

New Life In Jesus

A Catechism

Introduction

This is about Jesus – who he is, what he did, what he taught and why he came. It's a presentation of the good news of Jesus – that ***there is hope for new life*** for each one of us, because of him.

In these lessons we will look at three things:

1. *Three steps* to receiving the new life that Jesus gives (lessons 1-3)
2. *Nine characteristics* of what this new life looks like (lessons 4-12)
3. And *two symbols* of new life in Jesus (lessons 13-14)

We will learn this gospel from Jesus himself, from the the first three gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke (and the first part of the book of Acts). There are 14 lessons in all:

Three Steps	Nine Characteristics	Two Symbols
1. Step #1: Acknowledge Jesus As The Messiah	4. A New Life Of Righteousness 5. A New Pattern Of Prayer	13. Symbol Of New Life: Water Baptism
2. Step #2: Heed Jesus' Call For Repentance	6. A New Pattern Of Study 7. A New Trust In God	14. Symbol Of New Life: The Lord's Supper
3. Step #3: Receive New Life From God	8. A New Community 9. A New Life Focus Of Serving God 10. A New Courage To Suffer 11. A New Strength In Difficult Times 12. A New Hope In Jesus' Return	

*All Scripture references come from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

*This Catechism is online at - <http://newlifeinjesus1.wordpress.com>

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1. Step #1: Acknowledge Jesus As The Messiah

The following three lessons present three steps that each of us need to take in order to receive new life in Jesus. This first lesson focuses on who Jesus is, and our need to recognize that he is the Savior.

The **focus verse** for this lesson is Matthew 16:16: Jesus asked, “*Who do you say that I am?*” Simon Peter replied, ‘*You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.*’”

The popular Jesus

People generally like Jesus, at least what they think they know of him. And Jesus is one of, if not the most famous person to have ever lived. So people like to have Jesus on their side. And what they typically do is take a part of Jesus that they like, and then make this to be who Jesus is for them.

Here's some examples of popular versions of Jesus:

- *Jesus was a great philosopher* – a teacher who taught love. You find this among some historians and philosophers.
- *Jesus was a prophet* – a man who challenged injustice and died for his cause. You find this among some political activists as well as people of other faiths who try to make a place for Jesus in their belief system.
- *Jesus was a spiritual mystic* – a charismatic person with wisdom and healing powers. You find this among “new age” folks, or in Eastern religions, where Jesus is one of many manifestations of the divine.

People make out of Jesus whatever they want. And you find this stuff in book stores, on TV and all over. But what we want to do is-

Meet the real Jesus

We do this by looking at what Jesus actually said and did as this is recorded in the Gospels, not just a piece here or there. And let me just say at the beginning that the real Jesus was very controversial. (If you were raised in a Christian environment, you can easily miss this). After all, what he said and did was so radical that it got him killed! He was executed by the State.

Let's look at the real Jesus:

1. Jesus did mighty works of power. Jesus healed people. He healed, “every disease and every affliction among the people” – Matthew 4:23-24. God’s power worked through him to do this.

Jesus also did other kinds of miracles: multiplying food (Mark 6:30-44); calming a storm by his word (Luke 8:22-25); walking on water (Mark 6:45-52); and raising the dead (Luke 7:11-17). Jesus did amazing works of power.

2. Jesus cast out demons with a word. He had amazing power and authority over evil spirits. As just one example, Luke 11:14 recounts, “Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled.” Jesus did this time and again.

3. Jesus forgave sins, something only God can do. Mark 2:3-12 tells this story:

“And they came, bringing to him a瘫痪者 carried by four men. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the瘫痪者 lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the瘫痪者, ‘My son, your sins are forgiven.’ Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ‘Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, ‘Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the瘫痪者, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’—he said to the瘫痪者—‘I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.’ And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We never saw anything like this!’”

4. He taught that with his coming God's promises are all coming to fulfillment. He said, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand . . . believe the good news” – Mark 1:15. Jesus is saying, ‘God’s purposes and promises are being fulfilled through me, believe it!’

5. He said that he is now the teacher who tells us what God's will is. Speaking of himself, he said, “You have one teacher” – Matthew 23:10. He is saying is that he is now the interpreter of God’s will for us.

And, in fact, he changes Moses’ teaching – the one who was the supreme teacher of God’s way. He changes it by raising it to a higher standard. For example he said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” – Matthew 5:43-44. Moses taught you this . . . , but I am now raising the standard.

6. He demanded that with his coming each one of us should now begin to live our lives differently. His message to all was “Repent” – Mark 1:15, that is, fundamentally change how you are

living your life. Jesus is saying, ‘I’m here, God’s purpose is at hand, now everyone has to change how they live.’

7. He called for a higher allegiance to him than to our own families. He said, “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” – Matthew 10:37. Think about your family. If you have a good relationship with them, this is an amazing statement! And this would include the “extended family” of our country, wherever we may be from. Jesus calls for an allegiance to him that exceeds all our earthly connections.

8. He called us to love him more than our own lives. He said a disciple of his must “hate . . . his/her own life” – Luke 14:26. What he is saying is that, when you have to choose between being faithful to him or losing your life, you choose him. And this isn’t just talking about life or death situations. It means that you are willing to sacrifice for Jesus on a daily basis, to give up what you want and like, if that’s what it means to be faithful to him.

9. He said that acceptance or rejection of him will determine our eternal destiny. He said, “So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven” – Matthew 10:32-33. This is a picture of the final judgment. If we, now, deny Jesus is who he is, then he will deny us before God on that day. But if we acknowledge him, we will be acknowledged; we will be saved.

10. He said that his predictions about the future cannot fail. He said concerning his words about the future destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” – Mark 13:31. His words are more enduring than heaven and the earth we walk on.

11. He said that he would be killed and would be resurrected by God. Jesus said that he “must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” – Luke 9:22. And this is, in fact, what happened, as reported by his disciples and by the evidence of the empty tomb.

12. He said that he would return to earth and judge all people on the final day. Jesus said, “For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he (or she) has done.” – Matthew 16:27.

One thing that is clear from this brief survey is that-

The real Jesus is not a popular Jesus

Jesus is so much more than what any of them say, since they just take a piece of him and run with it according to what they like. It's clear from his own statements and actions that he is:

- much more than just another great philosopher
- much more than just another prophet
- much more than just another mystic

No one spoke like he did. No one acted like he did. Jesus is in a class by himself. He exercised amazing power and authority over sin, demons, diseases, nature and even death. And he claimed authority over every part of our lives.

Jesus' claim, 'I am the Messiah'

Jesus put all this together by saying that he was the promised Messiah. He asked his disciples one day (from our focus verse), "Who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' – Matthew 16:15-16. And Jesus accepts Peter's confession that he is the Messiah, as straight from God. "And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'" – Matthew 16:17. Jesus claims to be the promised Messiah of God.

Well, you might ask, "What is the Messiah?" It's the Hebrew word for "anointed one" (the Greek word is "Christ"). It has to do with the Old Testament practice of anointing someone with oil when they are commissioned by God to do a task. In this case, there was the expectation among many Jews, based on the Scriptures, that God was sending someone to deliver and save his people and to bring God's righteous rule to this earth – the kingdom of God. This was not just "an" anointed one, this was "the" anointed one. [Read *Appendix #1: Prophetic Predictions and Foreshadowings of Jesus, the Messiah*]

So the claim here is that Jesus is this "anointed one." Jesus is the one God has sent to save and rule over the earth. Jesus is the one with authority over all creation, including us. Another way to say it, is that "Jesus is Lord." This is what it means to call Jesus Messiah.

This brings us back to the question we began with-

"Who do you say that I am?"

Jesus knew that his statements and actions would be deeply controversial. That's why he said in Matthew 11:6 – "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me." As we have seen, Jesus was a polarizing figure, and that by design.

Jesus forced those in his day to decide about him. Everyone had to answer the question, “Who do you say that I am?” They had to answer, “Who is this Jesus?” And he forces us to answer as well. Jesus asks each of you the same question: “Who do you say that I am?”

And although like others, we may want to place Jesus in some other category, he was a good person, or just a prophet (but not everything that he claimed – a popular Jesus) Jesus himself doesn’t allow us to do this! By the sheer power of who he is, and the extreme way in which he presents himself, as we saw – ***Jesus leaves us no middle ground!*** As he said in Matthew 12:30, “Whoever is not with me is against me.” We are either with him or against him. These are the only two options, according to Jesus. We can either accept him for who he says he is, or be offended by him and reject him.

We can acknowledge that he is indeed the Messiah, and then we have to rearrange our lives and start living like this is true. Or, we have to say he is not who he says he is and that something was seriously wrong with him.

This latter option is what the Pharisees chose. They held that Jesus was a false prophet. Yes, you claim authority, but you are really only blaspheming (Matthew 9:3). Yes, you have amazing power, we can’t deny it, but it is really demonic power (Luke 11:15).

Like the Pharisees and everyone else who encounters Jesus, we have to make a choice. Which will it be for us? Jesus’ challenge to each of us is to believe that he is who he says he is; to acknowledge that he is indeed Lord; to confess as Peter did – ***“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”*** And then Jesus challenges us to begin to live our lives like this is true, which is what the rest of these lessons are about.

2. Step #2: Heed Jesus’ Call For Repentance

Our first lesson was on acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah. Well, if we accept that Jesus is Messiah and Lord, the one sent to save and to rule over all – then we need to listen to what he says to us.

And his message is summed up in our ***focus verse*** for this lesson from Matthew 4:17: ***“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”***

This is the second step to new life in Jesus. We begin with the question-

What is repentance?

Jesus' parable in Matthew 21:28-31 gives us a nice definition of repentance. He said,

"What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?"

The answer, of course, is the first son. He changed his mind and did his father's will. And this is a good way of explaining what repentance means – **We change our minds and begin to do our heavenly Father's will.** This leads us to the next question-

Why do we need to repent?

We need to repent because **we all give in to our "flesh."** That is, our human desires that lead us to do things that are sinful, evil and wrong. This is human weakness that leads us to be self-centered instead of focused on God and doing what is right.

As Jesus said in Mark 14:38, "the flesh is weak." He means weak with regard to doing God's will. God asks us to some things that are hard (as we will see below); and it seems easier to do our own thing than to try to do what God asks of us. We want what we desire, what is easy, what is comfortable.

We also all give in to "the world," that is, the people, values and ideas in this world that are not submitted to God and thus pressure us to sin. We give in to this peer pressure; we go along with the crowd. We don't want to look silly or un-cool.

Jesus said in Matthew 18:7 – "Woe to the world for temptations to sin!" The world is all about tempting and pressuring us to sin.

And behind all of this is **Satan, the ruler of this world** (Luke 4:5-6), who seeks to tempt us and pressure us to sin. He tests us by putting us into difficult situations, circumstances that test us, or tragedies that try us. And then he tells us, 'it's alright to sin; to act on your desires, to give in to your weaknesses, to take the easy (but wrong) way.'

And the bottom line is that, we have all given in. **We have all sinned and done what is wrong.** Jesus spoke of this in several places.

Jesus said that all Israel were sinners. Luke 13:1-5 says,

"There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.'"

Jesus said that all Galileans and all those who live in Jerusalem (all Israel) were sinners in need of repentance. And if the people of God (Israel) were all sinners, how much more the rest of the world that did not even know God?

Jesus also spoke of humanity as "evil" in Matthew 7:11. We have all sinned.

A summary of repentance

Given all this, repentance means having a change of heart and mind that leads us to turn away from our sins, our selfish desires which are the root of our sins, and as well, the world and Satan who pressure us to sin – in order to live a new life according to God's will from now on.

So there is a backward looking part – turning away from our sins, and a forward looking part – living a new kind of life. Now lets look a bit more at the backward part. That's because repentance means we have to-

Deal with past wrongdoing

This includes our acts of sin against God and others. In other words, we don't just stop doing wrong, we deal with the fact that we have done wrong things.

We are to confess our sins: An example of this comes from the story of the prodigal son. After he squandered his father's money he came back and said, "Father I have sinned against heaven and before you" – Luke 15:18. It takes complete honesty; you have to come clean about what you have done.

We are to be humble and sorrowful: Again from the example of the prodigal son, he said to his father, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants" – Luke 15:19. From another parable Jesus talks about a tax collector who, "would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'" – Luke 18:13. When you have done what is wrong – humility, sorrow and regret are the appropriate responses.

We are to take responsibility for the consequences of our actions: This includes trying to fix broken relationships. As Jesus said, “So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your sister or brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.” - Matthew 5:23-24. This also includes trying to make amends for damage done to others. An instance of this comes from the real life example of Zacchaeus’ repentance. He said, “if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold” – Luke 19:8. He had cheated people out of money as a tax collector and he makes amends for it here. He tries to make things right.

If this is the backward looking part of repentance, the forward looking part is to-

Live a new life according to God's will

Jesus didn't just call us to live this new life, he came to show us what it looks like, through his teaching and example. We'll look at this much more in later lessons, but for now just a few examples:

- Don't speak out angry words that tear others down – Matthew 5:21-22. This is a form of murder.
- Be sexually pure – don't engage in what God forbids. Matthew 5:27-28 gives one example, lusting after another person sexually.
- Love your enemies – Matthew 5:43-48. Instead of returning harm for harm, return good for harm. Don't just love those who treat you well, love those who hate you.
- Keep your word without swearing promises – Matthew 5:37. Simply let your yes be yes and your no, no.
- Share your resources with the poor – Luke 12:33. Don't keep more than you need for yourself. Use your abundance to help those in need.
- Be a witness for Jesus, even if others ridicule you – Matthew 5:11-12.

Now as you can see from all this-

The life Jesus calls us to isn't easy

That's because **repentance requires us to start all over again with our lives**. Matthew 18:3 says, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus is saying that to follow him, we must relearn how to think and act and live. Just like a child has to learn everything, so we have to start over and learn what it means to live according to the values of the kingdom of God, which are often the polar opposite of how the world thinks and acts.

Repentance also requires us to take the hard road. As Jesus said at the end of his Sermon on the Mount, where he teaches about God's will, “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and

the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” – Matthew 7:13-14. It is easy to go along with the world; the crowd. But “The gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life.” The demands of obedience, of following Jesus, are difficult. And that’s why Jesus teaches us that-

It will take your complete commitment

It must be your highest priority in life. As Jesus said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” – Matthew 6:33. Following Jesus is not a casual thing, something you do on the side. It must become the supreme focus of your life, even above providing for your material needs (your career), which is the context of this verse.

It involves sacrifice. “And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.” – Matthew 18:8-9. We must be willing to make whatever sacrifice we need to, to enter the kingdom. We cut off whatever gets in our way.

It will cost you everything. Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” – Matthew 13:44. We must be willing to give up everything, in order to gain it.

Because it takes our complete commitment, Jesus calls us to “*count the cost*” of what it means to follow after him in the path of life. Luke 14:25-33 says,

“Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, ‘If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and *count the cost*, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.’”

Jesus is saying, understand what you are getting into, and make sure you are willing to do what it takes to meet the demands of repentance – before you choose to follow him.

Now, having said all this and emphasizing the demand of God upon us, let me also say at the end-

Repentance and new life is possible with God's help

We can't do this in our own strength. That's for sure. God has to come in and change our hearts. And God has to strengthen us to do what he asks of us. We will look at this in our next lesson.

3. Step #3: Receive New Life From God

In this lesson we look at how Jesus not only came to call us to live a new kind of life – Jesus came to make this new life possible for us.

The **focus verses** for this lesson are from Matthew 7:7-8: *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened."* As we will see, these verses call us to ask for and receive the new life that Jesus gives to us.

