I wait for His soon return, in Christ’s Name. Amen.

THURSDAY, JUNE 11

LUKE 12:31-48

Memory verse: Luke 12:45-46

*“And that servant,
which knew his lord’s will,
and prepared not himself...”*

READY FOR CHRIST’S RETURN?—EVIDENCE #4

The fourth evidence is from the negative perspective. There is no indifference or indecision regarding the return of Christ. The consequence for rejecting and not being ready when Christ returns is dire. To be ready is to live holy lives, busily serving and witnessing for Christ. Not to be ready is to live in sin. Jesus describes such a person in Luke 12:45-46: *“But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.”* Jesus Christ regards him as an unbeliever, and He will appoint his portion with the unbelievers.

The message from Christ is very clear. A person who is born again has the Holy Spirit convicting him to live a holy life according to the Bible. When he understands the doctrine of Christ’s inevitable return, the Holy Spirit will compel him to ready himself to meet his Saviour. He wants to please his Lord and not disappoint Him when he stands before Him on judgment day. The evidence of a Christian is his readiness to meet his Lord.

The warning from Christ to the one who knows and does nothing and also to the ones who do not know and are not able to do anything is found in Luke 12:47-48: *“And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.”*

There is no escape from the dire consequences of unpreparedness.

We prepare for everything we do, so we will not fail or be disappointed. Meeting Jesus Christ, who is God, demands a biblical preparation that ensures we are truly born again.

THOUGHT: Am I biblically prepared to meet Jesus?

PRAYER: Father, help me to be true to my confession of Jesus as Lord and Saviour by preparing for His glorious return.

FRIDAY, JUNE 12

LUKE 13:1-9

Memory verse: Luke 13:2-3

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

PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE—NOT ME!

When disasters happen to others, we think we are fine because the disaster did not happen to us. Outward condemnation of others is common in all societies throughout the ages. The heart of the problem is the seed of self-righteousness. Self is understood to be better than others, especially in the face of calamities that happen to others.

But the Lord knew better. He read their sinful hearts. Luke 13:2-3: *“And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”* These Galileans who died were probably followers of Judas of Galilee, who taught his followers not to pay taxes (cf. Acts 5:37). Pilate’s duty was to collect taxes on behalf of Caesar. Pilate’s jurisdiction was Judea and not the Galilee region, which belonged to King Herod. But Judas’ teaching probably impacted his jurisdiction, and he killed them and mingled their blood with the sacrifices these Galileans offered. The ones who related this account to Jesus believed the Galileans had to be terrible sinners to suffer such a shameful fate. Jesus warned them to stop this censorious judgment, judge their own hearts, and repent. If they do not judge themselves and repent, they would perish like these Galileans.

Jesus cited another example of the tower of Siloam that collapsed, and eighteen people died in the accident. Jesus warned them not to think they were the worst of sinners who lived in Jerusalem because they died so horribly.

Whenever we come across any news of deaths, it is incumbent on all of us to look within our own souls to see if it were me, where would I end up? Would I end up in hell or heaven? Presumptuous sin is a deadly delusion whereby many who thought they would be in heaven when they die, to their horror, were cast into hell with no escape. Do not think “not me”, but think “what if it were me?” Presumption of salvation is the fruit of self-righteousness, a deadly sin.

THOUGHT: What if it were me who died?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may I examine my own heart regularly to make sure I am in Christ, in Jesus’ Name I pray. Amen.

SATURDAY, JUNE 13

LUKE 13:1-9

Memory verse: Luke 13:8-9

“And if it bear fruit, well:

and if not...

thou shalt cut it down.”

PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE—REPENT TODAY!

Planting a fig tree in vineyards is not uncommon for many practical reasons. A fig tree improves soil health, encourages biodiversity, enhances grape quality and provides additional revenue since figs are desirable. However, this fig tree did not provide any of the above benefits in the vineyard. The fig tree appeared to be dead. The owner who planted the fig tree expected to see some fruit but found none. Figs usually appear before the leaves. They will be the first sign that the fruit season is coming. If the fig tree is dead, then its purpose in the vineyard is lost. It becomes a cumbersome tree taking in the nutrients from the soil when it is supposed to enhance it, not deplete it.

The fig tree represents Israel. The vineyard is the world. The owner of the vineyard is the Lord Jesus Christ or God.

