

# THE FATE CHANGER



VICTORY ON THE  
HORIZON  
IV



# 4<sup>th</sup> BOOK

## VICTORY ON THE HORIZON



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## HOW CAN THESE BOOKS BE USED?

This book is designed for self-study, family study, and small groups.

If you are studying alone, read one chapter a day, think deeply about its main topic, and answer the questions at the end of each chapter.

If you are studying as a family, find a convenient time at least once a week to read a chapter, talk about it, and answer the discussion questions at the end of each chapter. A perfect time would be after dinner.

If you are studying in a small group, meet at least once a week for 1.5 hours, read two chapters by taking turns reading one page at a time, ask questions for comprehension, and answer the discussion questions at the end of each chapter.

It is strongly suggested to start each chapter with a prayer. Open your heart and speak to God as a friend, ask Him to be with you, to open your mind for understanding, and to change the way you think. It would also be good to pray again after answering the discussion questions to thank God, and ask for His help in applying to your own life the principles you learn in each chapter.

This book series is an essential first step towards psychological, physical, and moral improvement. In order for the series to have the full strength of positive good, regular reading and a forward determination to complete them is necessary. Thus, you are strongly encouraged to follow the instructions above.

This book series is the key to unlocking the secrets of your fate, life, and future. It will be a long journey, you will be challenged, and you will learn many new things.

Welcome to the adventure of a lifetime that will last forever!

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# 1 A MIRACULOUS BIRTH

*An angel, a virgin, a special baby, and you. What did Gabriel say that affects you?*

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What do you think is the most anticipated moment of peoples' lives? Graduating from high school or university? Getting a "real" job? How about buying a new car or first home? Surely, marriage! While most of us look forward to each one of these events and consider them major steps towards adulthood, there is something of greater importance that we all get excited about. The moment we get to hold our newborn child for the first time!

For most of us, having a baby is very personal and intimate. There is no fan fare, camera flashes, magazine articles, or bids for exclusive photos of the baby. Except for immediate family, the births of our children go unnoticed by the rest of the world. But for the select few, the situation is entirely different. Of course we are mostly speaking of the people in the entertainment industry.

When the tabloid magazines started covering the relationship between two American movie stars, Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, people were inundated with constant updates. They were seen at a movie premiere together. They vacationed in Cancun, Mexico. They travelled to Africa together. In fact, they even started to refer to them as one person – Brangelina! It was like the tabloids had hit the jackpot. They had two of the "most beautiful" people in the world to follow around and they were going to milk the story for

all it was worth. Then the biggest story of all came out. They were going to have a baby.

The magazines, newspapers, and tabloids immediately jumped into action. They started sending in requests and offering money for the baby's first pictures. Months went by and the anticipation grew. Finally, the day came, the baby was born, and the pictures were released. Did the world stop turning that day? No. Did the event put an end to poverty and hunger? No. Did it change the way people act towards one another? No. Did it change our lives? No. And yet, it was one of the most anticipated, followed, and admired events of 2006; an event that quickly became yesterday's news!

Over 2000 years ago, the greatest moment of the earth's history was about to unfold. The event had been prophesied hundreds of years in advance and it revolved around the birth of a boy. His parents weren't famous, rich, or influential. The newspapers didn't pay millions of dollars for his picture and the news of his birth wasn't delivered over the Internet. And yet he became the most influential person of all time. His life altered the lifestyle of countless generations and the fate of millions of people. His name was Jesus and his birth changed the world!

As we begin to study the life of this remarkable man, let us lay aside all our preconceived beliefs. Let's read through the Bible and discover who Jesus really was, what he taught, what he said about himself, and what he did. When we are finished we may just find the answer to our original question:

If fate can be changed, how?