Our situation

Jesus has to act to make it possible for us to live the new life, because we are stuck under judgment. If you do evil and stubbornly rebel against God, this is the result. God judges your sin. You reap what you sow. And your sins will find you out. What is this judgment?

We have been given over to Satan. Luke 4:5-6 tells us that the whole world is under the power of Satan. And he holds on to us. In Luke 11:21-22 Jesus pictures Satan as a "strong man, fully armed" guarding us in his fortress. We are prisoners of Satan.

We have also been given over to death. As Ezekiel 18:4 says, "the soul who sins shall die." Jesus agreed. In Luke 13:3 he talks about how everyone "will perish" because of sin. He also talks about "Hades" in several places, the prison house of the dead. This is the realm of the dead until the final judgment. We are spiritually dead and we will all physically die at some point.

So our situation is that, due to our sin, we are in prison, as it were, miserable and waiting for death. Or to say it in another way, we are not able to respond to Jesus' call to live a new life.

But there's good news

Despite our sin and rebellion, God has chosen to be merciful. God sees the world – its misery and suffering under Satan and death (which is God's judgment). But God has had a change of heart. God has heard our cries. And so God has sent Jesus to save us; so that we can begin a new life in Jesus.

This salvation (or, what Jesus calls the kingdom of God) is pictured for us in the ministry of Jesus:

- He casts out demons setting people free from the power of Satan
- He heals people of their suffering
- He raises people from the dead

But he didn't just come to give us a picture, or something temporary, or partial (these people all still suffered and then later died). He came to change the whole world and how it works, inside out. He came to bring about a new creation. Jesus came to save us completely. And this required that he give himself completely for us.

Jesus' love for us

Jesus said about himself in Mark 10:45, "The Son of Man came . . . to give his life as a ransom for many." As this verse says, he "gave his life." He was not guilty or deserving of death, but he willingly gave himself up anyway. And he did this "for many." He died for us – for you and for me. It is what we deserved; our judgment. But he bore it for us.

This reveals God's love to us, that he sent his Son to die for us. And it certainly shows us Jesus' love that he freely gave himself for us. So, yes, there is judgment for sin, but God's last word is a word of love and grace, for all who will receive it.

Now lets look at how Jesus brought about salvation.

Jesus' Victory

First of all, **Jesus defeated Satan**. That's because Jesus never sinned, even though Satan tested him. His whole life was summed up in his prayer to God just before he went to the cross and an unjust death – "Not my will, but yours be done" – Luke 22:42. Yet Satan had Jesus killed – Luke 22:3-6, for no good reason. So, therefore, Satan is judged and cast down, while Jesus is exalted. God stepped in to bring justice for Jesus. So there is a reversal.

That this happened can be seen from the gospel narrative itself. At the beginning of the story Satan has all authority on earth – Matthew 4:8-9. But at the end, Jesus has "all authority in heaven and on earth" – Matthew 28:18. There has been a switch, a reversal due to God's intervention.

Jesus also defeated death. Jesus was raised from the dead. Death could not hold Jesus down. He broke out of Hades, which no human has ever done. That's because death had no right to him. As the angel said after the resurrection, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen." – Luke 24:5-6.

Jesus not only defeated Satan and death, our enemies, next we see how he makes it possible for us to be set free.

Our salvation

Through Jesus' death, we can be forgiven. Jesus' death has established a new covenant. In Matthew 26:28 he spoke of his death on the cross as "my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." It is like the sacrifice that established the first covenant (Exodus 24:8). The language of "blood of the covenant" is used in both places. But this is the promised new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34) that provides free and full forgiveness for our sins.

So Jesus teaches us that though his death, our sins can be forgiven; we can find God's mercy and kindness. And since we can be forgiven, we can be freed from Satan and death! We can start over again with a clean slate. All our guilt and shame, our sinful acts, our selfish behavior can be wiped away, through what Jesus has done. But that's not all-

Through Jesus' resurrection, we can receive new life by the Spirit. Being exalted to the right hand of God, Jesus received the promise of the Spirit. In Luke 3:16, John the Baptist said, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." And after his resurrection Jesus poured out this promised Spirit upon his followers (Acts 1:4-5; Acts 2).

And when the Spirit comes into our hearts, something miraculous and amazing happens within!

- We come alive to God and everything becomes new within. We are not spiritually dead anymore. We can know God and be in relationship with God.
- God also enables us to live the new life Jesus models for us. For although "the flesh is weak," "the Spirit is willing" – Mark 14:38. The Spirit strengthens us each day to help us to do God's will.
- And also, the Spirit gives us power to serve God, as Jesus says in Acts 1:8. We are given gifts and abilities and anointings so that we can work for the kingdom of God.

And this new life doesn't end here. We can live on into eternity. At the resurrection, when Jesus returns, the righteous will be raised up and given new bodies (like Jesus has) and will live forever. In Luke 20:35-36 Jesus said – "those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the

resurrection from the dead . . . cannot die anymore . . . ” He also said in Matthew 25:46, talking about the final judgment – “the righteous (will go) into eternal life.”

Because of what Jesus has done for us, in his great love, we can receive all this.

What must you do to receive new life?

Having acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah and Savior, and having heeded Jesus’ call to repentance, **ask God for forgiveness**, for mercy, for a new start, for cleansing. Forgiveness is a gift of God to us, but you need to ask for it. No one else can do it for you. You have to come before God and ask yourself. It doesn’t happen if you don’t ask. God holds out the gift, but you have to reach out to receive it.

The promise comes to us from our focus verses – “Ask, and it will be given to you.” – Matthew 7:7. This applies to all of God’s “good gifts” to us, as it says in Matthew 7:11. And it certainly applies to forgiveness. Claim God’s promise in faith for yourself and receive the gift.

Also, **ask for the Spirit to come into your life and make you new**. The Spirit is God’s gift to you, but you need to ask for this, as well. Pray – “Come into my heart, fill me, bring me new life!”

Again the promise is: “Ask, and it will be given to you” - Matthew 7:7. In Luke 11:13 Jesus specifically applies these words to asking for and receiving the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” Claim this promise in faith for yourself and receive God’s gift to you.

4. A New Life Of Righteousness

In lessons 4-12 we will look at nine characteristics of what this new life in Jesus looks like, as we heed Jesus’ teaching and follow his example. This lesson gives an overview of what new life in Jesus looks like with regard to a morality that is different than the way the world lives.

The **focus verse** comes from Luke 6:46: Jesus said, “*Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?*” This obviously makes the point that if we call Jesus Lord; if we acknowledge him to be the Messiah, we must do what he says. It is meaningless to call him Lord and then do your own thing.

But what does it mean to do what Jesus says, when it comes to a new moral code? First of all-

Jesus agreed with what was taught by Moses and the prophets

Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them . . .” – Matthew 5:17. [Read appendix #2 for more on the question – *Should Christians Obey The Law Of Moses?*]

Here are some examples of his upholding the teaching of the Law:

- When the rich young ruler asked what he must do to enter life (or the resurrection), Jesus said, “You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.” – Luke 18:20. Jesus quotes to him several of the ten commandments.
- He also condemns “sexual immorality” – Mark 7:21. [For more scriptural teaching on *Sexual Purity* read appendix #3]

There are many other examples, but the point is that Jesus agreed with Old Testament teaching.

But, we also have to take note of what he says in the rest of Matthew 5:17, “I have not come to abolish the Law or the prophets, but to fulfill them.” Jesus came to perfect or to bring to completion what was taught by Moses. He does this in several ways-

Jesus fulfills the Law by giving it a perfect focus

Of all the commandments in the Old Testament (Orthodox Judaism lists 613), which are more important or central? Does it have to do with purity laws (the Pharisees) or the Temple procedures (the Sadducees)?

Jesus highlights a different focus, citing what he calls the two greatest commandments. In Matthew 22:37-40 he says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

So, love of God and others is the focus of it all and how you pull it all together.

Jesus also fulfills the Law by raising it to a higher standard

Jesus taught a form of righteousness (or God’s will) that went beyond Moses and the practice of Moses by the teachers of his day. He raised the bar of God’s moral code. Again, his teaching doesn’t do away with Moses, rather it builds on it and intensifies it.

To put it another way, what Jesus is really doing is showing us more clearly what loving God and loving others looks like. Here are some examples:

1. Put aside destructive anger. In Matthew 5:21-22 Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, (that is by Moses and the prophets) ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be liable to judgment . . . and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.” God is not just concerned with physical murder. God is also concerned with our anger that strikes out to insult and verbally tear down another person. This goes beyond Moses.

2. Don't lust after another person. In Matthew 5:27-28 Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Jesus teaches us here that faithfulness to our spouse also includes not looking at another with lust. This goes beyond what Moses taught.

3. Keep you marital commitment. In Matthew 5:31 Jesus said, “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’” Moses permitted divorce.

Here I skip to Matthew 19:6, where Jesus gives a more concise answer. He says that when two people marry – “They are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” So he teaches that we are to keep our covenant of marriage even when it is very difficult. (Jesus only allows divorce between two believers when the marriage has already been broken by an act of sexual immorality – Matthew 19:9).

4. Keep your promises without swearing oaths. In Matthew 5:33-37 Jesus said, “Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not break your oath, but carry out the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool . . . Let your word be ‘Yes,’ ‘Yes,’ or ‘No,’ ‘No,’; anything more than this comes from the evil one.” Moses allowed promissory oaths.

But Jesus teaches, instead of swearing promises – “I will do this, I swear,” simply be a person of your word. Just say “yes” or “no” and leave God and God’s name out of it.

5. Love your enemies. In Matthew 5:43-44 Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you . . .” Moses taught that under certain circumstances we can return harm for harm, for instance during a war.

Jesus teaches us that we are not only to love our neighbors – those who are like us and do good to us – we are also to love our enemies. Instead of returning harm for harm, we are to give good in return for evil, even with our enemies. [For more scriptural teaching on this read *Appendix #4: Love Your Enemies.*]

6. Don't condemn others. In Luke 6:37 Jesus said, "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven." Moses taught that you should judge sin in others' lives, even with the death penalty in some cases.

Jesus teaches us that when we see someone else sin, we are to respond with mercy, just as God has had mercy on us. We are not to dismiss them, or look down on them as condemned by God; or seek to harm them. Rather, we are to work and pray for their repentance. And if they have sinned against us, we are to give mercy and even forgive them when they repent.

7. Share your wealth. In Luke 12:33 Jesus said, "Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail . . ." Jesus is saying, don't keep more than you need for yourself, for your comfort and security. Use your abundance to help those in need. This goes way beyond what Moses taught on giving tithes.

Finally-

**Jesus fulfills the Law by calling us to give up our entire lives
out of love for God and others**

Jesus taught in Mark 8:34-35 – "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."

If what we saw before dealt with seven specific examples of the new life, this is the whole of what God wants from us. God wants all of us. Every part of us. Self-denial and taking up the cross is the summary of the Christian life.

This is what Jesus did when he came, served and died on the cross – out of love for God and others. And this is what Jesus call us to do, to lose our lives out of love for God and others. We are to deny ourselves and our selfishness. We are to give up our lives; our ambitions in order to do whatever God tells us to do.

Three things to remember

1. Obedience is not optional. Although we are saved by what Jesus did for us on the cross, he does require us to obey. As Jesus said at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:20, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." And as he said at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

This last verse shows us that even some who acknowledge Jesus as Messiah and Lord, will not make it in. Only the ones who do what Jesus teaches.

2. God makes our obedience possible. Obedience is only possible because God makes it possible for us. Otherwise it is too hard.

When the rich young ruler thought that God's way was too hard, Jesus said, "What is impossible with people (or – mere humans), is possible with God." – Luke 18:27. (NLT) Jesus said in a time of real testing, that although the flesh is weak, "the Spirit indeed is willing" – Mark 18:38. The Spirit helps us in our weakness to do God's will. The Spirit of God enables us to obey.

3. When we fail, we seek forgiveness and renewal. Jesus taught us to pray regularly, "Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us." – Luke 11:4. He also said, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." – Matthew 6:14.

When we do fail; when we give in to the weakness of our flesh (our fears and insecurities); when we don't rely on the strength of the Spirit – we seek God's forgiveness.

5. A New Pattern Of Prayer

A crucial part of our new life in Jesus is prayer.

The **focus verse** for this lesson comes from Matthew 6:8: "*Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*" As the language of this verse makes clear-

Prayer comes from our new relationship with God

Because of what Jesus has done, now God is our "Father" (Matthew 6:9), and we are a child of God (Matthew 7:11). And prayer flows out of this relationship.

- As God's children, we want God's purposes to be fulfilled. We have repented in order to do God's will and we want God's will to be done in the lives of others.
- And as our Father, God wants to care for our needs. As Jesus teaches in Matthew 7:11, God is better than any earthly parent and gives us what we need.

So this leads us to ask for God's will to be done and for our needs to be met, as well as the needs of others.

Lets look at prayer and what Jesus has to say about it. First of all-

Jesus teaches us to pray

Jesus said, in Matthew 6:9, “Pray, then, like this . . .,” and then he goes on to give the Lord’s prayer. But the point is that he teaches us how to pray, because Jesus wants us to be praying. As Luke says in Luke 18:1, “And Jesus told them . . . that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.” Jesus emphasized the importance of prayer through his teaching.

But we also have-

The example of Jesus’ prayer life

Luke highlights for us that Jesus prayed often:

- Luke 3:21 – “Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened . . .” Jesus prayed at the beginning of his ministry.
- Luke 5:16 – “Jesus would withdraw to desolate places and pray.” This was his characteristic pattern.
- Luke 6:12 – “In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.” Jesus engaged in intense, all night prayer.
- Luke 9:18 – “Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?”
- Luke 9:28 – “Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray.”
- Luke 11:1 – “Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’” They wanted to learn from him, having seen him pray.
- Luke 22:41 – “And he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and knelt down and prayed.” Right before the cross, when he was facing his most difficult situation, he prayed fervently.

We can take at least two lessons for Jesus’ example of prayer:

1. Jesus practiced the Jewish pattern of daily prayers. He offered prayer in the morning and the evening. This comes out a little more clearly in Mark’s references to Jesus’ pattern of prayer:

- Mark 1:35 – morning prayers
- Mark 6:46-47 – evening prayers

His example commends this as a pattern for us to follow as well. We too should have regular, set times of prayer each day. We need both a disciplined routine as well as spontaneous times of prayer, as there is need.

2. If Jesus needed to pray so much, how much more do we? As followers of Jesus we should have an active and regular prayer life. This, then raises the question-

What should we pray for?

In a typically Jewish fashion, Jesus taught his disciples a “set prayer” which we now call the Lord’s prayer or the prayer of Jesus. In other words, we are to pray for these specific things in our times of prayer. It is a kind of prayer template.

Luke 11:2-4

Father

1. Hallowed be your Name
2. Your kingdom come

3. Give us each day our daily bread

4. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us

5. And do not lead us into testing

Matthew 6:9-13

Our Father in heaven

1. Hallowed be your Name
2. a) Your kingdom come,
b) Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

3. Give us this day our daily bread

4. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven those indebted to us

5. a) And do not lead us into testing
b) but deliver us from the evil one

As you can see, there are five requests that Jesus highlights. (In Matthew the second and the fifth are expanded, but they are the same request). What is most important, God’s agenda, comes first (above the line), and then come our most important needs, out of the hundreds that we could pray about. Lets look at these five requests briefly, to get the basic sense:

1. “Hallowed be your name.” Hallowed means set apart as special; as amazing. God’s name refers to God’ reputation. The basic idea is, “God, show who you are so that people come to know you and thus honor you.” We are asking that God act in the world and work in people’s lives. And that they will come to know who God is and praise him.