The owner had been seeking fruit from the fig tree for three years. He found none. Christ had been ministering in Israel for the past three years. The leaders of Israel had the Word of God (the Old Testament). They should have recognised Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, i.e. the Christ (in Greek). For the past three years, the Lord had taught, preached the Word of God and evidenced His claim to be God incarnate by His miracles, yet they refused to see. They refused to believe. Israel was founded to bring blessings, just as the fig tree is planted to bring blessings. The fig tree is useless if it cannot recognise and believe in the Messiah. What is the point of Israel's existence if it cannot recognise the Messiah? God created and brought Israel into existence, with everything in Israel ordained by God. Israel's holy days, dietary laws, dress code, manner of worship, etc., are all spiritual to show the world that Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away their sins. Israel's behaviour, i.e. her fruits, must manifest the glory of God's love in Christ to the world dying in sin. If she fails to do this, then Israel might as well cease to exist now that Christ has already come! But the dresser in the parable asked the owner to give the tree one more year. If there was still no fruit, let it be cut down. Thus, God replaced Israel with the church witness.

THOUGHT: Repent today; do not think I have tomorrow.

PRAYER: Father, forgive me for my sins for Christ's sake. Amen.

LORD'S DAY, JUNE 14

LUKE 14:1-11

Memory verse: Luke 14:3-4

*"And they could not answer him
again to these things."*

PARABLE OF THE INVITED ONES—POLITICAL LEADERS?

When church leaders become political leaders, the death nail has already been driven into the coffin of that local church. Church leaders are spiritual leaders. The characteristics of political leaders include doing what is right in their own eyes, pleasing man, deceiving their undiscerning followers through opinions that they cloak deceptively by citing Bible verses, and being by nature cultic. They fear losing face; as such, they struggle with repentance, for they cannot afford to lose the man-centred aura their delusional mind has manufactured.

Jesus went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath day. It was a very high honour to be invited to such a home! The enemies of Christ watched Him insidiously. He deliberately healed a man with dropsy, i.e. water retention in the body where the limbs would swell. Before Jesus healed him, He asked these very important people (lawyers and Pharisees) who were present if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath day. They kept silent. Then Jesus healed him, and asked them if they would pull out an ass or an ox from a pit if it had fallen into it. Again, they said nothing.

Why did they not answer the Lord? They knew the answer to these questions, and so did the ordinary Jews. These lawyers and Pharisees were like religious police officers who demanded that the Jews kept their oral traditions or else they would be punished for their disobedience.

If they had answered Christ, their answer would have been no, for no one could heal on the Sabbath day. Their answer to the second question would have been yes, they would definitely pull their ass and ox out of the pit! To answer Jesus would have resulted in a shameful contradiction they could not afford. They could not bear to be wrong in their teaching and practice of God's Word, as they were the guardians of God's Word. They would lose face in the eyes of their followers! Being seen as important and clever meant that they could not publicly admit that they had been wrong. Beware of such church leaders, and beware that you do not become one!

THOUGHT: Am I a man-pleaser with a cultic personality?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to please Thee all the days of my life, for Thou must increase and I must decrease, in Jesus' name. Amen.

MONDAY, JUNE 15

LUKE 14:1-11

Memory verse: Luke 14:11

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

PARABLE OF THE INVITED ONES—WHERE DO I SIT?

Like the Pharisees and lawyers, we love to be seen as important people. At a banquet, we do not like to be seated in obscure corners or placed the furthest from the host at the dining table. The ones who sit closest to him, especially the one who sits at his right hand, are usually the most important among his invited guests. Others who love to sit next to the host would envy him.

This was what Jesus observed in the home of the chief Pharisee, which prompted Him to give the parable of the invited ones. He used a wedding feast as His example. When invited, it is best not to sit in the highest room because a more important person may come later and you would be asked to leave and be seated in the lowest room. But when you come and sit in the lowest room and the host sees you and asks you to sit in a higher room, others will see you as being promoted.

Jesus gave the lesson at the end of the parable. He said in Luke 14:11, *“For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”* Carnal men and women often measure themselves by their earthly titles and man-centred accolades. They like to be called presidents, chief executive officers or managers. These titles make them great in their own eyes and in the world’s eyes. They get invited to important activities where they are the guests-of-honour, seated in the highest seat. Their egos and pride-filled hearts rejoice with these empty, foolish, pitiful praises. If he is somebody based on these externals, then he is nobody. Take them all away, and he has nothing, for these will all be gone with time and death. A child of God sees himself only as a sinner saved by grace. Whatever praises the world may heap on him, he knows they are nothing compared to what he has received from God. He has tasted God’s grace and mercy in Christ in his life. He is eternally grateful and knows he already has everything he needs in Christ. He needs nothing of what the world offers him. Therefore, to sit at the lowest seat is not a game he plays, hoping to be promoted, but the reality of a sincere spiritual experience he receives from God, that he knows he is nothing if not for God’s grace.

THOUGHT: Where do I usually sit when invited?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may I sit at the lowest seat. Amen.

TUESDAY, JUNE 16

LUKE 15:1-7

Memory verse: Luke 15:1-2

*"Then drew near unto him
all the publicans and sinners
for to hear him."*

PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP—WHO DO YOU RECEIVE?