Before we start reading the Bible, let's draw a picture of the political climate at the time. The Romans were in control of the entire Mediterranean region, thus Israel was subject to Rome's laws and tax collectors. But unlike their neighbors, Israel was a constant thorn in the side of Rome. They were always resisting by refusing to pay taxes and obey the laws. In other words, they were just as

stubborn as their ancestors. But they were faithful in their worship of God. They knew that God had given them the responsibility to prepare the way for the Messiah. Unfortunately they were holding on to traditions and man-made expectations about his purpose. They were expecting a king from the royal lineage of David. But there was a big problem; the descendants of kings weren't always born in palaces or as the son of an existing queen. Let's start by reading Luke chapter 1 verses 26-33:<sup>1</sup>

*26 In the sixth month<sup>2</sup> the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you! 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.*

Mary was a very young woman, possibly around 16 years old, who lived in Nazareth. Nazareth wasn't a big city and for the most part wasn't very important. The inhabitants of this village were proverbial for their wickedness and caused someone once to say:

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1 Four different authors recorded the life of Jesus in the 1st century AD. These four authors' books, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, became known as the Gospels. Although we can find the events of Jesus' life in each book, the authors sometimes wrote more or less about certain events. For this reason we will not be studying Jesus' life from a single perspective. Sometimes we may read from Matthew's account, while other times we may read from Luke's, etc. At this point, it would be good to read through all four accounts so you can be comfortable with looking up the different scriptures as we study.

2 If you read the previous verses, you will see that this is referring to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. At that time, Elizabeth was pregnant with John the Baptist. She was also the cousin of Mary the mother of Jesus.

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”<sup>3</sup>

But that was about to change because the angel Gabriel was sent there on a very important mission. If you remember, Gabriel was the one who originally explained the Messianic prophecy as recorded in Daniel chapter 9.

From the verses we learn that Mary was engaged to a man named Joseph and had followed the custom of her people by remaining pure. That is she was still a virgin. Although we are not told why God chose her, we can assume that she was a faithful follower of God, obedient to her parents, and motivated by the desire to please God. All of which are things God wants to see in each one of us.

Can you imagine what it was like for Mary to hear Gabriel’s message? She was told that she would have a child, that he would be a king, and more importantly that his kingdom would reign forever. These were attributes pulled directly from the prophecies about the coming Messiah in the books of Isaiah and Daniel. She had to be familiar with them because Israel had been waiting for the Messiah for hundreds of years.

Upon hearing these things, Mary was confused and needed more information. Remember, she was a virgin and had never slept with a man. At this point, the angel Gabriel told her that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on her, she would be blessed, and a baby would form in her womb. In short, it would be a miracle; a miracle that many people, both then and now, might not want to believe; a miracle that forces us to ask several questions.

Why was Jesus born of a virgin? **If he was just an ordinary prophet, why wasn't he born like them?** Why did the angel say his name would be Jesus which means "Yahweh is salvation"? Of course we won't find the answers to all of these questions in this lesson, but if we are patient, God will eventually lead us to the answers. Let's get back to the lesson.

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3 John 1:46

What do you think Joseph thought when he heard the news from Mary? Let's find out in Matthew chapter 1 verses 18-23:

*18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. 19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. 20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. 21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. 22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.*

This must have been a very difficult situation for Joseph. According to the law,<sup>4</sup> the engagement was a legally binding agreement that could only be broken by death or divorce. Even though they had not consummated the marriage, they were still legally bound to one another as husband and wife. Therefore, breaking the engagement would not be easy. In addition, he wanted to trust Mary and thought she would never do something to dishonor him or their relationship. What would he do? He decided that his only recourse was to annul the marriage secretly. But before he did anything, God wanted to reassure Joseph that what Mary had told him was true. So He sent the angel Gabriel to Joseph. It is almost unfathomable to imagine ourselves in a similar situation. But Joseph, just like Mary, was a special person.

Just as Mary had been favored by God to bring the Messiah into the world, so too Joseph must have been highly regarded by God. He

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4 In Deut. 22:23, 24 we see that a woman who was betrothed was considered to be married in legal terms.

was to be the "father" of a child that was biologically not his and the husband of a woman who was pregnant when they got married. Most importantly he must have been religious because God was entrusting him with a sacred task. He was to teach Jesus to be upright in every aspect of his life. Fathers, God is asking no less of us!

Perhaps you have never thought about this event from the angel Gabriel's perspective. Over 500 years had passed since he spoke with the prophet Daniel. To once again carry the message of the coming Messiah, to see the prophecy fulfilled and the actual birth, must have been exciting. We don't often think of angels having feelings, but it seems to be true. We already learned that Satan fell from heaven because of his self-pride and jealousy. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that angels can also feel joy and pride in the accomplishments of God. You might be wondering:

“Why would angels be happy? What does the Messiah have to do with them?”