2. “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” The basic idea is, “God, let your transforming power, set in motion by Jesus, spread to all people. Bring forth your salvation, new life, righteousness, peace and joy in this world.”

Now these first two requests also can have a ‘last day’ focus:

- “Hallowed be your name” – we can pray for the full revelation of who God is on the final day when all will kneel and acknowledge who God is and glorify God’s name.
- “Your Kingdom come” – we can pray for the coming of the kingdom in its fullness on earth, with the return of Jesus, the resurrection, the rule of God and the end of all evil.

3. "Give us each /this day our daily bread." The basic idea is, "God, provide for our daily material needs of food, clothing and shelter." And notice that it is not just for you as an individual. We pray give "us" our needs. This refers to the whole Christian community throughout the world (and, of course, we can pray for others as well).

4. "Forgive us our sins /debts." This is pretty straightforward, "Give us your mercy of forgiveness and restored relationship when we fail."

5. "And do not lead us into testing, but deliver us from the evil one." A little background here:

- God allows us to be tested, that is, to go through difficult times in our lives. He uses these to train us and make us stronger.
- But Satan, who is the one who actually tests us, hopes that in our weakness we will give up, or take the easy way out that leads us to sin.
- So, because we are weak and might fail, Jesus teaches us to pray to be spared testing, even though God allows it.

The basic idea is, "Spare us difficult situations that test our faithfulness to you. Deliver us from the evil one who tests us." We will talk more about testing in another lesson.

There are other requests that Jesus refers to. We are to pray:

- for relief from injustice – Luke 18:1-8
- for those who abuse and persecute you – Luke 6:28; Matthew 5:4
- for kingdom workers, to do God's work in the world – Matthew 9:37-38
- for the Spirit in your life; that the Spirit might continue to be powerfully present – Luke 11:9-13

Some things to remember when you pray

1. When you pray, be to the point. Jesus said, "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." - Matthew 6:7-8.

2. Don't pray in order to be seen by others. Jesus said, "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." - Matthew 6:5-6.

3. When you pray, forgive others. Just as we pray in the Lord's prayer, "forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us." – Luke 11:4. Jesus also says in Mark 11:25, "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

4. When you pray, be persistent. Jesus said, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a fiend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will now get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs." - Luke 11:5-8.

5. When you pray, have faith in God. Jesus said, "And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith." - Matthew 21:22. When we pray for God to accomplish his purposes, we must actually believe that he will, and not doubt.

A powerful prayer promise

Jesus said in Luke 11:9-10, "And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." This assumes, as always, that we are praying according to God's will. But the promise is powerful. God will hear us and God will provide for us.

Finally, just a note to say that-

God also speaks to us

There is something called listening prayer; where we listen for what God says back. But also, even if we aren't praying, maybe we are reading the Scriptures, or doing something else – God will at times speak to us, most often in the depths of our heart.

But whatever we hear must always be tested against what we find in the Scriptures. This is the definitive voice of God. It is easy to get things wrong and so we check everything against what Scripture has to say.

6. A New Pattern Of Study

As we have seen, we have a new relationship with God through Jesus. And we not only speak to God in prayer, but God also has much to say to us. And the way that we learn what God has to say to us, above all else, is through study of the Scriptures.

Our **focus verse** for this lesson comes from Mark 4:24: "*Pay attention to what you hear.*" Now in our context, as we will see (now that Jesus' words have been written down) we might want to say, "Pay attention to what you read."

The Scriptures

What are the Scriptures? Well first of all there is the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible. This is made up of 66 "books." They can be divided into four rough categories:

1. *The Law of Moses:* Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
2. *The Story of Israel:* Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther
3. *Wisdom literature:* Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon
4. *The Prophets:* Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

These preserve the ancient Hebrew testimony to what God did and taught among them as God's people.

Then we have the New Testament, made up of 27 "books" under four categories:

1. *The Gospels:* Matthew, Mark, Luke, John
2. *The Story of the Early Church:* Acts
3. *Letters:* Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude
4. *Prophecy:* The book of Revelation

Jesus wrote nothing. Rather, he authorized his original disciples to speak for him. He told them, "Make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." – Matthew 28:19-20. He said to them, "The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me." – Luke 10:16. The New Testament is the record of this apostolic witness to Jesus. It comes from the apostles and teachers from the apostolic church.

The point of our lesson is that we are to study these Scriptures. So we begin by looking at-

Calls to study and learn from the Old Testament

Moses said to Israel – “Listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live . . .” – Deuteronomy 4:1. Also, the Lord said to Joshua, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.” – Joshua 1:8.

The Old Testament lays out the overall plan of God’s work in this world, especially God’s work through his people Israel. It also provides God’s foundational teaching concerning his will for people. We need to study and understand it. But as we have already seen-

God has spoken to us even more clearly and fully through Jesus

And so we can rightly say, how much more do we need to study and understand what he says!

- Jesus is our one teacher – Matthew 23:10. He is the one who interprets Moses correctly.
- Jesus is the fulfiller of the Law of Moses – Matthew 5:17. He intensifies and perfects what is found in the Old Testament.

This is why, when Moses and Elijah (representing the Law and the prophets; the Old Testament) were there on the mount of transfiguration with Jesus, the voice of God came and said about Jesus, “This is my beloved Son, listen to him!” – Mark 9:7. We are to listen to Jesus.

Jesus brings together and sums up all of God’s plan and will for us. He is the fulfillment of all that has come before and he is the perfect and final revelation of God to us. And so for good reason-

Jesus calls us to learn from him

He said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30. A “yoke” refers to a teacher’s teaching. He invites us to take his yoke and learn from him, both his teaching and his example.

Jesus also said in many places in reference to his teaching, “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear” – Mark 4:23. And from our focus verse Jesus said, “Pay attention to what you hear”- Mark 4:24, talking about his teaching.

Not only does Jesus call us to learn from him, this idea of learning and studying is built into the very name we are given by Jesus. We are “disciples.” This is simply another name for “students.” So as disciples of Jesus we are called to be students of Jesus.

As Jesus says, the goal of a disciple is to be like their teacher: “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master.” – Matthew 10:24-25. We seek to live and act just as Jesus lived and acted.

How do we learn from Jesus?

Well, today we read and study the Scriptures:

1. We learn about Jesus from the Old Testament. The Old Testament points forward to Jesus' life, death and resurrection as the culmination of God's plan of redemption for the world. Jesus said, "everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." – Luke 24:44.

The Old Testament is also the background for understanding what Jesus teaches about God's will on any given topic. As Jesus said about his teaching, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." – Matthew 5:17. There is a connection between what the Old Testament teaches and what Jesus teaches and to understand Jesus you need to understand the Old Testament.

2. We learn from Jesus by studying the gospels. These contain the apostolic witness to what Jesus said and did. As Luke puts it:

"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught." – Luke 1:1-4.

Here we learn in detail about Jesus – who he is, why he came, what he taught, how to follow in his footsteps and how to be ready for his return.

3. We learn about Jesus from the rest of the New Testament. This points back to Jesus and helps us to understand the significance of his life, teaching, death and resurrection and his future return.

So it is all about Jesus, whether directly about him – the Gospels, or pointing forward to him – the Old Testament, or pointing back to him – the rest of the New Testament.

It is not always easy to understand Jesus

The disciples often didn't understand what Jesus was teaching (Mark 7:17-18; 8:14-21). And we are separated by time and culture. And so it will take some work on our part; study. We have to take time to understand what things were like in those days in order to make sense out of the Scriptures.

But God helps us. Just after Jesus said, "Pay attention to what you hear," he said, "with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you" – Mark 4:24. Jesus encourages us to put effort into listening to and learning what he says. What he is saying is that the effort you put into it, is what you will get out of it. Except that God is generous and will add some more to our understanding. God will help us.

Study the Scriptures!

There you will learn about Jesus. There you will be equipped to live your new life in Jesus:

- you will find guidance to know God's will for your life
- you will find encouragement through stories of others' faithfulness, reminders of God's character and power and Jesus' love for us
- and you will be challenged to grow

So spend time in the Scriptures, study them and learn from them. Make it a routine part of your life. In the words of Joshua 1:8 – "meditate on it day and night." This will strengthen and help you in your new life in Jesus.

7. A New Trust In God

A central part of our new relationship with God through Jesus, is that God is our heavenly Father. (We saw this in our lesson on prayer). Since God is our Father, we can trust God with all of our life problems.

The **focus verse** is from Matthew 10:31: "*Fear not.*" We do not need to give in to fear and anxiety. God will take care of us.

Jesus calls us to trust God for our material needs

He talks about this in Matthew 6:25-34:

[25] “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? [26] Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? [27] And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? [28] And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, [29] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. [30] But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? [31] Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ [32] For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. [33] But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. [34] “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Jesus focuses on this issue because it causes us to be so fearful. Lets look at how this works. It starts with the fact that ***life isn't easy***. As Jesus says in v. 34, “Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” And this includes issues of providing for our material needs. So Jesus isn't naïve in his call to give up anxiety. The problem is real.

What happens is that ***all this trouble creates fear in us***, which is the essential problem Jesus is addressing here, especially anxiety over tomorrow – v. 34. Jesus focuses on such basics as food and clothing, but there are more things that we fret about: housing, providing for children, having enough to care for our health needs, retirement and more.

The bigger point of Matthew 6:19-34 is that given these troubles and our fears ***our natural response is to store up lots of resources to calm our fears***. Jesus refers to this in Matthew 6:19 when he talks about laying up “treasures on earth . . .” We want control over the future, to try to ease our fears. And the way we do this is by laying up resources for ourselves for the future - more than we need (see Luke 12:16-21).

If we don't have enough to lay up, we are fearful. And even if we do have enough to lay up, we fear that it will be taken away somehow. So, we are fearful either way!

So what happens is that this ***seeking after and storing up of resources becomes the focus of our lives***. Jesus says in Matthew 6:32, “For the Gentiles seek after all these things.” Jesus is saying that they are anxious for tomorrow and make protecting against future troubles the focus of their lives – storing up resources, or striving hard to do so.

The result is that our fear leads us to begin to trust in money to take care of us instead of God (Matthew 6:24), which is a breaking of the most important commandment – to love God alone. And it also leads us to stop being generous with others in need, since we need to cling to our resources to calm our fears (Matthew 6:19-20). This is a breaking of the second greatest commandment to love our neighbor.

In this passage Jesus calls us to give up anxiety that causes us to focus on, trust in and hoard our resources. And he calls us to a faith that frees us to focus on and trust in God, and to be generous with others.

Why should we give up our fear and trust God? 1) *Because life is about more than our material needs.* Jesus says in v. 25, “Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” In other words, even if we are ‘dirt poor,’ with only food and clothing, we still have our life and can have joy in serving God. (Remember, Jesus was ‘dirt poor’).

And also, in v. 33 Jesus teaches us that life is not about seeking after material things, but about seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness. We can’t let our fear lead us to get focused on what is not important. What is important is God. And we can have God without material possessions.

2) *Because our anxiety doesn’t solve anything.* Jesus says in v. 27, “And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” In the parallel passage in Luke 12:26 he adds a second question, “If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?” If our fear can’t add a single hour, how can it help us with providing for our material needs? Our fear and worrying about tomorrow is futile. It doesn’t actually help us.

3) *Because God will provide for our needs.* Jesus teaches us that God provides food to the birds, and we are more valuable than birds – v. 26. Also, God clothes the lilies, and we are more valuable than grass – vs. 28-30. As Jesus says, “Your heavenly Father knows that you need” material provisions – v. 32. And so we should not be those of “little faith” – v. 30. This is how we break free from our fear, and all the problems it leads to. We break free of fear by choosing to trust in God.

The promise Jesus gives us is this: “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness . . . (give yourself fully to God, focusing your life on what God wants for you) . . . and all these things (the material provisions you need) will be added to you.” – v. 33.

Jesus calls us to trust in God in difficult circumstances

He says in Luke 12:11-12:

"And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

The specific situation here is one of persecution for your faith. You have been brought before the authorities to give an account of why you believe in and follow Jesus.

Again, we are told "do not be anxious." It is not because it is not a fearful situation. It is because God is there with us to help us. As the passage says, "the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what to say."

Now, certainly, if God can help us in such a difficult circumstance, God can also help us in less difficult ones. No matter where we find ourselves, in a dangerous or a difficult spot, God is with us, and God's Spirit can help us with our need and give us the wisdom to do and say what is right.

Jesus calls us to trust God with our very lives

Jesus says in Matthew 10:29-31:

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."

Jesus is talking about death. As he says right before our text in v. 28, "do not fear those who kill the body." Again, the context is one of persecution, where we might be killed for our faith.

Jesus teaches us that God watches over even small animals. And not one of them dies without his knowing about it and allowing it to happen. He also tells us that God knows how many hairs are on each of our heads. God knows all about our situations; all the details. Jesus makes the point in the parallel passage in Luke 12:6 that we are not forgotten before God.

So Jesus tells us, "fear not." God is always watching over us. God loves us and is concerned about us. And if we are walking in God's way, we are not going to die, unless its time for us to die (even if people are trying to kill us -Luke 4:28-30). We are more valuable than sparrows, who do not die apart from the Father. We can trust God with our very lives.

8. A New Community

Jesus came, not just to call individuals to new life, but to form a new community. And he calls us to be a part of this.

The **focus verse** is from Matthew 16:18: *“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”* This teaches us, among other things, that Jesus will build his new community on the basis of the apostolic testimony that Peter had just confessed, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (v. 16).

An overview of what the church is

1. It is the assembly of the people of God. This is what the word “church” means – “a regularly assembled political body.” Just as in the Old Testament, God had his own people or nation, apart from all the nations of the world, so the church is God’s people; God’s distinct nation (Matthew 21:43).

2. It is the remnant of Israel, the people of God. Only a portion or remnant of Israel in Jesus’ day responded to him. From this remnant he re-formed the people of God. Just as there had been 12 tribes, now Jesus symbolically chooses 12 apostles to signal this.

Jesus said to the leaders of Israel who rejected him, “Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits” – Matthew 21:43. This “people,” or “nation” is the church, made up Jews and Gentiles who have responded to Jesus.

3. It is Jesus’ new community. Here is a comparison of the people of God before and after Jesus:

Moses was the leader	Jesus is the leader – “my church” (Matthew 16:18)
The exodus was the foundational event	Jesus’ exodus through death to resurrection is the foundational event
The temple/festivals as a focus for worship	Jesus as the focus of worship – the Lord’s Supper, his resurrection, etc.

Jesus is the foundation and focus of God’s people now.

4. It is made up of those who choose to do God’s will as Jesus teaches this. Jesus said his community is made up of “whoever does the will of God.” – Mark 3:35. He said it is made up of people from all nations who observe all that Jesus has taught – Matthew 28:19. Jesus calls out a remnant from every nation. And we all find a new identity in the nation of Jesus.

So this means you can't be born into Jesus' community. It doesn't matter who your parents are. You have to make the choice yourself! And as Matthew 28:19 indicates, this choice is made through the act of baptism.

An overview of what the church does

We gather together to worship:

- We pray together. We pray "our Father" – Matthew 6:9. We pray as a community.
- We remember, celebrate and recommit to Jesus in the Lord's supper – Mark 14:22-25; I Corinthians 11:23-26.
- We baptize new Christians – Matthew 28:19.
- We learn the way of Jesus – Matthew 28:20.

We love and support each other. This shows up in the familial language. We are Jesus' family – Mark 3:33-35; we are all "brothers and sisters" – Matthew 23:8. And as Jesus' family we love and care for each other:

- We humbly serve each other – Mark 9:35.
- We forgive each other – Mark 11:25, Luke 17:3.
- We work hard to be at peace with one another – Mark 9:50.
- We are careful not to cause others to stumble – Mark 9:42.
- We help each other with needs – Luke 12:33.