Jesus was a magnet to publicans and sinners. They were regarded by many in Jewish society, especially in the eyes of the spiritual elite, as scum. The publicans were tax collectors who served the Romans. They were given special privileges and powers as their personal benefits or else they would not serve. These materialistic benefits included the right to enforce new types of taxes on the Jewish people. For example, if the Romans only demanded that those who owned a four-wheel cart be taxed, the publican included those with three or two wheels as well. The money collected from the tax on the four-wheelers would be given to the Romans, but the publicans would keep the tax collected for the three and two-wheelers. In this way, the publicans accepted the ostracism and hatred of their fellow Jews because they could live in luxury or at least, a very comfortable life. Sinners refer to those who live in sin openly, like harlots, or who might have committed a crime and been jailed, like thieves and robbers.

No religious person would associate with them, for that would show that they accept and approve of their sin, and perhaps were like them by association. But these "rejects" of society came to hear Jesus, and Jesus received them.

The religious leaders saw what had happened and murmured among themselves (Luke 15:2). Not only did they frown on Christ's association with these people, they also insinuated that He lacked discernment and did not recognise that what He had done was spiritually unclean and very wrong. Eating with someone in the time of Christ implied receiving him into your life as a family member or at least a close friend. Did Christ not know that they were the rejects of Jewish society and had to be ostracised?

Who do you receive into your life? Who are your friends? They define who you really are! All sinners need to know Christ. Reach out to all without discrimination. You must share readily and willingly if they come to you and desire to know Christ. Friend or foe, no believer must desire any sinner to die in sin and be cast into hell.

THOUGHT: Do I have a prejudice when sharing the Gospel?

PRAYER: Father, save me to share the Gospel with all without prejudice as the Holy Spirit leads and directs.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 17

LUKE 15:1-7

Memory verse: Luke 15:7

*“And when he hath found it,
he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.”*

PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP—SEEKING THE LOST!

A shepherd would go and look for his one lost sheep, even though he owned one hundred sheep. This was a matter of fact in Christ's time. Christ's main point in this Parable of the Lost Sheep was to raise the question of why the Pharisees and scribes would be offended by God, who looks for a lost sinner.

The shepherd is Christ. The lost sheep is the sinner. The wilderness is the world.

Sheep are very docile animals, and they are without guile. But they are also very dumb and helpless. They cannot differentiate between good green grass and poisonous weeds. They are timid and dare not drink the cool, refreshing water of flowing streams. If they fall or trip and roll into a depression on the ground, and end up with all their four legs pointing toward the sky, they cannot get themselves back up. They stay there until they die under the hot sun or wild animals come and devour them. They foolishly walk or run toward a cliff and plunge to their deaths. They have no way of returning home, unlike some other animals.

Based on the sheep's weaknesses and characteristics, the shepherd knew that if he did not go out to look for the lost sheep, it would not return on its own and would surely die! The shepherd searched high and low wherever he thought the lost sheep might be. He did not care for the inconvenience and the hardship. His single-mindedness drove him on. He was determined to find his lost sheep, no matter how long or difficult the search might be. Is this not an accurate picture of every sinner, including us before we were born again? Christ went out of His way to look for us. He did so by suffering and dying on the cross for our sins. God raised Him from the dead for all sinners' justification if they would believe. He found us. When? When the Gospel was shared with us, Christ found us and offered salvation. Thank God we accepted. When that happens, like when the sheep was found, there is joy on earth among all believers who know, and there is joy in heaven.

THOUGHT: Am I lost or have I been found?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee from the depths of my soul for finding a lost sheep like me. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.

THURSDAY, JUNE 18

LUKE 15:8-10

Memory verse: Luke 15:9-10

*“...Rejoice with me;
for I have found the piece
which I had lost.”*

PARABLE OF THE LOST COIN—THE LOST IS PRECIOUS

Every soul is precious in God's eyes. But to man, the preciousness of souls is measured by their usefulness to society and the abundance of what they possess. By their standards, human life has become very cheap. Thus, the killings in wars and even during peacetime, abuses, abortions, euthanasia and the legalisation of mercy killing in many countries. When the powerful satisfy their greed through conquests, millions die for nothing! Evil leaders glorify themselves by having their names etched in the annals of time at the cost of millions of lives.

To her shame, the church did not and still does not fare any better. Tens of thousands of Christians have been persecuted for their faith because of the church's blinded zeal that is not based on God's truth. The falsehood that permeates throughout 21st-century Christianity is diabolical. The gospel preached today is tainted by errors, distortions and deceptions. The gospel of the Roman Catholic Church is one of superstition and is anchored in church traditions rather than God's truth. The gospel of the Charismatics is carnal, promoting health and wealth, which Christ came to condemn. It is as if Christ died so that they could be healthy and wealthy on earth! This is blasphemy! Worst of all, perhaps, are the neo-evangelicals who proclaim the gospel from a Bible with mistakes. They are the worst and most dangerous because they are closest to the truth. They have the greatest capacity to deceive sinners, making them think they are believers, but in reality, they are still doomed to die in sin and be cast into hell.