Don't forget, God's angels are at war with Satan and his angels. He tempted Adam and Eve and brought sin into the world. While Satan tempts humans to sin and works to deceive mankind about God's real character and care for humanity, the angels work as God's messengers and protectors. God said that the Messiah would save people from their sins. If there is no sin, there is no battle! Sin disrupted the harmony of heaven. Satan had accused God of withholding goodness from the created beings.<sup>5</sup> He also claimed that God's kingdom was founded on nothing more than bribery and selfish gain.<sup>6</sup> And yet right here we see God is doing something great in the battle for the allegiance of all created beings. Therefore it is easy to see how the angels would be elated.

So how do you think Joseph responded? This must not have been an easy decision. Let's find out in Matthew chapter 1 verses 24 and 25:

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<sup>5</sup> Genesis 3:5

<sup>6</sup> In Deut. 22:23, 24 we see that a woman who was betrothed was considered to be married in legal terms.

*24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: 25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.*

Joseph did what God told him to do! He didn't ask any questions or have any doubts. He married Mary and they went on with their lives. God didn't tell them everything, but what He said was enough. Let's continue the story by returning to Luke chapter 2 verses 1-5:

*1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. 2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) 3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:.) 5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.*

The dreaded Roman tax! Nobody likes to pay taxes, especially to a foreign government. But the Jews couldn't do anything about it. They were forced to obey the law or suffer the penalty. According to the law every family needed to register and pay in their home-town. Because Joseph was the head of the household, he and Mary had to travel to Bethlehem.

The journey wasn't going to be an easy one. Mary was pregnant and the baby's birth was getting closer. Because there wasn't public transportation or modern vehicles, they had no other choice but to walk from Nazareth to Bethlehem. We don't know their exact route, but we do know that the trip probably lasted about 7-10 days and was about 120 km. long. The trip would have been much too difficult for Mary to walk, so she likely rode on a donkey.

Although Joseph and Mary arrived on time for the census, they found that there wasn't anywhere to stay. All the rooms had been filled. Have you ever taken a trip somewhere to find out that there

were no rooms or that your reservation was never written down? Imagine if your wife was pregnant when it happened and there were no doctors available! That is exactly what happened to Joseph and Mary. Let's read about it in verses 6 and 7:

*6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.*

The Messiah was born in a barn! There is no mention of doctors, nurses, or a midwife. As far as we know, Mary must have been alone during the birth. Her only helper would have been Joseph, assuming he broke with tradition and helped her during childbirth. But although they were alone during the birth, they would not be alone during the celebration. The angels would make sure of that. Let's continue in Luke chapter 2 verses 8-14:

*8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. 10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. 12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*

God wanted this event to be witnessed by others. So, He sent angels to proclaim the good news to some shepherds. At first, it seems strange that God would tell shepherds. But if you think about it in a symbolic way, it makes a lot of sense. What do shepherds do? They lead their flocks to good pasture, provide water, and protect them.

The angels were saying the same thing about this child. He was to be a savior for all people. Like a shepherd, he would lead them to righteousness. He would be a king and fulfill the prophecy given to Abraham that his seed would bless the whole world. This same seed would crush the head of the serpent, otherwise known as Satan who had deceived Adam and Eve. It is also interesting to note that the angels said the Messiah was not only a savior but also Lord. Let's read verse 11 again:

*11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.*

Could there be more to Messiahship than we had thought?

So what do you think those shepherds did after the angels left? Do you think they just sat there and continued watching their sheep? Let's find out in verses 15-20:

*15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. 16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. 17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. 18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.*

The shepherds ran into Bethlehem as fast they could! They wanted to see what the angels had described. And sure enough, they found a young woman in a barn holding her baby for the first time. Mary knew what Gabriel had told her and she listened to what the shepherds said. And although she must have wondered what the future was going to be like, she just wanted to enjoy the moment.

As she stared into her son's eyes and held his little hand, she forgot about the pain and the sin filled world that her son would grow up in. She just smiled and cherished that moment for what it was, pure happiness!