We hold each other accountable to our commitment to Jesus. In Matthew 18:15-17 Jesus taught: "If your brother (or sister) sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

If someone is not interested in doing God's will anymore, then they aren't seen as a part of the community anymore ("a Gentile and a tax collector"). This is determined through the three stage process outlined by Jesus of lovingly calling the person to repentance.

We work and witness for the kingdom. As the parable of the talents indicates, Jesus gives each of us tasks to spread the gospel and build up the kingdom community (Matthew 25:14-30).

Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses" – Acts 1:8. We share with others what Jesus has done for us. This is about inviting people to become disciples of Jesus, as he said, "make disciples of all nations" – Matthew 28:19

And this is not just an individual thing. Jesus said to his community, “You (as a community) are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden” – Matthew 5:14. We bear witness to the world of a different way of living and treating each other.

Being a part of Jesus' community is not optional

To truly follow Jesus you need to be a part of Jesus' community. Following Jesus is not a private, individualistic experience. This is everywhere assumed by Jesus. For instance:

- we can't serve one another, if we are isolated by ourselves.
- we can't help each other with needs, if we aren't in relationship with each other.
- we can't be accountable to others, if we don't belong to the community.

We need the support and help of fellow Christians in order to be faithful in a world that doesn't follow Jesus and would seek to have us give up our commitment to him. Without others to come alongside and help us, we become weak and give in to the peer pressure around us. We just blend back into the culture and society out of which we came.

Portraits of the early church

Luke records for us in Acts several descriptions of the apostolic church and they present for us an ideal for what the church should be like:

Acts 2:42-47: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

Acts 4:32-35: “Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.”

Jesus' promise regarding his church

This comes from our focus verse, where Jesus says, “the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” He is saying, death itself will not destroy his community. Just as Jesus overcame death and was raised to new life, so we will be raised and live on as a community in the coming kingdom of God. We will be the only community that will survive death intact and continue on.

Although for now we seem small and insignificant. Then we will reign. Speaking to his disciple community, he said, “blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” – Matthew 5:3. He also said, “blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” – Matthew 5:5.

9. A New Life Focus Of Serving God

A key part of our new life in Jesus is that we have a new life focus and orientation. We live now to serve God and work to advance God’s kingdom. We don’t live for ourselves, or others, or anything else.

Our **focus verse** comes from Matthew 25:21: *“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”* This is the response of Jesus to those who have worked hard to serve God with their earthly lives – when they see him on the final day.

This comes from a parable in Matthew 25:14-30 (sometimes called the parable of the talents). Here it is:

“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’ His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’ His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

‘Take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For those who have will be given more, and they will have an abundance. As for those who do not have, even what they have will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’” (TNIV)

We’ll come back to this text. Let’s first notice that-

Jesus was a man with a mission

He worked hard to promote the kingdom, to make it a reality on earth. As Matthew 9:35 says, “Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.”

Jesus gave himself to this completely and constantly. Serving God was his life focus and orientation. As he said in Luke 4:43, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.”

The Gospels tell us that Jesus

- taught God’s way
- healed the wounded
- loved the loveless
- and served the needy

He served God in all these ways in order to spread God’s kingdom message and to build up God’s kingdom community.

Jesus also calls others to be a part of his mission

During his earthly ministry he frequently said to people, “Follow me.” Now this phrase included in it an invitation to repentance and faith in him – but most especially it was a call to ‘Come and work with me to advance God’s kingdom.’

One example of this is found in Mark 1:16-20:

“Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.”

Jesus called many people when he walked this earth. And now that his earthly ministry is over, **Jesus calls us** to serve God; to work hard to spread the kingdom and finish the mission he began.

So we will draw now on our Scripture reading, as well as other passages where Jesus talks about this, and see what-

Lessons we learn from Jesus about serving God

These are things we can take away from these Scriptures that will help us, encourage us and equip us for the task of working for the kingdom.

1. Each of us are given tasks to do. Just as the servants in the parable were to take what was given them from their master and increase it, so we are each given kingdom responsibilities and we are to advance the kingdom in those areas. We all have responsibilities, according to our ability. Some have heavier duties, some lighter, but we all have something to do.

2. These tasks can be anything that further God’s kingdom. Just as with Jesus’ example, we can

- teach God’s way
- heal the wounded
- love the loveless
- and serve the needy

Whatever God assigns to us to spread his kingdom message and to build up his kingdom community.

So, find out what it is that God wants you to do. Look at the gifts that he has given you – natural talents or gifts of the Spirit. Find out what brings you joy in serving God. And then get busy at it!

But also, help out with whatever needs to be done, even if you don't feel tremendously gifted, or called in that area. In any Christian community there are things that just need to be done for the community to work. And you don't need a heavenly vision or a warm and fuzzy feeling to do it. Just a servant's heart. Give of yourself in these areas as well.

3. The focus of all our work is bearing witness to Jesus. It is about testifying to the coming of the kingdom with Jesus; it is about sharing who he is and the salvation he gives. Jesus said, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” – Acts 1:8.

- We do this as *individuals*, sharing as we have opportunity about what Jesus has done in our lives; inviting people to church.
- And we do this as a *community*. Jesus calls us “a city set on a hill” (Matthew 5:14). As a community, we live by a different standard than the world around us, and this is a witness to Jesus.

Let's remember that Jesus tells us - don't put your lamp under a basket, but let your witness shine before others – Matthew 5:14. We don't need to be fearful. And he tells us don't be ashamed of him before the world – Mark 8:38. We are to share our faith in Jesus boldly with others.

4. The goal of our work is to make disciples of Jesus. In the words of the great commission, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” – Matthew 28:19-20. We are to bear witness to Jesus so that people will begin to live a new life in Jesus for themselves and be a part of the kingdom of God. We are not just sharing information about Jesus, we seek to lead them to commit be disciples of Jesus as well.

5. Jesus calls some to give their whole lives to working for the kingdom. They may have to leave family and career behind, to help finish the work that Jesus has begun. As we saw in Mark 1:16-20, the first disciples did this. And in Mark 10:29 Jesus speaks of those who leave family and homes behind “for my sake and for the gospel.”

And God might well ask some of you to do this. Are you open to hear what God has for you? Perhaps God will call you to be a missionary or a pastor or to give your life fully to work for the kingdom in some other way.

6. Jesus calls others to stay in their place in life and work for the kingdom. To the healed demoniac who wanted to be a traveling missionary with Jesus, he said in Luke 8:39 – “Return to your

home, and declare how much God has done for you.' And he went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him." It was God's will for him not to go, but to stay home and serve and witness there.

7. We are to support those who give themselves fully to working for the kingdom. Jesus said, speaking of these, "the laborer deserves his wages." – Luke 10:7. They can't do what they are called to do without your support.

8. God's Spirit gives us the power to work for his kingdom. Just as Jesus was empowered by the Spirit, so are we. Jesus said in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses . . ."

We can't do anything in our own strength. We need God working in and through us to accomplish something for the kingdom, whatever our gifts and callings.

9. Be prepared to give an account. This brings us back to the parable in Matthew 25. We have each been given tasks, and we will have to give an account for how we have done. The parable is meant to impress in our minds the exacting nature of our master.

It teaches us – don't be lazy, doing nothing to increase God's kingdom; doing nothing to finish Jesus' mission. For those who do nothing, will not enter the kingdom on that final day when Jesus returns. And the parable ends with this ringing in our ears in order to make an impression on us.

Rather, find out what God wants you to do and work hard! Give your all for the work of God. Be a man or woman with a mission, just like Jesus.

And if you do, you will be blessed to have joy with Jesus for eternity, as our focus verse says. This is a reward that far surpasses anything we give up to work for him; anything we have to sacrifice to advance God's kingdom.

A final thought

All of our lives are so busy today. It is a part of our culture that we are always doing things. There are so many things, good things, to do. The challenge for each of us is to have a "a final day perspective" on what we choose to do with our limited time. In other words, what will God really care about, in terms of all you do, when you stand before him on the final day?

What I am saying is, of all your many commitments, make serving God and working for the kingdom the top commitment. And schedule the rest of your lives around that.

10. A New Courage To Suffer

In this lesson we are talking about a willingness to suffer for our commitment to Jesus and the kingdom of God. A willingness to give things up and to go through hardship because of our faith.

The **focus verse** comes from Mark 8:34: *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."* Jesus is saying that anyone who follows him will be persecuted. So you have to be prepared to deny your self-interests and take up your cross - an instrument of death.

From Jesus' point of view persecution is a certainty. He says, "You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake." – Luke 21:16-17. So lets look at-

How persecution works

1. We follow Jesus. We do what Jesus teaches and models for us. Specifically:

- We *confess Jesus* as Lord. We bear witness to him as the Messiah and the Son of the living God and the one who has given us salvation.
- And we *live according to Jesus' teaching and example*; by his standards and values.

2. People in the world don't like this and so they respond in negative ways. As Jesus says in Matthew 10:24-25, it won't be different for you. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you when you follow me.

- We are persecuted for *confessing Jesus*; for witnessing to others about Jesus. In Matthew 10:17-18 Jesus says to those he sent out to be his witnesses – "they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles."
- And we are persecuted for *living according to Jesus' teaching and example*; for obeying Jesus' moral code. In Matthew 5:10 Jesus talks about being "persecuted for righteousness' sake;" for doing what Jesus says, instead of what the world or a particular government says.

Persecution comes in many forms

It doesn't always mean death (certainly not in our context). There is, rather, a scale of negative reactions that can come our way:

- You can be slandered – Matthew 5:11. Jesus talks here about how they will "... revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account." In Matthew 10:25 this can include being called "Beelzebub" or Satan.
- You can be excluded socially – Luke 6:22.
- You can receive various expressions of hatred – Luke 21:17.

- You can be taken to court for your faith (where it is illegal to be a Christian) – Mark 13:9.
- You can be put to death – Matthew 10:21.

So there are different levels of persecution, from something as simple as ridicule, to being put to death.

But there is good news-

The Spirit gives us the courage we need to stay true

In these situations Jesus tells us not to be ashamed of him and his words - Mark 8:38. He also tells us not to fear those who can only kill you, that is your body and not your soul – Matthew 10:28.

But he doesn't leave us alone. As Jesus said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses . . ." – Acts 1:8. The Spirit helps us, where we would not be able to do it in our own strength. Although we would give in to our fear, or shame, the Spirit gives us the courage and boldness we need.

The difference that the Spirit makes can be seen in the example of the disciples. When Jesus was persecuted and eventually killed, they were cowards. They abandoned Jesus, ran and hid in fear. But after they had received the Spirit, they were willing to give their lives (e.g. James – Acts 12:1-2).

The promise of eternal blessings

If we remain true in times of persecution God will reward us. It will be worth it. Jesus said:

"Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." – Mark 8:35.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." – Matthew 5:10.

"You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved." – Mark 13:13.

If we endure, we will enter the kingdom eternal.

[Read appendix #5: *Martyr Stories* for three stories of persecution from the time of the Protestant reformation. Look at <http://www.persecution.com> for stories of persecution in the world today.]

11. A New Strength In Difficult Times

As Christians we will go through many kinds of struggles. We talked about persecution last week and that is a big one. But there are other kinds of difficulties that we go through. Just the stresses and struggles of ordinary life, as well as unusual times of pain and suffering that are a part of life.

Whatever kinds of difficult situations we go through, these test us to see whether we will stay true to our faith; whether we will quit, or rather grow deeper in our faith.

The **focus verse** for today is Mark 14:38: "*The Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*" This verse is talking about testing, and we will look at it as we work through our lesson. Lets begin by looking at-

Who is involved in testing

1. God allows us to be tested. This comes to us from the Lord's prayer, where Jesus taught us to pray, "lead us not into testing" – Luke 11:4. If God didn't lead us into testing, there would be no need to ask for him not to do this. And, of course, there are numerous examples of God testing people in scripture, for instance:

- God tested the Israelites in the wilderness – Deuteronomy 8:2
- God tested Job – Job 1-2

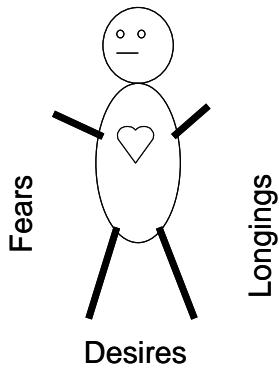
Even though God allows us to be tested, it is important to remember that God allows it for our own good. It is not a matter of us doing wrong and then being disciplined by God. This happens, but this isn't what we are talking about. Even when we do everything right, like Jesus, we are still tested. We are like athletes who train and enter competitions; who strain and hurt, in order to grow and win. God allows us to be tested because God wants us to grow and to succeed.

2. Although God allows us to be tested, *it is actually Satan who tests us*(or his underlings – evil spirits/demons).

- He is called "the tester" – Mark 1:13. This is one of his names in Scripture and this is a part of his function in the order of God, to test and then to punish those who sin.
- He seeks permission from God to test us – Job 1-2; Luke 22:31.
- His goal is to cause us to stumble and fall. He wants to separate us from God, so that he can condemn us and then destroy us.

So, God wants us to grow. But Satan wants us to be destroyed.

3. And then there is **You!** In terms of testing, two parts of you need to be pointed out:



First, there is “the flesh”: This refers to your human weakness. As Jesus said in Mark 14:38, “the flesh is weak.” This is not something alien in you (another nature); it is simply your own human desires, longings and fears. And when we are put under pressure – the flesh makes us vulnerable to give in and take another way than God’s way. (And this is the real source of our test – not God or Satan. Without our weakness we would never be tempted to sin.)

Second, there is your heart: This is the seat of your choice or will. We are not simply our fears and desires. There is more to us than that. And in a test we choose which way we will go.

4. God doesn’t leave us alone – ***The Spirit helps us in times of testing.*** As Jesus said in our focus verse, “The Spirit is willing” – Mark 14:38. The Spirit gives us strength in our times of weakness.

So this is who all is involved in testing. Now lets look at . . .

How testing works

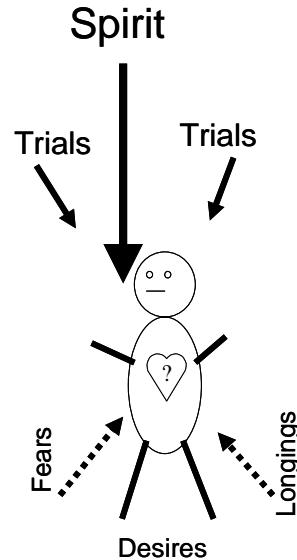
1. We are put into a difficult situation. Here are some examples from the O.T.:

- When you don’t have enough to eat, will you still trust and obey God? Exodus 16; Deuteronomy 8:2.
- When you have an abundance of wealth, will you turn away from God? Deuteronomy 6:10-12.
- When tragedy strikes, will you curse God? Job.
- When an opportunity for sexual immorality occurs, will you take it? Numbers 25.
- When God asks you to do something that is very hard, will you sacrifice for him? Genesis 22.

2. These difficult situations provoke an inner struggle

within us. The trial we are going through puts pressure on us. Our flesh wants us to take the easy way out when God is calling us to take the hard way of righteousness, to self-control, to self-sacrifice. Our flesh doesn’t like difficulty and suffering. Satan appeals to this weakness. But the Spirit is there to help us, as we saw. The Spirit pushes us to do what is right. So our flesh pulls one way, and the Spirit pulls another.

Which leads us to the point of testing with regard to us.



3. We have to choose. God wants to know what is in our heart – Deuteronomy 8:2. Will we trust and obey God in difficult situations, or will we take the easy way out? Will we stay true to God, or will we be unfaithful?