All souls are precious to God. They are so precious that He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem us from our sins. All souls must be precious to every believer since they are precious to God. Do not stumble them. Do not deceive them with the false gospel. Live a holy life before God and all men, so that by your good works they will see Christ and glorify our Father who art in heaven.

THOUGHT: Are all souls in my life precious to me? Will I respond with my life of holiness?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, teach me to love souls by living and dying for them as Christ did for me, for Christ's sake. Amen.

FRIDAY, JUNE 19

LUKE 15:8-10

Memory verse: Luke 15:10

*“...there is joy in the
presence of the angels of God
over one sinner that repenteth.”*

PARABLE OF THE LOST COIN—FINDING THE LOST

In the case of the lost sheep, the sheep walked away from the shepherd into the wilderness and got lost. In the case of the lost coin, the woman lost it. How she lost it was not told. It is not crucial to the spiritual lesson in this parable.

The woman represents Christ. The lost coin represents the sinner. The house represents the world.

The coin was precious to her, but the coin did not know it was precious just like a sinner. The lost coin might be dirty and covered in dust after it was lost, assuming it fell and rolled into a dark corner. The floors of homes in biblical times were usually hardened mud and uneven, depending on how well the earth was pounded when it was constructed. The woman lit the candle to find her lost coin. She swept the house to ensure that no corner of her home was excluded from her search. With piles of swept dust and dirt carefully tucked in every room, she began searching through the pile of dust and dirt with her fingers. She hoped to find the lost coin, regardless of how dirty her fingers might become. She would seek diligently until she found the lost coin.

She might have put all her housework on hold or cancelled all other appointments until she found the lost coin. Finding the lost coin was foremost on her mind. She struggled to concentrate on whatever she wanted to do because she could not bear to lose the coin, even though she still had nine coins. That is the feeling of one who has lost something. You had it in your possession, and you lost it! You cannot bear that loss. It is not a matter of what you have left but what you have lost. She called her friends and neighbours together to rejoice when she found it. She told them her good news.

The moment God finds a lost sinner in Christ, *“...there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth”* (Luke 15:10). It is not the angels rejoicing, but joy in their presence. The One in their presence is God Almighty. God rejoices in heaven when a sinner is saved.

THOUGHT: Have I gone out of my way to reach a sinner for Christ?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for finding me.

SATURDAY, JUNE 20

LUKE 15:11-32

Memory verse: Luke 15:15-16

*“...and he sent him into his fields
to feed swine.”*

PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON—THE BEHAVIOUR

The Parable of the Prodigal Son directly targeted the Pharisees and scribes, compared to the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. The first two parables taught them the value of a lost soul. Christ's desire to save sinners must never be frowned on but rejoiced in. In this Parable of the Lost Son, Jesus taught that He wanted to save these scribes and Pharisees. He bore no animosity toward them, only the heart of a Saviour to save sinners, including the ones who wanted Him killed.

This parable of the lost son begins with a man with two sons. The younger son was rebellious and ungrateful. He asked the father for his inheritance. An inheritance belongs to the sons only after the father dies. To ask for the inheritance before the father dies is as good as saying to the father, “Why are you still alive?” The father acceded to the younger son's request and divided his wealth into two portions: one to the younger son. Not many days later, after the younger son had gathered all his inheritance, he left home to live in a faraway country. There, he wasted his wealth in riotous living. After he had spent all his inheritance, a mighty famine arose in the land where the younger son lived. He had nothing left. He looked for a job to survive. He attached himself to a citizen of that country who sent him to feed swine. It was not a spiritually unclean job because handling swine was not a sin. The Jews were forbidden to eat unclean animals like swine, which means that only after the swine was dead were the Jews forbidden to touch them. In desperation and great hunger, the younger son felt like eating the husks that the swine ate. In other words, he felt like he was a swine or that the swine was better than him because the swine had eaten before him. The swines were fed, but he was hungry!

The younger son began in great carnality with much wealth until he lost everything. His physical body was fraught with a desperate hunger he had never felt before. He needed to be in this state of desperation for him to be transformed by God. God used the adverse circumstances in his life to break him of his carnal self-will in order to save him.

THOUGHT: Was I like the prodigal son before salvation or am I still like him now?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I am coming home, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

LORD'S DAY, JUNE 21

LUKE 15:11-32

Memory verse: Luke 15:18-19

*"And am no more worthy
to be called thy son..."*

PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON—THE HOMECOMING

Simply returning home was not the primary focus of the parable. The younger son had to return for the right reason so he would not repeat the same rebellious mistake. Many prodigal sons return home, but do not stay home for long. After a short stay, when things return to normal, they soon forget why they had left and returned the first time. This prodigal son had to experience a brokenness of spirit first before he could return home for good and not want to leave home again.

For that to happen, the younger son had to realise his foolishness and unworthiness in his father's house. He could not return as a self-righteous son, which would bring pride and arrogance. His return had to be permanent and based on the right reason. He had to repent for the sins he had committed against his father.

Here, the father represents God. The prodigal son represents a sinner.

Luke 15:18-19: *"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants."* He realised he had sinned against heaven (i.e. God) and his father. He admitted that he was not worthy of being called a son any more. He did not mind returning home, losing his birthright, and being relegated to being one of the hired servants, i.e. to serve for wages, which was up to the father to decide. In short, he acknowledged he had lost his right to call his father, father. By demanding the inheritance prematurely, he wanted the father dead. This was a grave sin. He prepared himself to return home with humility and a repentant heart. It was not to demand his right of sonship, but just to be allowed to come home.

True repentance is described here. It begins with a broken and a contrite heart. God used the external circumstances of his life to break him so that he might realise the grievous nature of his sin against God. In sincere repentance, he returned home.

THOUGHT: Have I returned home to God?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me understand that Christ's salvation is returning home to Thee, my Father, in Jesus' Name. Amen.

MONDAY, JUNE 22

LUKE 15:11-32

Memory verse: Luke 15:24

*"For this my son was dead,
and is alive again;
he was lost, and is found..."*

PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON – FATHER'S LOVE

The son did not know his father had been watching the horizon for his return. When the son was "a great way off" (Luke 15:20), his father saw him. The son was a speck on the horizon, but his father did not forget his gait and silhouette. The father had compassion, i.e. his bowels yearned for his son. What the son did was forgotten by the father, i.e. he would not hold it against him. His father had already forgiven him, but until the son returned home, he would not experience the blessing of being forgiven, i.e. reconciliation with his father. The father could not wait for the son to come to him, so he ran to meet his beloved prodigal son. He embraced him with his head on his son's neck and kissed him on the cheek as was their custom to show deep affection.

Immediately, the son confessed his sin sincerely to the father as planned (Luke 15:21). But the father was more concerned that he had returned, and he could embrace and love him. The feeling from the parents' hearts when a wayward son returns is indescribable. The joy is unspeakable. Immediately, the father instructed his servants to prepare a feast to celebrate his son's homecoming. Before that, he dressed his son in the best robe, indicating he was still his son. The ring was placed on his finger to indicate to the world that, no matter what anyone might have heard about his son's sinful behaviour, he had been forgiven and remained a beloved son to his father. The father wanted the world to know, "*For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry*" (Luke 15:24).

Salvation of every sinner in God's eyes is described here. God's love for a sinner is like a father's love for a lost son. When you as a sinner receive Christ into your heart, God receives and embraces you. He has longed for your repentance and return. Return for the right reason of repentance. Once you return, never leave Him again. Be faithful and grateful all the days of your life, till Christ returns.

THOUGHT: Have I experienced the Father's loving embrace?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may I never stop loving Thee with all my heart, soul, strength and mind. May I never leave Thee, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

TUESDAY, JUNE 23

LUKE 15:11-32

Memory verse: Luke 15:29-30

*“And he was angry,
and would not go in:
therefore came his father out...”*

PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON – THE REAL PRODIGAL

Religiosity is the bane of Christendom today. Many, like the scribes and Pharisees, believe that as they serve in church, teach and preach the Bible, baptise and take the Lord's Supper, or possess a theological degree from a well-known and conservative Bible College or seminary, they must be born again! They are lying to themselves and living in delusion. Sin remains their master, and hell is their waiting destiny.

The symptoms of such a deluded heart are portrayed visibly in Luke 15:25-30. The elder son's sinful behaviour speaks louder than words. Luke 15:25-30: *“Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.”* The elder son's anger reveals his lack of love for his younger brother. His refusal to enter and celebrate with the family on his younger brother's return reflects his unforgiving heart. The father had to go out to entreat him to rejoice that his brother had returned home. Instead, his reply revealed his jealousy and a bitter heart. He might not have left home and committed the sins of his younger brother, but his heart was far from his father. He served like a slave at home when he should have served as a son. His body was home, but his heart was far from home.

Because he was home, the elder son thought he had been a good son. As such, he would not repent. He did not leave home, so there was no need to return home. He served faithfully at home and felt that he had no sin and no reason to repent. How have you been serving the Lord? With your heart, or just your body, like the elder son?

THOUGHT: Am I really home?

PRAYER: Father, may I serve Thee faithfully.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24

LUKE 15:11-32

Memory verse: Luke 15:31-32

*“...Son, thou art ever with me,
and all that I have is thine.”*

PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON—ARE YOU A SON?