These situations of testing can be very difficult, so let's look at some-

Things that help us in times of testing

1. We can pray to be delivered from testing. Although we are told that we will be tested, Jesus also teaches us to pray regularly, “Lead us not into testing, but deliver us from the evil one” (who tests us) – Matthew 6:13. And this can also be applied when we are already in a test – “Lead us not into further testing.” Give me relief, O Lord; have mercy on me in my weakness!

2. We can find help from other believers. Just before Simon Peter and the other disciples were about to be tested when Jesus was arrested, Jesus said to him, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” – Luke 22:31-32.

- Others can “pray” for us, as Jesus prayed for Peter
- And others can “strengthen” us, as Peter was to do once he came through the test.

Encouragement and support from other believers is crucial and that is one reason we come together regularly as a community. It also speaks to the importance of having Christian friends.

3. You can find strength and focus from the Scriptures. Jesus used the Scriptures when Satan tested him in the wilderness – Luke 4:1-13. Every time Satan tried to trip him up to do the wrong thing, Jesus responded by quoting scripture. Fill yourself with the Scriptures and use them in times of testing.

4. Rely on the strength of the Spirit to help you. We have talked about this, but it is crucial. Pray that the Spirit will give you the strength that you need to make it through the test and to remain faithful to God.

- Without the Spirit’s help we will fail.
- With the Spirit’s help we can endure anything, even being killed.

Finally-

We can have joy in trials

Because we know that God has our best interests at heart, and because we know that God wants to use times of testing to help us learn and grow and prepare us for the eternal blessings he has for us, we can

have joy, even as we experience the pain of testing. It is a paradox, but it is true. As Jesus said about the testing of persecution – “Blessed are you . . . Rejoice and be glad . . .” – Matthew 5:10-12.

12. A New Hope In Jesus' Return

A final characteristic of new life (at least of what we will look at) is hope. The Scriptures teach us that everything is heading toward a decisive change; that God's kingdom, begun by Jesus, will one day cover the whole earth. So suffering, conflict, injustice and death are not the final word.

And the promise is that if we are faithful to God and our Lord Jesus now, we will enter into the fullness of the kingdom and be blessed in that day. So we have something to look forward to. As followers of Jesus we have hope.

The **focus verse** for this lesson comes from Matthew 5:5: *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”* Lets begin by looking at-

The basics

Now there are lots of things that Christians disagree on about the specifics of what will happen when or before Jesus returns. Here are some things that are more clear:

1. Jesus will return. Jesus said, “For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father . . .” – Matthew 16:27. He also said, “And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.” – Mark 13:26.

The angels said to the disciples after he ascended into heaven, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” – Acts 1:11.

2. It will be a worldwide, public event. There have been several splinter groups or cults that are based on the idea that Jesus has already, in a sense, come in a private or spiritual way. (Usually they set a date, and then when it doesn't happen, it gets spiritualized). After warning his disciples about false teachers who say, ‘Jesus is over here,’ or ‘over there’ – Jesus said, “For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day.” – Luke 17:24. He is saying, you won't be able to miss it. There will be nothing hidden or secret about it. When Jesus returns, everyone will see it.

3. No one knows the time. Jesus said, “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” – Mark 13:32. The phrase, “that day or that hour” means any time. We simply don’t know the time of his return. And if the angels don’t know, and the Son doesn’t know, that is, Jesus doesn’t know you can bet that no human knows! As Jesus says plainly in the next verse, “You do not know when the time will come” – Mark 13:33.

It is as the resurrected Jesus said to his disciples in Acts 1:7, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.” And if it is not our place, we should stop trying to figure it out!

Closely connected to this is the point that-

4. Jesus could come at any time. Jesus said of his coming “ . . . you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or in the morning.” – Mark 13:35. He goes on to say in the next verse that he could come “suddenly.” – Mark 13:36. He also says, “the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” – Luke 12:40.

The point of all of this is that the time of Jesus’ return is not known and could happen at any time. (Now, in Matthew 24:14 Jesus said the gospel must be preached to all nations before he comes. But does this mean every person? Or every actual nation? Or every tribe or subgroup? We don’t know. Paul said in his own day that the gospel had been preached to all creation – Colossians 1:23.)

5. Jesus will rule over the earth. Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world . . . the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne . . .” Matthew 19:28. This throne speaks to his rule as King over the earth.

Jesus said to the earthly rulers who were judging him at his trial – “ . . . you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” Mark 14:62. Jesus will be vindicated and he will one day come and rule over all things, from the right hand of God.

6. We will be raised to new life. We are talking about resurrection here. New bodies that will live forever, without suffering. Jesus said that “those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.” – Luke 20:35-36.

In a reference back to Daniel 12:2-3, which speaks of the resurrection and the saints shining as stars, Jesus says, “the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” – Matthew 13:43.

7. It will be a time of judgment. “For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.” – Matthew 16:27. Everyone will give an account to him of everything they have said and done (or not said and done that we should have).

With regard to followers of Jesus, *our obedience will be judged*. Jesus speaks to the final day when we will stand before him – “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’ Matthew 7:21-23.

Also, *our work for the kingdom will be judged*: This is from the parable we have looked at in Matthew 25:14-30 (the parable of the talents).

- Those who work hard at serving God and working for the kingdom will hear these words from Jesus – “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.” v. 21.
- But Jesus will say of those who do nothing – “cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” – v. 30.

8. All things will be made new. He talks about “the new world” in Matthew 19:28. It says literally, the “regeneration.” Another translation renders it “the renewal of all things.” (NRSV). This is the new creation, when the heavens and the earth will pass away (which Jesus speaks of in Mark 13:31) and then there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

9. There will be a Messianic banquet. It will be a big party, a celebration. Jesus said, “I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.” – Matthew 8:11. He talked about his disciples eating and drinking, “at my table in my kingdom” – Luke 22:30.

He said at the Last Supper, “I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” – Matthew 26:29. He is waiting for us!

Our hope

This is what we have to look forward to:

- We will be raised to new life – Luke 20:35-36. You can’t die anymore. Death is defeated. You will have a new body, like Jesus’ supernatural body and like the angels have.
- We will enter the fullness of the kingdom of God, which will never end. Matthew 5:3 says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

- We will see God. Matthew 5:8 says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” We will be close to God and be able to be in God’s presence.
- We will have joy with Jesus – Matthew 25:21. We will enter into the joy of our Master.
- We will be blessed and comforted for persecution and hardships we have suffered – Luke 6:22-23; 16:25.
- We will be rewarded for our work – Matthew 25:14-31. Hard work and sacrifices will be remembered and blessed.
- We will “inherit the earth,” as our focus verse says – Matthew 5:5. It is our destiny, not to be in heaven, but to be on the earth in God’s presence.
- We will rule with Jesus. Matthew 5:9, says “blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God.” This last phrase, “sons of God” refers to those who rule under God. Jesus also talks about how there will be varying levels of rule in the coming kingdom, based on what we have done here now – Luke 19:17, 19; Matthew 19:28.

The call to be ready

Since we don’t know when Jesus will return, we need to be alert and ready. Jesus talks about this over and over again. In Mark 13:33-37 he says,

“Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

The message is clear, we are to be ready and alert, so that we will not be caught off guard and so that we will be able to enter in and receive the blessings.

13. Symbol Of New Life: Water Baptism

The final two lessons look at two important symbols of new life in Jesus. We begin with water baptism.

The **focus verses** come from Matthew 28:19-20: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”* We know from earlier in the Gospels that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, and here we see that Jesus wants this practice to continue in his community.

To help us understand what baptism means, we begin with-

The background of water baptism: The Red Sea crossing

To get at the symbolism of water baptism we need to understand, first of all, that in Hebrew thought the deep waters are evil. They are about judgment and death, for instance with Noah (Also, Psalm 104:5-9; Psalm 69:15). And although this may seem strange to us, they are often personified as a sea-serpent (variously called Leviathan, Yamm or Rahab, as we will see).

Well, as the Israelites tried to escape Egypt and as Pharaoh's army came to kill them – the waters of the Red Sea blocked Israel and they were about to be judged and destroyed. God acted, however. He defeated the waters. He divided the sea, making a path for Israel, and then destroyed Pharaoh with the waters.

Here is where the sea-serpent language comes in. Isaiah 51:9-10, speaking of the Red Sea crossing, says, “ . . . Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to cross over?”

Psalm 74:13-14, also talking about the Red Sea crossing says, “You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the dragons of the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.”

God acted to save his people. He made a way for his people to pass through the waters. And then five things happen that show us the symbolic meaning of such water crossings in Scripture:

1. Israel left behind their old lives in Egypt. They had already begun this process in coming to the Red Sea, but they completed it because of what God did.

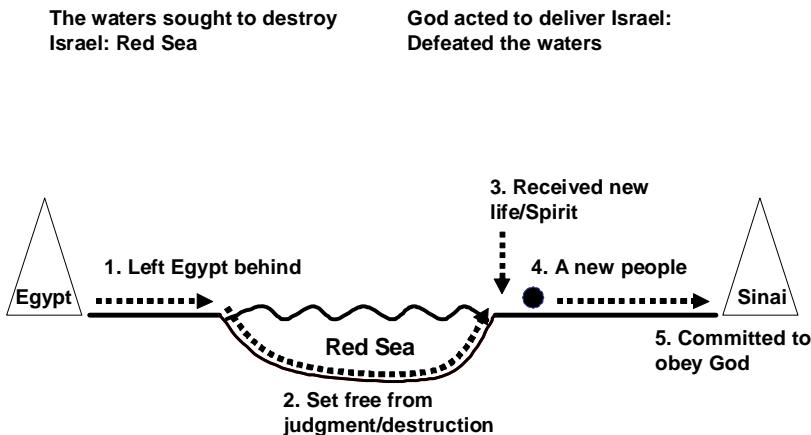
2. Israel was set free from judgment and destruction. They went through the waters safely to the other side.

3. All Israel had a Spirit experience and rejoiced at new life – Isaiah 63:11; Exodus 15:1-21. On the other shore, they sang prophetic songs.

4. Israel became a new people. They were no longer a ragtag group of slaves anymore. They became the people of God.

5. They committed to follow the Mosaic Law. After they came out of the waters, they traveled to Mt Sinai to receive God's Law, which gave order to their new life as a people.

Passing through the Red Sea



Now we need to see that-

There is a connection between this Red Sea crossing and Christian baptism

It is a historical-prophetic connection. Remember that after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea they went on to fail in their commitment to God in the wilderness. So that generation of Israelites never crossed into the promised land.

Thus when Joshua entered the promised land with the next generation they crossed through "the waters" again – the Jordan river. The waters upstream were stopped and they walked through it on dry ground (Joshua 3). This was a reenactment of the Red Sea crossing. God was symbolically reconstituting Israel after their failure in the wilderness.

And then, low and behold, John the Baptist comes baptizing people in the Jordan river. The symbolism is there to be seen. He is, like Joshua, calling for Israel to be reconstituted, to be made new. In other words, John the Baptist was reenacting Joshua's reenactment of the Red Sea crossing.

All we need to do, then, is recognize that Jesus continued John's baptismal practices, and we have an unbroken chain back to the Red Sea crossing:

- Jesus and Christian baptism
- John the Baptist and the Jordan river
- Joshua and the Jordan river
- Moses and the Red Sea

This is the essential component that helps us to understand-

What Christian water baptism means

We also are confronted by “the deep waters.” Like we saw before, these have to do with judgment and death, for our sin. And like with Israel, there is a sea-serpent (Leviathan, Rahab). Satan is the sea serpent who seeks to destroy us. (In fact, this connection is explicitly made in Revelation 12:9; 20:2).

And so, like Israel, we may seek new life and freedom, but “the waters” block us from moving forward. But God intervenes; God acts through Jesus to defeat “the waters.” Because of God’s love for us in Jesus, now there is a way for us to cross through the waters to the other side and find new life. And this is what water baptism pictures symbolically.

This can be spelled out, once again with five themes:

1. When we come to the waters of baptism – *we portray that we have left behind our old life through repentance.* Just like Israel left Egypt behind, so we leave our old, sinful life behind. This is the commitment that we publicly testify to in baptism.

This connection between baptism and repentance shows up in the New Testament: John the Baptist said, “I baptize you with water for repentance . . .” – Matthew 3:11. Peter said on the day of Pentecost, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ . . .” – Acts 2:38.

2. When we go through the waters of baptism – *we acknowledge that we are free and forgiven.* Just like with Israel and “the waters,” or judgment and death cannot harm us anymore. Our sins are forgiven (or washed away). They have no claim on us; they can’t touch us anymore. That’s why we can go through the waters and not be harmed. By going through the waters we testify that God has forgiven us. We have received God’s mercy and grace.

This connection between baptism and forgiveness shows up in the New Testament: Once again, Peter says, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” – Acts 2:38.

3. As we come up out of the water “on the other shore,” as it were, – *we acknowledge that we have received new life through the Spirit.* Just like when Israel came up on the other shore and they had a Spirit experience, so we testify that we have received new life by the Spirit.

This connection between baptism and new life by the Spirit shows up in the New Testament: John said that when Jesus came, he would baptize with the Holy Spirit – Matthew 3:11. This connects water

baptism with new life by the Spirit, or Spirit baptism. Baptism is also associated with receiving the Spirit in Acts 2:38. Peter says, “and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

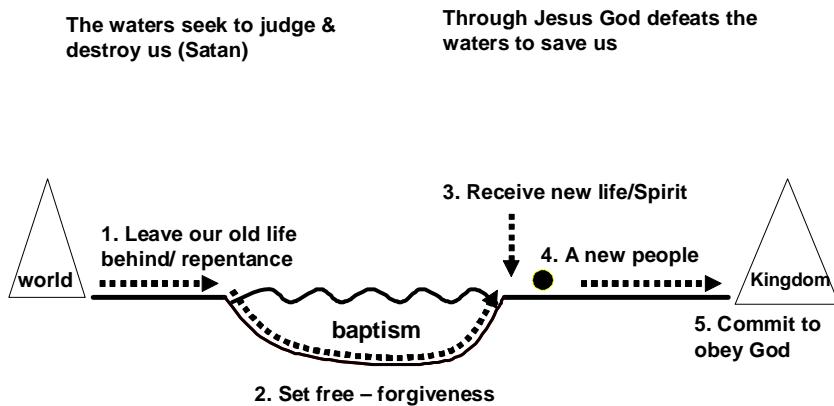
4. When we come up out of the waters – ***we acknowledge that we are now a part of God's new people.*** Just as Israel became a new people, we show that we have left the world behind and we are now a part of the church.

This connection between baptism and joining God's people shows up in the New Testament: Luke says, “So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls” - Acts 2:41. They were added to the fellowship of believers there in the local church of Jerusalem. Everyone knew they were a part now.

5. When we come up out of the waters – ***we acknowledge our commitment to follow Jesus.*** Just as Israel went on to Sinai and committed to obey God, we show our commitment to a new way of life; to doing God's will from now on.

This connection between baptism and commitment to righteousness shows up in the New Testament: Jesus talks about this, in our focus verse, “ . . . baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” – Matthew 28:19-20. Baptism is connected to obedience to everything that Jesus teaches.

Christian water baptism



When we accept baptism this is what we proclaim symbolically to all who see. That these five components of salvation in Jesus are true in our lives.

The sum of it all

Jesus spoke of his death and resurrection as a baptism. For instance in Mark 10:38, speaking of the cross, he said, “Are you able . . . be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” And this helps us to summarize the meaning of baptism: **water baptism is a symbol of death and resurrection.**

Jesus went down into and through the waters of judgment and death – the cross. And he was raised up to new life on the other side – resurrection. And He calls us to take up our cross and lose our lives, in order to gain our lives – Mark 8:34-35. Verse 35 says, “whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.”