The elder son's reaction was unjustified and shocking. His younger brother had been lost to the world, living a profligate life of sin and debauchery, and the family did not know if he was alive or dead. But he returned alive, and the elder brother's response was anger and jealousy! He even highlighted his brother's sins. He complained, *“But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf”* (Luke 15:30). Instead of addressing his younger brother as “my brother,” he deliberately called him *“thy son,”* i.e. his father's son. As far as the elder brother was concerned, he had no younger brother. He had devoured *“thy living”* (i.e. his father's living) with harlots, and now the father killed the fatted calf for him.

The father did not kill the fatted calf because of his younger son's life of sin, but for his return in humble repentance. That was the reason for the celebration. The elder brother could not see this because he had served his father externally, not inwardly out of love. He failed to realise that he should have served as a son, not a servant. His words condemned him and revealed his legalistic and materialistic service.

The father's words are instructive: *“Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found”* (Luke 15:31b-32). The elder brother needed to know that if he had truly been serving with the right heart, he would have known that all the father had was his. If this were his heart, he would understand that his younger brother's return was the reason for the rejoicing and thanksgiving. His departure from home was as if he had died, but now he was alive. His departure from home was like someone who was lost, but now he was found. The elder brother had to stop focusing on service. He needed to concentrate on his relationship with his father.

The lesson is to have a personal and loving relationship with God before serving. In this way, we will not lose sight of why we serve, i.e. to help sinners come to know Christ.

THOUGHT: Am I a child of God?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for saving me.

THURSDAY, JUNE 25

LUKE 16:1-12

Memory verse: Luke 16:8

*“...for the children of this world
are in their generation
wiser than the children of light.”*

PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD – WORLDLY WISDOM?

The Parable of the Unjust Steward has been a problem for some because it appears as if Christ was commending the unjust nature of the steward in this parable. This conclusion is incorrect. The basic understanding of biblical parables is that Christ was not commending nor condemning the ethics depicted in the parables. Parables describe daily life experiences in Jesus' time that He used to teach a spiritual truth.

The Parable of the Unjust Steward is a parable of a steward who knew he was about to be fired. He reasoned within himself, carnally, that he could not dig and was too ashamed to beg after losing his job. He did something commonly found in societies throughout the ages. While still employed, he reduced the debt of his lord's debtors. By doing them this favour, he won "friends" whom he could turn to for favours after he became unemployed.

The steward thought of his future and did something in the present to ensure that his future was taken care of. He used his power and the material resources for personal benefit. The lord (not Jesus) of the unjust steward in the parable commended the unjust steward after he found out what the steward had done. He could reduce his lord's debt at will while in employment. Luke 16:8: *"And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."* The second half of this verse is the application.

Jesus taught His disciples a very important truth regarding material possessions. Material possessions have been the foundation of man's trust and confidence in life. The more one has, the more assured his future is, for himself and his loved ones. Therefore, hoarding things and feeling safe had been every disciple's way of life. After salvation, they need to use their possessions differently. This parable teaches this truth. Learn from worldly wisdom!

THOUGHT: Do I have a godly relationship with my possessions?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to use things, and not let things use me, in Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.

FRIDAY, JUNE 26

LUKE 16:1-12

Memory verse: Luke 16:9

“...Make to yourselves friends
of the mammon of unrighteousness...”

PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD—MAKE FRIENDS!

Making friends should be the quest of every believer. In this way, they can win others for Christ. To have friends, the Bible says, we need to be friendly. One of the best ways to be friendly is to be generous. A stingy person drives people away. At meal times, he never pays and expects others to foot the bill. This is especially true of full-time workers in churches. They expect the congregation to give them “things” even when they asked them to buy certain things for them. They happily take them without offering to pay for them. Not only have they given themselves a bad name, but they also give Christ a bad name.

In the Parable of the Unjust Steward, the unjust steward used money for personal gain. The conclusion of Jesus’ teaching is that unbelievers know how to use their material things for personal benefit. Can believers then not use material things in their lives for the glory of God? Before salvation, material things were the most important things in life because we treated them as true riches that could secure our future. Our future was earthbound and very materialistic. But after salvation, material things become the least important. God has become the most important. Jesus says so in Matthew 6:24: *“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”*

Believers hate mammon, i.e. money and all things material. What we hate, we let go of first. What we love, we let go of last when forced to do so. Help others materially so that we can help them spiritually. We cannot tell a person to be warm if we do not provide him with a cloak when we can afford it. We cannot only say to the person, “Let me pray for your exam,” when we can help him in his studies and yet not help. Offering concrete help is part of sharing lives and impacting others for Christ.

Therefore, let all believers be generous and friendly. Share your life, time and substance with others for their blessing and for God’s glory. Expect no kindness in return or any form of beneficial reciprocation. Do it for Christ’s sake. Love unconditionally and sacrificially.

THOUGHT: Am I friendly and generous?

PRAYER: Father, teach me to be more generous and friendly.

SATURDAY, JUNE 27

LUKE 16:1-12

Memory verse: Luke 16:10-11

*“He that is faithful
in that which is least
is faithful also in much...”*

PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD—FAITHFUL IN THE LEAST

If a professing believer says that he will be faithful when it comes to important things like marriage covenants and business dealings but will cut corners and be lazy about it when it comes to small things that are of little significance, he is a liar. He is delusional and lying to himself. Faithfulness is trustworthiness. Whatever tasks are assigned to a faithful person, he gets them done to the best of his ability, and he gets them done on time.

To be such a faithful person, he must be faithful in all things, big and small. In the Parable of the Unjust Steward, Jesus declares, *“He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?”* (Luke 16:10-11). The least important thing in every believer’s life is his material possessions. To be unfaithful in managing mammon is to hoard and be miserly. He trusts in his wealth. He holds on to it tightly and panics when it diminishes in value and amount. He looks for the cheapest things. On holiday, he boasts of his “good” deal: staying in the cheapest hotel and eating the cheapest food, when he has millions in his bank. His stinginess in his own life extends also to his stinginess in not helping others in need. He is tightfisted in not sharing and helping others in need, even when he has much.

Behaviours like these reveal the unfaithfulness in mammon that Christ calls *“the least”* in every believer’s life. All believers know that this world is reserved for destruction by fire, and to hoard things demonstrates unfaithfulness. Furthermore, the believer trusts God and Christ. The stingy believer still puts his trust in mammon, which means that he hates God. He says he is a Christian, but his life fails to bear any spiritual fruit, especially concerning his love for mammon.

Being faithful in the least will enable us to be faithful in the much, which includes the souls of men, women and children, and the Word of God.

THOUGHT: Am I faithful in handling mammon?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may I be faithful in the least so that I can be faithful in the much, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

LORD'S DAY, JUNE 28 MORNING

LUKE 18:1-8

Memory verse: Luke 18:4-5

*"...I will avenge her,
lest by her continual coming
she weary me."*

PARABLE OF THE PERSISTENT WIDOW—RIGHT TO PRAY

The Parable of the Persistent Widow begins with Christ teaching His disciples *"that men ought always to pray, and not to faint."* Christians cannot study the Bible without ceasing, as their minds cannot concentrate after a while. But all believers can pray without ceasing. Thus, the command is to pray always.

What gives us the right to approach God and pray to Him? Why would God accept believers and hear their prayers? Believers are citizens of heaven with Christ as their Judge. They have a right to approach the Judge and ask for help like the widow in the parable. The judge was responsible for handling cases of injustice committed in that city.

Widows were the most vulnerable at that time. Perhaps they were even more vulnerable than young orphans. Young orphans might be helped and adopted by others, or they might be pitied when they suffered because of their young age. But widows were ignored and might even be blamed for their widowhood. A widow pleaded to the judge of the city for revenge because her adversary had taken advantage of her. The judge did not fear God. Therefore, the judge would not help her since he was not afraid of God. He also did not care what man thought of him. What he was most concerned with was the widow's continual coming. Her persistent plea for help against her adversary wearied him. As a widow, she had no one to turn to except him. Her adversary would not stop bothering her. The judge was her only hope of deliverance. The judge knew she would never stop until he listened and helped her.

For this self-interest reason and to stop the widow from bothering him further and tiring him out, he helped her and stopped the adversary from bullying her. Persistence can soften a hardened heart, just as a stream of continuous water droplets can wear down solid rock.

All believers have the right in Christ to approach God in prayer. If this uncaring judge would help her, how much more would God, the loving and caring Judge, help all His children when they cry to Him?

THOUGHT: Do I have the right to pray to God?

PRAYER: Father, may I be persistent in my prayers.

LORD'S DAY, JUNE 28 EVENING

LUKE 18:1-8

Memory verse: Luke 18:7-8

*"...when the Son of man cometh,
shall he find faith on the earth?"*

PARABLE OF THE PERSISTENT WIDOW—KEEP ON PRAYING

In the parable's conclusion, Jesus said to note what the unjust judge said in Luke 18:5: *"because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me."* Jesus' reply in Luke 18:7-8, *"And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"*

God is a Just Judge. He will never behave like the unjust judge. But the lesson from God is to use the lesser to teach us the greater. God's children pray for God's protection and deliverance when they suffer for Christ. But the persecution continues as if God has not heard. God's children become impatient because they feel God has not listened to their cry. In their impatience, they sin. When they sin, others are hurt and stumbled.