So, water baptism is about **dying to your old life in order to be raised up to new life** through what Jesus has done.

It has to do with all that we have talked about with regard to dying to our earthly life in repentance and laying aside the ways of the world and sin. And it has to do with being raised to a new life of righteousness, prayer, study of Scripture, trust in God, joining a new community, finding a new life focus of serving God, a new courage to suffer, a new strength to endure testing and a new hope in Jesus’ return and the resurrection.

14. Symbol Of New Life: The Lord’s Supper

A second symbol of new life is the Lord’s supper.

Our **focus verses** come from Matthew 26:26-28: *“Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.’”*

This meal involves two elements: receiving the bread and the cup. So we will look at what each of these mean so that we understand what we are doing when we partake. We begin with-

The meaning of the bread

To understand this we have to look at the **Passover background**. That’s because the bread that Jesus uses comes from the Passover meal – Luke 22:15. This is what he and his disciples were eating together in our focus verses.

Exodus 12:6-13 describes the instructions for the original Passover meal:

“ . . . The whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight. Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. . . . In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.”

First of all, the Passover is about God delivering Israel from slavery. It was celebrated just before their deliverance; they were to be dressed and ready to go; and afterwards they were set free.

Second, this deliverance is connected to a sacrificial death – the lambs. In fact, the Passover was the means of their deliverance. While the Egyptians were judged, the blood of the lambs protected the Israelites. God passed over their homes. And when the Egyptians saw this they wanted the Israelites to leave.

The bread, coming from this meal, calls to mind deliverance from slavery through sacrificial death.

Jesus on the bread: In v. 26 Jesus says of the bread, “this is my body.” This is a figurative way of talking about his body. (The reason we know it is figurative is that Jesus’ body was still a part of him, with the disciples in the room.) What he is saying is that just as the bread was broken as it was distributed to be eaten, so the bread represents his broken body on the cross. He is saying that through his sacrificial death, we are set free from slavery – to the world, Satan, our sin and death. And in keeping with the symbolism, we commit to leave all this behind.

The meaning of the cup

Here we need to look at the background of **the covenant ceremony**. This was when Israel, after passing through the Red Sea, went to Mt. Sinai and entered into a covenant with God.

Jesus connects the cup to this event when he uses the phrase “my blood of the covenant” (v. 28), which comes from this event.

Exodus 24:5-8 talks about this:

“And Moses sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and

half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.’ And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.’”

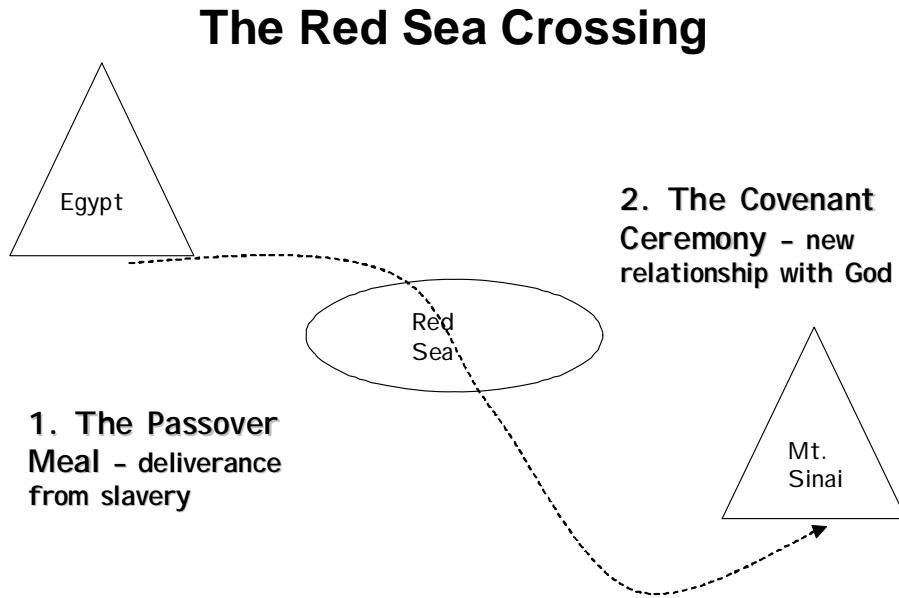
First, this has to do with entering into a new relationship with God: God forgave them (Hebrews 9:20-22), and they agreed to obey God. “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.”

Second, this new relationship is connected to sacrificial death. The blood of the oxen was sprinkled on the altar and the people. It was the “the blood of the covenant.” (Exodus 24:5-8).

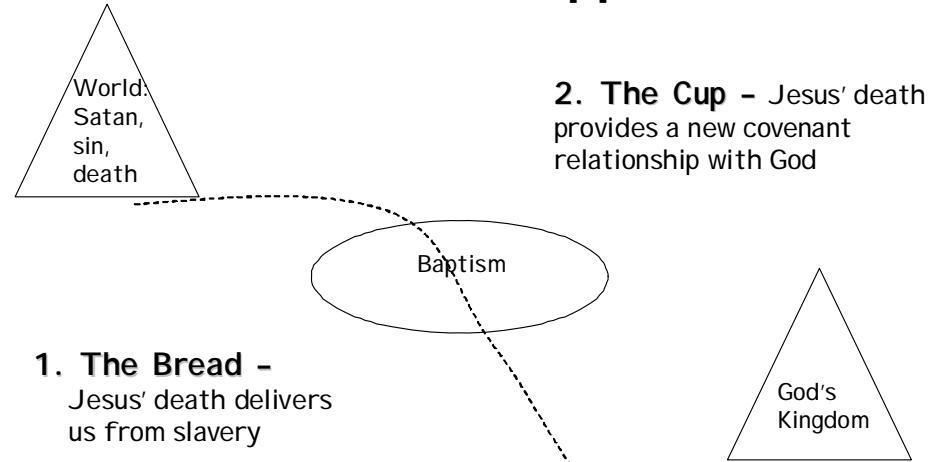
The cup, connected to this, brings to mind a new relationship with God through sacrificial death.

Jesus on the cup: In v. 28 he says of the cup, “this is my blood.” Like with the bread, this is a figurative way of talking about his blood. Jesus is saying that just as the cup was poured out as they drank from it, so the cup represents his blood “poured out” (v. 28) on the cross. He is saying that through his sacrificial death, his “blood of the covenant,” we have a new relationship with God; a new covenant. Our sins are forgiven (v. 28). And in keeping with the symbolism, we commit to do all that Jesus commands us.

Here are two graphics as a summary of this:



The Lord's Supper



1. We acknowledge the symbolism as true in our lives:

- When we eat the bread we are saying that “through Jesus I am set free. I am delivered from the world, Satan, sin and death and I choose to leave all this behind.”
- When we drink the cup we are saying that “through Jesus I have a new relationship with God. My sins are forgiven and I commit to do all that Jesus has commanded.”

These are the very things that we acknowledged at the time of our baptism. And each time we partake of the Lord’s supper we renew this baptismal testimony and commitment to God.

2. We remember Jesus. In speaking of his meal, Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me” – 1 Corinthians 11:24, echoing the command with regard to Passover (Exodus 12:14). We remember Jesus and his death for us and the salvation he has given us – deliverance and new relationship with God. We remember his sacrificial love for us.

3. We offer thanks. Just as Jesus gave thanks for the bread and cup, and after the meal they sang a hymn of thanks (Matthew 26:30), so we give thanks for the salvation that we have in Jesus. For deliverance, forgiveness and new life.

4. We look forward to the Messianic banquet. This is that great feast and celebration that will happen at the end of the age.

Jesus says in Matthew 26:29, "I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." He is speaking of this celebration. So every time we partake, we anticipate the day when we will feast with Jesus in the Kingdom.

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Appendix #1: Prophetic Predictions and Foreshadowings of Jesus, the Messiah

Introduction: Some of these Old Testament Scriptures are straightforward prophetic predictions about Jesus. Some of them are predictions which have a double fulfillment, both in the life of Israel and then more fully in Jesus. And some give us a picture of Jesus from the lives of various Israelites - especially King David. They speak of the individual, but also look forward to their true fulfillment in Jesus. So, for instance, what happened to David becomes a prophetic picture of Jesus' life. And what David said becomes prophetic pronouncements about or from Jesus. This is called 'typology'. What happened before foreshadows what happens in Jesus - who is the true fulfillment of all of God's plans and purposes. This is not a complete list.

1. He was born of a virgin: Isaiah 7:14 - "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (God with us). Just as Hezekiah was born to a young woman as a sign that God remembered his promise to David for a son to rule; that God was with them. So with Jesus. Jesus was born of the virgin Mary as a sign of God coming to save - Luke 1:26-35; Matthew 1:18-23.

2. He was born in Bethlehem: Micah 5:2 - "But you, O Bethlehem . . . from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days." Jesus was born in Bethlehem - Matthew 2:1/6. Verse 6 notes this as the fulfillment of this prophetic prediction.

3. He was a descendent of David: Isaiah 11:1 - "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit." This was seen as a Messianic text. The Messiah was to be a descendent of David (Jesse's son) who would sit on his throne. Jesus was a descendent of David – Luke 3:31-32; Matthew 1:6; Acts 13:23.

4. He was born to rule: Isaiah 9:6-7 - "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called wonderful counselor, Mighty God, everlasting Father, prince of peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and uphold it with justice and righteousness from this time forth and forevermore." Jesus was born to rule. Matthew 2:1-12 tells the story of the wise men who came to honor the king of the Jews. And indeed he rules right now, sitting at the right hand of God, and will rule the earth fully when he returns in glory.

5. His ministry was preceded by a forerunner: Malachi 3:1 - "Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me." John the Baptist came before Jesus to prepare the way - Matthew 11:10. Jesus saw this as the fulfillment of this verse.

6. He lived in Galilee: Isaiah 9:1-2 - "In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined." This text comes just before the Messianic scripture, "to us a child is

born." Jesus lived and ministered in Galilee – Mark 1:14. Matthew 4:15 notes this as a fulfillment of Isaiah.

7. He was full of the Spirit: Isaiah 11:2 - "And the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and the Spirit of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord." This comes from a broader Messianic passage of scripture. Jesus was full of the Spirit – Matthew 3:16; Luke 4:14. The Spirit came upon him at his baptism. He was known as one who did works of power by the Spirit, and for his understanding and wisdom.

8. He proclaimed the Kingdom of God: Isaiah 52:7 - "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'" This passage is connected to the Messianic servant that Isaiah speaks about. Jesus preached the good news of the Kingdom of God – Mark 1:15; Luke 4:43.

9. He ministered to the outcasts and the hurting: Isaiah 61:1-2 - "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Jesus ministered to the needy and lowly - tax collectors, sinners and prostitutes - Luke 15:1. In Luke 4:21 Jesus says that his ministry is a fulfillment of this text.

10. He took away people's suffering: Isaiah 53:4 - "Surely he has borne our grief and carried our sorrows." Jesus healed people and cast out demons – Matthew 8:14-17. Verses 17 notes this as a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4.

11. He was Moses' successor as prophetic teacher: Deuteronomy 18:18 - "I will raise up for Israel a prophet like Moses from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him." Jesus was a teacher greater than Moses. In Acts 3:22-23 Peter applies this verse from Deuteronomy to Jesus. And Jesus himself said, "you have one teacher, the Messiah" Matthew 23:8.

12. He was gentle and righteous: Isaiah 42:1-3 - "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice." Jesus was gentle and righteous. Matthew 12:15-21 sees this as a fulfillment of this passage.

13. He spoke in parables: Psalm 78:2 - "I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter dark sayings from of old." Jesus was famous for speaking in parables. Matthew 13:35 notes this as a fulfillment of Psalm 78.

14. His message was rejected: Isaiah 53:1 – "Who has believed what they heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" This is from a Messianic section of Isaiah. Jesus' message was rejected – John 12:37-38. This last verse cites this as a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:1.

15. He was presented to Israel riding on a donkey: Zechariah 9:9 - "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Zechariah has several Messianic allusions in it. As this verse pictures, Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Matthew 21:4-5 notes this as a fulfillment of this text.

16. He was zealous for the temple: Psalm 69:9 - "For zeal for your house has consumed me." Jesus cleansed the temple – John 2:13-17; Matthew 21:12-13. John 2:17 looks to this as a fulfillment of this text.

17. He was betrayed by one who ate bread with him: Psalm 41:9 - "Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me." This is a Davidic psalm. Just as David was betrayed, so Judas, one of the twelve, betrayed Jesus after eating bread with him at the Last supper – John 13:8. Jesus said in this verse, "But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.'"

18. He was betrayed for 30 pieces of silver: Zechariah 11:12 - "And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver." Jesus was betrayed for 30 pieces of silver – Matthew 27:3/9.

19. He was among the "lawless": Isaiah 53:12 - "He was numbered with the transgressors." Jesus was

arrested with his disciples as they acted as criminals with their swords – Luke 22:35-38; 47-53. This is noted as a fulfillment of this text.

20. He was deserted by his followers: Zechariah 13:7 - "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered." The key word here is "Shepherd" which means ruler, and prophetically points to the Messiah, the ruler of Israel. When Jesus was arrested, his disciples deserted him – Mark 14:50-52. Jesus predicted this, based on this passage ahead of time, before the arrest, when he said, "You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'" - Mark 14:27.

21. He was silent before his accusers: Isaiah 53:7 - "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth." Jesus did not defend himself at his trial – Matthew 26:63.

22. He was mocked at his trial: Psalm 109:25 – "I am an object of scorn to my accusers; when they see me, they wag their heads." Jesus was spit on, mocked and beaten at his trial - Mark 14:65.

23. Nations plotted against him: Psalm 2:1-2 - "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his anointed." The key word is "anointed," which means Messiah. Both the Jewish and Gentile authorities acted against Jesus – Mark 14:53-65; 15:1-15. This Scripture is applied to Jesus in Acts 4:25-27.

24. He was despised and rejected: Isaiah 53:3 - "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not." Jesus was despised and rejected – Matthew 22:66-23:25.

25. He gave himself up as an offering: Psalm 40:6-8- "Sacrifice and offering you have not desired, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.'" Hebrews 10:5-9 refers these words to Jesus as he went to die.

26. They pierced his hands and feet: Psalm 22:16 - "They have pierced my hands and feet." This is a Davidic psalm which tells the whole story of Jesus' death and resurrection. This speaks to his crucifixion. Jesus' hands and feet were pierced as they were nailed to the cross – Luke 23:33.

27. He was mocked on the cross: Psalm 22:7-8 - "All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads. He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him." Jesus was mocked on the cross – Mark 15:29-32 relates to Psalm 22:7. Matthew 27:43 relates to Psalm 22:8.

28. They cast lots for his garments: Psalm 22:18 - "They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." The soldiers divided Jesus' clothes by casting lots – Matthew 27:35; and John 19:23-24, notes this as a fulfillment of this Scripture.

29. Jesus was thirsty: Psalm 22:15 – "My mouth sticks to my jaw." Jesus said, "I thirst" in accordance with this Scripture - John 19:28.

30. He was given sour wine: Psalm 69:21 - "For my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink." This is a Davidic psalm. Jesus was also given sour wine on the cross – John 19:28-30.

31. He said, "into your hand I commit my spirit": Psalm 31:5 – "Into your hands I commit my spirit." This is a Davidic psalm. On the cross Jesus said these words - Luke 23:46.

32. He bore our sins: Isaiah 53:5-6 - "He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Jesus bore our sins on the cross – Matthew 26:27-28; Mark 10:45; I Corinthians 15:3; I John 2:1-2.

33. He died: Isaiah 53:8 - "By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people." Jesus died on the cross – John 19:30.

34. He was pierced: Zechariah 12:10 - "they will look on him whom they have pierced." Jesus was pierced

in the side by a spear on the cross – John 19:33-37. The last verse notes this is a fulfillment of Zechariah 12:10.

35. He was connected to the rich in death: Isaiah 53:9 - “He was with a rich man in death.” Joseph of Arimethia, a well to do man, put Jesus in his tomb – John 19:38-42; Luke 23:50-53.

36. He was not abandoned to death (Sheol): Psalm 16:10 – “For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.” This is a Davidic psalm. Jesus did not stay dead, as we know from the resurrection accounts. Both Peter and Paul see Psalm 16:10 as David speaking prophetically of Jesus being freed from death - Acts 2:24-31; Acts 13:35-37.

37. He was raised from the dead: Psalm 2:7 – “The Lord said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you.’” This was considered to be a Messianic psalm. It speaks of God’s “anointed” or Messiah. Jesus was raised from the dead. Paul refers this Psalm to Jesus’ resurrection in Acts 13:32-33. Begotten here means resurrection.

38. He was exalted to sit at God's right hand: Psalm 110:1 – “The Lord said to my lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.” This was also considered to be a Messianic psalm. Here David speaks of God and then of his “lord” – a reference to the coming Messiah, that he would sit by God’s side. Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God. This text is seen as a clear fulfillment of this by numerous New Testament texts. As one example, Peter refers to it in Acts 2:34-35.

Conclusion: The Old Testament Scriptures predict and foreshadow the coming of Jesus – his birth, life, death, resurrection and glory.

- Jesus said to the Jewish leaders - “You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf.” - John 5:39.
- Jesus said to the dismayed disciples after his death – “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.” - Luke 24:25-27.
- He also said to these disciples – “These things are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you - that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem.” - Luke 24:44-47.
- The apostle Peter writes, “Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory.” - I Peter 1:10-11.

Appendix #2: Should Christians Obey The Law Of Moses?

The Apostolic Decree of Acts 15:28-29

This teaching speaks to the big picture of how we interpret the Scriptures, but also deals with some specific aspects of Christian obedience; things that are rarely or never talked about.

We begin with the big picture question, which is: Are Christians supposed to keep the Law of Moses? For instance:

- Are Christians to keep the Sabbath, that is, Saturday, as a day of rest?

- Should Christian men be circumcised?
- Should Christians eat only clean foods and abstain from foods like pork?
- Should we maintain ritual purity for example, if we touch a dead body?
- Should Christians tithe according to the precepts of the Law?

It seems like there has always been confusion among Christians about the role of the Law of Moses in the Christian life. Didn't Jesus change things? Didn't Paul teach that it is no longer binding? We will look at the answer given by the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:28-29.

But first we have to note, by way of background, that-

Jewish Christians continued to follow the Law of Moses

Jesus himself was Law observant, all the way down to wearing four tassels on his garment (Deuteronomy 22:12/Matthew 9:20). Oh, he stretched some things now and again, like touching a leper (Matthew 8:1-4; Numbers 5:1-4), but this was to heal the leper. And even in this case, he told the leper to follow the Law of Moses to be certified as clean.

And not only was Jesus Law observant, **he also taught his Jewish disciples to keep the Law**. As he said in Matthew 5:17, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, I have not come to abolish them." (See Matthew 5:17-19; 23:2-3; 23:23).

Now for sure, Jesus rejected the human traditions, or the "tradition of the elders" (the oral law) which the Pharisees used as a guide for keeping the Law (Matthew 15:1-9). Rather, he gave his disciples his own teaching and example as a guide (Matthew 23:10) which clarifies and perfects the Law of Moses (Matthew 5:17). So for instance, with regard to the Sabbath: his Jewish disciples should keep it, but recognize that mercy has priority, which is why Jesus healed on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:9-14).

Paul also kept the Law. James, the brother of Jesus, and the leader of the church in Jerusalem, who was himself famous for his strict observance of the Law, bears witness that Paul was Law observant in Acts 21:20-24:

- When Paul came to visit Jerusalem, James spoke of how the Jewish Christians there were zealous for the Law.
- But, they had been told a rumor that Paul was teaching Jewish Christians to forsake the Law.
- To counter this, James had Paul publicly go through a Mosaic vow ceremony.

James says in v. 24, "Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law."

Now, these Jewish believers, *didn't keep the Law in order to be saved by it*. Jesus is the Messiah and Savior. They kept the Law because Moses is the authority that God has placed over them, just as we submit to the authorities that God has placed over us and the laws of our land.

And the authority of Moses for Jews will not pass away until the coming of the kingdom in its fullness, as Jesus said in Matthew 5:18.

The Jerusalem Council

But what about Gentiles? Should they keep the Law? There was *a heated debate* about this because Jesus didn't leave any specific instructions on this point.

- Some taught that Gentiles must be circumcised and become fully Law observant Jews in order to be accepted by God (Acts 15:1; 5). [To be circumcised is to commit to obey the whole Law of Moses – Galatians 5:3]
- Paul and others taught that Gentiles do not need to be circumcised and keep the Law, to be fully accepted by God (Acts 15:2).

So, there was a gathering to settle this issue, the apostles, along with the elders of the church of Jerusalem, and Paul and Barnabas, called the Jerusalem Council. They decided that ***Gentiles are not required to keep the Law of Moses to be saved*** (Acts 15:13-19). As Peter said:

- Gentile Christians, like Jewish Christians, are “saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 15:11).
- They are “disciples” of Jesus, that is, they obey Jesus’ teaching (Acts 15:10).
- They have received the “Holy Spirit” as a witness to their salvation (Acts 15:8).

But ***Jewish Christians would continue to keep the Law***, not for salvation, but in submission to Moses.

So this helps us to understand the bigger picture of Scripture, why some passages sound like the Law is to be followed; talking to Jewish Christians (see again Matthew 5:17-19; 23:2-3; 23:23). And why others sound like the Law does not need to be followed; Paul talking to the Gentile Christians.

Now to the issue of specific behaviors - that are rarely if ever talked about. It was also decided at the Jerusalem council that there was one portion of the Law that Gentile Christians should observe.

We see this in what is called-

The Apostolic Decree

This is a letter that was sent out to the Gentile churches. It says in part, “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well” - Acts 15:28-29.

This letter gives three essentials that apply to everyone: 1) Do not eat idol food. 2) Do not eat blood (or what is strangled, because the blood hasn’t been drained). 3) Do not practice sexual immorality

If we ask, ***where do these essentials come from?*** It is quite clear. These refer back to Leviticus 17-18, which talk about these same issues in the same order as in the Apostolic Decree: 1) Idol food - Leviticus 17:1-9; 2) Eating blood - Leviticus 17:10-16; 3) Sexual immorality - Leviticus 18.

So the decision of the council was that, Gentile followers of Jesus do not need to submit to the Law of Moses, except for a particular part of it that comes from Leviticus 17-18.

What does this mean practically in terms of specific behaviors? 1. *Do not eat idol food.* This isn't a pressing issue in our context today. It was huge for them, and still is in some parts of the world. But basically it means, if you know the food has been offered up to an idol, don't eat it.

2. *Do not eat blood.* This means that our meat needs to be butchered so that the blood is drained, which is the common practice today. (The widespread acceptance of the Decree in the Gentile churches and the later influence of the church on society no doubt played a role in this being common today). And also don't eat dishes that have blood in them.

3. *Do not practice sexual immorality.* This seems self-explanatory, but Leviticus 18 gets pretty specific, you know, beyond just the basics, (you can read the whole chapter yourself, I rate it at PG 13 or above). Here are three examples:

- Do not marry close relatives - vs. 6-18
- No sexual relations during menstruation – v. 19
- Do not engage in same-sex acts - v. 22

Alright, as I said, some of this is never really talked about, but this is God's will for our lives. As the letter said, "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us (the apostles and elders)" - Acts 15:28. It really doesn't get any clearer than that.

A footnote: The teaching of the decree was followed in Gentile churches for centuries as is evidenced in various church manuals and other writings:

- No idol food: *Didache* 6:3; *Apostolic Constitutions* 7:2:21.
- No eating blood: Irenaeus *Fragments* xiii; Tertullian *Apology* 9; *Apostolic Constitutions* 7:2:20.
- No sexual immorality: *The Apostolic Tradition* 16:20; *Apostolic Constitutions* 6:5:28 forbids same-sex practice, intercourse during menstruation, etc. and appeals to Leviticus 18.

Why these three items?

It's because they teach a 'creation righteousness' that is not Jewish specific, but applies to all people, everywhere.

- *Why can't we eat food sacrificed to idols?* Because God is our Creator and we are to have no participation with idolatry or false gods, including idol food. This applies to everyone, since God created everyone.
- *Why can't we eat blood?* Because the life is in the blood, (Leviticus 17) and the life belongs to the Creator. Originally God only allowed a vegetarian diet. God gave Noah permission to eat meat, but then only without the blood (Genesis 9:4). So this command applies to all the children of Noah; that is, to all people.
- *Why can't we engage in sexual immorality?* Because our Creator has established the boundaries of sexual behavior. And as the end of Leviticus 18 makes clear, Gentiles are held accountable to these boundaries. The Canaanites were judged, in part, for the sexual immorality described in Leviticus 18. These boundaries apply to all people.

Finally, what about Paul and the Apostolic Decree?

Well, he was there, he shared, and **he supported the Decree** – which, in fact, vindicated his position. Act 16:4 says, “As Paul and Timothy went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them *for observance* the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem.”

He supported the specifics of the Decree. Now, there is no discussion of eating blood in Paul or anywhere else in the New Testament, other than Acts 15. But on the issue of idol food, Paul taught his people not to knowingly eat food sacrificed to idols - I Corinthians 10:14-22. (See also Revelation 2:20). And on the issue of sexual immorality, numerous examples could be given. Here are two: no incest (I Corinthians 5:1) and no same-sex behavior (I Corinthians 6:9-11).

He also supported the general principle of the Decree. This gets us back to the big picture level. All were to follow Jesus' teaching and example as Christians, and then according to the Apostolic Decree:

- Jewish Christians continued to keep the Law of Moses (Acts 21:20-24)
- And Gentile Christians were only to keep the three essentials from the Law (Acts 21:25)

Paul affirms this in I Corinthians 7:17-20: “Let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you. This is my rule in all the churches. Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision in nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything. Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called.”

He is saying, if you are a practicing Jew when you become a follower of Jesus, don't give up your observance of the Law; don't remove the marks of circumcision. But, if you are a Gentile when you become a follower of Jesus, don't seek to start obeying the Law of Moses; don't seek circumcision (at least not as a means of salvation).

Remain in the condition in which you were called, when you were saved. The Jew remains a Jew, the Gentile remains a Gentile. Just make sure, whether Jew or Gentile, that you are obeying God; that you are following Jesus' teaching and example.

This is **the mystery of God**, according to Paul, that was hidden from the foundation of the world (Ephesians 3:1-6). God has chosen to put together both Jews and Gentiles as the people of God.

- Gentiles should not be forced to become Jews, which is what Paul fought.
- And Jews should not be forced to be Gentiles, which is pretty much what has happened ever since the time of Paul.

Both Jews and Gentiles come together in Christ as one, on an equal footing.

Appendix #3: Sexual Purity

God calls us to live sexually pure lives. To be sexually pure is to live according to God's boundaries for sexual expression, not those of our own making or according to our desires or what the world around us says.

The standard is set by God and Jesus teaches us what this is in Mark 10:6-9. He said, "But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." The positive standard for sexuality is one man and one woman in a lifelong marriage relationship.

Sexual impurity or "Porneia"

The Greek word for sexual impurity is "Porneia." It is usually translated as "sexual immorality" or "fornication." It doesn't just refer to premarital sex as is sometimes thought. It actually means "every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse." It is a word that covers every category of forbidden sexual activity. In some cases the context defines a particular meaning – adultery or incest, but often it is used generically for all kinds of sexual immorality.

Kinds of Porneia:

1. Incest – This refers to sexual relations with close relatives. (See Leviticus 18:7-18 and Deuteronomy 27:23). That this still applies to us can be seen from: Mark 6:18, I Corinthians 5:1-3 and Acts 15:28-29.

2. Prostitution – This is, of course, sex for payment. Paul forbids this. He says, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!" - I Corinthians 6:15.

3. Pre-marital sex – or engaging in sexual relations before you are married.

- ◆ In Deuteronomy 22:20-21 the death penalty was applied to the non-virgin bride.
- ◆ In John 8:41 pre-marital sex is called Porneia.
- ◆ According to I Corinthians 7:2, 9, Paul says the answer to burning desire is marriage, not premarital sex. It is called Porneia here as well.

Pre-marital sex is akin to prostitution - Genesis 34:31. It is treating the woman as a prostitute.

4. Adultery – This refers to breaking your marriage commitment by having sexual relations with someone who is not your spouse. Exodus 20:14 – "You shall not commit adultery." Matthew 15:19 – "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, *adultery*, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander."

5. Adulterous remarriage after a wrongful divorce - If your first marriage is not already broken by sexual immorality, and you consummate another marriage (even if you are legally divorced) this is considered an act of adultery because the first marriage is still intact in God's eyes. Matthew 19:8-9 – "He said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.'"

Things are a bit different if your spouse was an unbeliever and left or divorced you. In this case you are free of the marriage, even if the marriage is not broken by adultery – I Corinthians 7:12-16.

6. Homosexual practice – or same-sex activity. Leviticus 18:22 – "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination." That this still applies can be seen in Romans 1:26-27 and I Timothy 1:8-11.

7. Sex during menstruation – This is sexual intercourse during a woman's monthly cycle. Ezekiel 18:5-9 – "If a man is righteous and does what is just . . . and does not defile his neighbor's wife or approach a woman in her time of menstrual impurity, does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment . . . he is righteous . . ." Leviticus 18:19 teaches this. Acts 15:28-29 tells us to observe the regulations of Leviticus 18.

8. Bestiality – This has to do with sexual contact with an animal. Leviticus 18:23 - "And you shall not lie with any animal and so make yourself unclean with it, neither shall any woman give herself to an animal to lie with it: it is perversion." Again, Acts 15:28-29 tells us to observe Leviticus 18.

9. Other: Anything else that falls outside of one man and one woman in a committed life-long relationship. This would exclude, among other things, polygamy and pedophilia.

Other Concerns

1. Not just the outward act is wrong, also entertaining the inward lust for Porneia is forbidden.

Matthew 5:27-28 – "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Mental fantasies and the use of pornography are Porneia of the heart. Also, seeking to seduce someone into Porneia is Porneia of the heart. This last has to do with the way we dress, act and talk, both men and women (I Timothy 2:9-10).

2. We must also beware of stumbling blocks that lead to Porneia. That is, putting ourselves in situations or relationships that pressure us or encourage us to Porneia. Matthew 5:29 - "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell."

The seriousness of Porneia

Porneia, in any of its forms, defiles us – Mark 7:23. It brings God's judgment upon us – I Corinthians 10:8. And it will exclude us from the coming kingdom of God. I Corinthians 6:9-10 says, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the *sexually immoral*, nor idolaters, nor *adulterers*, nor *men who practice homosexuality*, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." (Also, Galatians 5:19-21).

Scriptural calls to refrain from Porneia

- ◆ Romans 13:13 says, "Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy."
- ◆ 1 Corinthians 6:13 says, "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."
- ◆ 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 says, "Flee from sexual immorality. . . . Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

- ♦ Colossians 3:5 says, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”
- ♦ Ephesians 5:3 says, “But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.”
- ♦ I Thessalonians 4:3 says, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality . . .”