Persevering in prayer is good for every believer's faith. It is good for them to know how mature or weak their faith is. If they endure patiently to the end of the trial, they know their faith is strong enough to withstand that level of persecution. However, if they sin, they know their faith has reached its limit. They need to repent, and to trust God again and grow more. Either way, the patient waiting for God's deliverance is good for all believers.

If God were to hear and answer believers' cries immediately, how would they measure the level of their faith? God will not allow all those who persecute Christians to escape His just judgment. When Christians endure persecution, Christ's image is seen clearly. If these persecutors do not repent of their sin, God is waiting to condemn them when they die. The Apostle Paul persecuted Christ before his salvation, but he repented and was saved by Christ. That is the only way for all sinners, including the persecutors of Christians, to be saved and be forgiven by God. The issue is not God's delay in hearing believers but whether these believers have the maturity of faith to persevere in their prayers when persecution comes.

THOUGHT: Am I patient or impatient in my prayer life?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to always wait patiently for Thy will to be done in all my prayers, in Jesus' Name. Amen.

MONDAY, JUNE 29

LUKE 18:9-14

Memory verse: Luke 18:11-12

"I fast twice in the week,

I give tithes of all that I possess."

PARABLE ON SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS—THE PHARISEE

Self-righteousness is a deadly sin. Some might even consider it the most fatal of all the sins of the heart. A self-righteous person believes he is going to heaven based on his good works. He despises others as sinful and unworthy of heaven. He alone is good enough to enter heaven.

He measures salvation by good Christian works, like the Pharisees in Jesus' time, who were the "religious policemen" of the Jews. They knew the Bible well, so they thought. They were the teachers of God's Word who believed they would enter heaven. They checked every Jew's conduct and behaviour. They punished all Jews who broke the Jewish laws as understood by them. They sent them to prison or beat them when they did not keep the laws of God, eg. keeping the Sabbath Day holy. Their self-righteousness was based on a comparison with their fellow Jews, whom they criticised and judged. How could they be less holy than these sinful Jews whom they despised!

Modern-day self-righteous behaviour is found in churches that are legalistic in their understanding of and obedience to God's Word. For example, they have man-made rules of dos and don'ts in keeping the Lord's Day holy. These modern-day Pharisees police their congregation with the same scrutiny and self-righteous judgment. Since they are the "religious police," how can they not be born again and enter heaven? They have been keeping these dos and don'ts all their lives since they became leaders of the church and set up these rules; they must be Christians!

Such delusional reasoning is common in these churches that emphasise the external at the expense of the inward man. They walk with their heads held high above everyone else. Like the Pharisees, they pray self-righteous prayers as they approach God. It is not as a sinner saved by grace, but a saint saved by their good Christian works. They boast of their religious accomplishments as they come before God. They make sure man see their acts of religiosity. Their tithes and offerings are known by the right people so that they are seen as generous when, in reality, they are the most carnal.

THOUGHT: Am I like a Pharisee at heart?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, let the mind of Christ be seen in me as I live for Thee for Christ's sake. Amen.

TUESDAY, JUNE 30

LUKE 18:9-14

Memory verse: Luke 18:14

*“...every one that exalteth himself
shall be abased; and he that
humbleth himself shall be exalted.”*

PARABLE ON SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS—THE PUBLICAN

The publican began his approach toward God by standing afar off. He dared not go near God because he felt so unworthy. He knew he was the lowest in the society of the Jews. They despised him and regarded him as a traitor to their own people because he served the Roman masters as their tax collector. He had no status or standing in Jewish society. He was the scum of the earth to them. This was also probably how he saw himself. While he stood there, his eyes looked up to heaven, but his body was downcast. His demeanour was that of an unworthy, abject slave standing before the Almighty Holy God. He smote his breast, symbolic of a man in deep grief. His cry before God confirmed his broken spirit, “*God be merciful to me a sinner*” (Luke 18:13).

His short prayer to God focused on God’s greatness, not his own. He asked God for mercy, knowing that he would not be alive if not for His mercy. He acknowledged that he could stand before God from afar with his eyes looking upward to heaven because of His mercy.

That was enough for Jesus to commend him. Jesus said, “*I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*” The publican went home justified before God, i.e. God found him righteous. He was born again. Meanwhile, the Pharisee returned to his house, remaining unrighteous without realising it. He was not born again. Unless he repented and humbled himself like the publican, he would soon die in his sin and be cast into hell. This is the bane of religiosity when seminary and Bible College teachers think that since they teach the Bible, they must be born again. Their pride and foolish arrogance condemn them. They are the modern-day Pharisees.

The attitude of a born-again believer is humility; the only one he promotes and exalts is Jesus Christ, his Lord and Saviour. Like the publican, he knows that he is alive only because of God’s mercy bestowed on him, a most undeserving sinner, saved by God’s grace.

THOUGHT: Am I a Pharisee or a publican?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may I never forget that I am not consumed only because of Thy grace and mercy.