On a related topic: Only marry (date) a fellow believer

Scripture teaches that we are only to marry believers:

- ♦ Paul tells the widow who is considering remarrying “she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord” – I Corinthians 7:39, that is to another believer.
- ♦ Paul’s words in II Corinthians 6:14-15 certainly apply to marriage and dating. “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?”

To be married to an unbeliever is to yoke yourself together in the most intimate way possible with someone who does not share your faith; your deepest life values. So they will not be particularly interested in giving you encouragement in your Christian faith and the danger is that they will pull you away from it (see Deuteronomy 7:3-4).

There is also the issue of how to raise the children. Whose values will be taught? One of the purposes of marriage, according to Malachi 2:15, is to raise godly children.

It is one thing if you are already married to an unbeliever before you become a Christian (as is the case in I Corinthians 7:12-16). It is another to knowingly choose to do this.

Appendix #4: Love Your Enemies

The Meaning of Matthew 5:43-48

[43] You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' [44] But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. [46] For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? [47] And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? [48] You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

This text presents a central teaching of Jesus. It comes as the climax of six examples of the greater righteousness of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20). It teaches us to love our enemies. Here are four things that we learn from this passage along with other teaching on this topic.

1. Jesus teaches us to return good for evil. Moses clearly allowed returning evil for evil, harm for harm. We see this in the verses just before our focus, in 5:38 - "an eye for an eye." But even in our text we can see this. For, although Moses taught in Leviticus 19:18 to forsake revenge and love your neighbor, that is, your fellow Israelite, he also taught in Deuteronomy 23:3-6 to hate the enemy who is an outsider, the Ammonite and the Moabite.

More specifically, since these peoples did not give the Israelites food and water in their time of need after the exodus, but rather tried to curse them, Israel is commanded never to act for this people's well-being. In other words, they are to return evil for evil to these enemies. This is what Jesus is referring to when he says, "you have heard that it was said . . . hate your enemy."

After laying out Moses' position, Jesus moves beyond it. He says, "but, I say to you . . ."

- ♦ If you have an enemy, don't hate them, love them.
- ♦ If your enemy persecutes you, don't curse them, pray for them.

Jesus calls us to a higher standard. Even when someone harms you, return good for evil.

This teaching is echoed all throughout the New Testament. I Peter 3:9 says, "Do not repay evil for evil, or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary repay with a blessing." I Thessalonians 5:15 says, "See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do what is good to one another and to all."

Although returning evil for evil is the standard of Moses, and it is the standard of worldly governments around us today, Jesus calls us to his higher way.

2. This call to return good for evil is packaged in a contrast between incomplete love and complete love.

- Incomplete love means only loving those who are like you, or those who do good to you.
- Complete, or perfect love means loving those who are like you *and* those who are not a part of your group. It means loving those who do good to you *and* those who harm you. It is complete love because it encompasses all people, not just certain categories.

Jesus gives two examples of incomplete love:

- In verse 46 the tax collectors love only a certain group - those who love them.
- In verse 47 the Gentiles greet only a certain kind of people - those in their own group.

Jesus also gives two examples of complete love. Neither of the first two groups are models of righteousness in Jesus' context. But for these examples, he points us to the Father in heaven, who is our example:

- In verse 45 the Father in heaven gives sunshine to the good *and* the evil.
- And also in verse 45 the Father in heaven gives rain to the righteous *and* the unrighteous.

In an agricultural context this means that God supplies food to all. So the Father's love is complete. It is all inclusive. He gives to the insiders and outsiders, to those who do him harm and those who do good. This is the meaning of verse 48. To "be perfect" (or it can also be translated "complete") is to be complete like the Father in your love. Have in your own life love that includes both the good and the bad, the righteous and the unrighteous.

Now we always try to draw boundaries on who we love. Like the lawyer in Luke 10 we ask, "Who is my neighbor?" wondering if it really includes people like Samaritans. We try to tame Jesus' words so that our love does not have

to be complete like the Father's. But the thrust of Jesus' words are clear. Our love is to encompass all people, all enemies, no matter in what context we encounter them.

3. Enemy love is not an emotion or some inner intention. Rather it consists of concrete actions that help our enemies. Jesus tells us to love our enemies. From the rest of Scripture we know that to love someone means to do good to them, to help them with their practical needs (I John 3:16-18). This is evident in this text in that the Father gives food to his enemies.

Jesus also tells us to pray for our persecutors. We are to ask for God's blessings to come into their lives. We are also to "greet" our enemies. This is not about whether we are rude to them or not. The greeting in that day was "peace," a word that functioned as a blessing. In greeting them, we give them a blessing.

In these two examples we see the contrast with Moses in Deuteronomy 23:

- The Ammonites did not give Israel food. Instead of returning evil for evil, we are to love and feed our enemies.
- The Ammonites sought to curse Israel. Instead of returning evil for evil, we are to pray for and bless our enemies.

The example of Jesus is instructive. When he was being arrested by his enemies and one of his disciples cut off the ear of one of them, Jesus stopped to rebuke his disciple and heal his enemy's ear (Luke 22:50). He acted in a practical way to help someone who was seeking to kill him. He also prayed for God's mercy for his enemies who executed him, even while he was dying on the cross (Luke 23:34).

If we look further in the New Testament at the example of the Father, we see that love includes self-sacrifice for enemies. Not only does God give food to his enemies, he gave his Son. Romans 5:8 says, "But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Paul goes on to say in verse 10, "while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God."

To love our enemy certainly does not mean killing them. Rather, it means that we act for the best interests of our enemy in practical ways, even to the point of self-sacrifice.

4. There is a promise here for those who love their enemies. Loving enemies is not easy. It takes a real yieldedness to God, strength from the Spirit, and faith that God will take care of you. It is hard.

As an encouragement to us, Jesus gives us a promise, which gives us hope. In verse 45 he says that we are to love our enemies, "so that you may be sons of your Father in heaven." To be a "son" is not about being male. It is not about gender, but about a certain social status - the status of an inheritor. The son inherits the Father's blessings.

When we look at the overall context of Matthew 5:17-48 it is all about "Who will inherit the kingdom?" "Who will gain the Father's blessings?" Matthew 5:20 says, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Then Jesus gives us six examples of the greater righteousness necessary to enter the kingdom, culminating in the example of enemy love.

So what Jesus is saying, is this - those who don't practice enemy love are no better than tax collectors and Gentiles. Their practice of righteousness is no different. But those who do practice enemy love, by God's help, imitate the Father in heaven. And by imitating the Father, they show that they are indeed true sons of the Father;

for like Father, like son. And since they are true sons, they show themselves to be true inheritors of the Father's blessings. It is these who will enter into the blessings of the kingdom of heaven.

Questions, questions

This teaching raises many questions - "What about this situation?" or "What if this happens?" We will look at one situation to lay out some principles. *What should you do if someone breaks into your house and seeks to harm your family?* We certainly want to protect our family, but Jesus also tells us to love our enemy.

First of all, we are not required to yield to the evildoer. (Jesus' teaching on this in Matthew 5:38-42 refers to oppressive authorities. It doesn't apply here). Rather, we are simply told to love our enemies. So this means we have some freedom to make some choices, within the bounds of love for our enemy. What does love allow?

- ◆ We can restrain or disarm an enemy. This is not unloving.
- ◆ We can call the police to restrain them, or if we think this might help them in the long run. But we are not to do it simply to seek to punish them.
- ◆ We can even harm an enemy to stop them. Not out of payback but because this is what is best for them. We would certainly not try to seriously wound or kill them. We would not give expression to our wrath. We would certainly not beat them in return as pay back. None of this has to with love or returning good for evil.

With regard to this last point, sometimes harming someone is, in the bigger picture, what is best for them. For instance a doctor who has to cause a lot of pain to set a broken leg. Or who amputates a leg to save a life. The question we have to ask is this – "Is the harm we do redemptive (something that is in the enemies best interests) or is it non-redemptive (just giving harm for harm, trying to punish or destroy them)?"

When we ask, "What does love allow?" Jesus' golden rule can help (Matthew 7:12). Treat your enemy like you would want to be treated, if you were in their shoes. Or if it helps you, think like this: treat your enemy like a relative that you love who suddenly sought to harm you. What if it were your mother or son or daughter? Treat the enemy in the same way, with concern for their well-being.

The truth is that most of the time, in this situation, we would not have the options noted above. We would be powerless. In these situations we should follow the example of Jesus and place ourselves in harm's way, to bear suffering for our families or for others, if possible.

Also, in these kinds of situations, we need to hear the Spirit, who can give us just the right word or action that will avert harm. Perhaps doing good or being kind to the attacker will change their intention. We should pray and entrust ourselves into God's care and protection, whatever the case may be.

This is just one example. But Jesus' teaching on loving enemies applies to all of life, whether we have an enemy in our personal relationships, in a legal setting or in the context of war. Jesus calls us to love our enemies and to return good for evil.

Overcoming evil with good

When someone harms us, it makes us want to harm them in return. But when we do so, as Paul says in Romans 12:21, "we are overcome by evil." We end up doing the same kinds of things our enemy has done – payback,

revenge and evil. But if we give up the agenda of returning harm for harm, and instead love our enemies, we can know that God is more than able to handle all wrongs done against us. And he will. Paul says in Romans 12:19, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"

Jesus is our example here. As 1 Peter 2:23 says, "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." And what did God do? God vindicated him by raising him from the dead. And God also judged his enemies. Just as Jesus said, Jerusalem and all the corrupt social and political structures that acted to kill him were destroyed (Matthew 21:33-41; Luke 19:41-44).

We also can entrust ourselves to a God who judges justly. And having turned that agenda over to God, we can be free to love our enemies and return good for evil. In this way, instead of being overcome by evil, we can "overcome evil with good" – Romans 12:21.

Appendix #5: Martyr Stories

Christians from many different traditions have been persecuted and killed for their faith throughout the centuries. The following three stories come from Anabaptist (Mennonite) history. Thousands of Mennonites were persecuted and killed in the 16th Century.

Each of these three people were killed by the so-called "Christian" authorities in Europe at the time, simply because they became a Mennonite Christian. These Mennonites believed in a simple faith of following what Jesus taught in the New Testament, which included believers' baptism (not infant baptism) and loving enemies (which meant they would not fight in wars, or kill others). The practice of adult baptism alone was considered a capital offense in that day. And their belief in loving enemies made them social outcasts. In general they were considered heretics and thus worthy of death. These come from the book – *The Martyr's Mirror*.

JOOST JOOSTEN



Joost Joosten was apprehended at Veer, in Zealand [Holland], in 1560. He was considerably versed in the Latin language. When he was a student of about fourteen years, it happened that King Philip was in Zealand and heard him singing choral in church, in the organ loft, as is customary in [the State] churches. The king was so delighted with the lad's singing, that he wanted to take him with him to Spain; on which account Joost kept himself concealed for six weeks, as he did not want to go away.

Thus, he afterwards, became converted to [a] true faith [in Jesus] and consequently, was baptized upon his faith, and thus led a Christian life. [The authorities] . . . apprehended him when he was eighteen years old.

He had to suffer many assaults, and divers times attempts were made to draw him from [his] faith. He disputed with four inquisitors concerning many articles of faith; they made strenuous efforts to draw him over to their religion. When they could not move him with such means, they tortured him dreadfully, especially with instruments called iron *teerlingen*, which they thrust into his knees so that they came out again at the ankles. But all this he steadfastly endured with great patience, and faithfully kept the treasure which he had in an earthen vessel. Hence (the authorities) sentenced him to death by burning; which they executed on him on a Monday before Christmas. On his way to death he rejoiced greatly in the Lord, and sang yet as he was going into the hut of straw in which he was burnt, the last verse of the hymn composed by himself, which begins thus, "O Lord, thou art forever in my thoughts." (edited, p. 651]

ANNEKEN HEYNDRICKS



In the year 1571, there was burnt alive, at Amsterdam in Holland, for the testimony of Jesus, a woman named Anneken Heyndricks, aged about fifty-three years. Having come from Friesland to Amsterdam, she was betrayed by her neighbor, the underbailiff, who entered her house, in order to apprehend her. She said to him with a meek spirit, "Neighbor Evert, what is your wish? If you seek me, you can easily find me; here I am at your service."

. . . After arriving in prison, she thanked and praised her Lord and Creator with an humble heart, for counting her worthy to suffer for His name's sake. And she boldly confessed her faith before Pieter the bailiff and the other lords. They greatly tormented her [along with the] priests, in order to cause her to apostatize; but through the grace of God she valiantly resisted it . . .

Thus they suspended this God-fearing aged woman (who could neither read nor write) by her hands, even as Christ had been, and by severe torturing sought to extort from her the names of her fellow believers, for they thirsted for more innocent blood. But they obtained nothing from Anneken, so faithfully did God keep her lips. Hence the bailiff preferred against her the charge of being infected with heresy . . . Thereupon she was sentenced to be burnt alive. She thanked the lords, and said with humility, that if she had done amiss to any one, she asked them to forgive her. But the lords arose and made no reply. She was then tied on a ladder. Then she said to Evert the underbailiff, her neighbor, "Thou Judas, I have not deserved it, that I should be thus murdered." And she asked him not to do this any more, or God should avenge it on him. Thereupon Evert angrily said, that he would bring all those that were of her mind into the same trouble. Then the other bailiff came once more with a priest, tormenting her, and saying that if she did not renounce, she should go from this fire into the eternal. Thereupon Anneken steadfastly said, "Though I am sentenced and condemned by you, yet what you say does not come from God; for I firmly trust in God, who shall help me out of my distress, and deliver me out of all my trouble." They did not let her speak any more but filled her mouth with gunpowder, and carried her thus from the city hall to the fire into which they cast her alive. This done, the traitor Evert, the underbailiff, was seen to laugh, as though he thought he had done God an acceptable service. But the merciful God, who is the comfort of the pious, shall give this faithful witness, for this brief and temporal tribulation, an everlasting reward, when her stopped mouth shall be opened in fullness of joy, and these sad tears - for the truth's sake - shall be wiped away, and she be crowned with eternal joy with God in heaven. (edited, pp. 872-874)

DIRK WILLEMS



In the year 1569 a pious, faithful brother and follower of Jesus Christ, named Dirk Willems, was apprehended at Asperen, in Holland. . . . Concerning his apprehension, it is stated by trustworthy persons, that when he fled he was hotly pursued by a thief-catcher, and as there had been some frost, said Dirk Willems ran before over the ice, getting across with considerable peril. The thief-catcher following him broke through, when Dirk Willems, perceiving that the former was in danger of his life, quickly returned and aided him in getting out, and thus saved his life. The thief catcher wanted to let him go, but the [Sheriff], very sternly called to him to

consider his oath [that is, he had promised by an oath to be loyal to the Sheriff], and thus he was again seized by the thief-catcher, and, at said place, after severe imprisonment [was] put to death at a lingering fire . . .

[With] a strong east wind blowing that day, the kindled fire was much driven away from the upper part of his body, as he stood at the stake; in consequence of which this good man suffered a lingering death, insomuch that in the town of Leerdam, towards which the wind was blowing, he was heard to exclaim over seventy times, "O my Lord; my God," etc., for which cause the judge or bailiff, who was present on horseback, filled with sorrow and regret at the man's sufferings, wheeled about his horse, turning his back toward the place of execution, and said to the executioner, "Dispatch the man with a quick death."

. . . his life was consumed by the fire, and . . . he passed through the conflict with great steadfastness, having commended his soul into the hands of God. (edited, pp. 741-742).