When Brad and Angelina's child was born, the only reason it received attention was because its parents were rich and famous. There is no doubt that they felt joy and that their lives changed when they held that child for the first time. But it was a joy that only they could feel.

In the birth of Jesus, we see something entirely different. We learn of a joy and change that the whole world can experience – a joy and change worthy enough that the angels would proclaim:

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!”

When will mankind see that peace? When will we see good will toward one another? Let's continue studying to find out!

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. What makes newborn babies so special? Why do they soften even the hardest of hearts?
2. What would it be like for an atheist or Buddhist to hear the story of Jesus' birth? What elements of the story might be hard for them to understand?
3. Read the entire accounts of Jesus' birth in Matthew chapter 1 and Luke 1:26-35 and 2:1-20. How many Messianic prophecies were fulfilled?
4. How do you think the Messiah will end the sin problem?
5. What do you think “peace and good will toward men” is referring to?

## 2 FATE IN THE HANDS OF A BABY?

*An old man tells that baby Jesus would grow up to change the fate of every human being. Would he?*

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Our government has wisely dedicated several large pieces of land in Çanakkale to the memory of those who died there. All would agree that it would be wrong for someone to build a casino or factory on that sacred land. It would be wrong because the land is dedicated to the single purpose of remembering the lives and valor of our soldiers. “To dedicate,” means, “to set aside for special use.” In this lesson we will read about the dedication of Jesus who was eight days old when his parents took him to be circumcised. At his circumcision and dedication, several things happened that left Mary and Joseph in awe. Before we find out what happened, let’s read a story.

In 1582, Sultan Murat III was making plans on a grand scale for his son’s circumcision party. His son, Prince Mehmet, was 16 years old and long overdue for a circumcision. Sultan Murat ended up devising what many historians have called the most expensive and grand festival ever held in the entire history of Turkey.

The public celebrations began on June 7 with the procession of Sultan Murat from Topkapi Palace to Ibrahim Paşa Palace and then to the Hippodrome. The Hippodrome was designated to be the center of the festival. On the third day of the festival, the games started. On that day, Prince Mehmet went to the Old Palace to kiss his mother; an act that symbolically ended his childhood and dependence on

her. He then returned to pay homage to his father who was watching the events from an elevated pavilion.

Today many parents are pushed to their financial limits when they pay for a ride in a red convertible and buy pide and ayran for their neighborhood friends at a street party. But for Sultan Murat there was no limit to the amount of effort or expense it would take to celebrate his son's step into manhood.

Each day opened with foreign dignitaries presenting gifts to the sultan, and in turn the sultan bestowing gifts on them and ordering that feasts be given in their honor. The variety of foods that were at the daily banquets was beyond description. Various shows, dancers, jugglers, and groups of soldiers paraded and performed in the afternoons. Singing, dancing, and tight rope walking continued into the night. Every two or three days, the sultan distributed silver coins from his window or ordered bowls of food to be brought from the imperial kitchen. Part of the entertainment was watching the poor people scramble and fight over the meat that was brought out.

They also staged elaborate, mock battles and reenacted real ones; the most elaborate being the conquest of Cyprus. Wooden castles built for these battle scenes were set on fire much to the delight of all the people. But the fireworks were most likely the highlight of these nightly performances.

This royal sunnet party lasted fifty-two days, almost two months! It is because of the eight European eye witnesses' and two Ottoman historians' written accounts, not to mention hundreds of miniature figurines made to remember the details of the event, that we are able to know what happened during those days and weeks.

The week before the actual circumcision took place, an event described as "the climax" of the festivities happened. In an act of mercy and compassion, the Sultan ordered the prison guards to bring into his presence several prisoners who had been jailed for not paying their debts. When they arrived, tired from dragging the

chains clamped onto their ankles, he surprised them by paying their debts and releasing them from prison. How happy they must have been for that boy's circumcision!

The circumcision of Prince Mehmet was, however, a private affair that took place in the Topkapi Palace. The fifth vizier, Mehmet Paşa in the presence of only three people, performed the operation. Though not recorded, it is certain someone must have pinned a bit of gold on the prince's clothes!

Now, let's go back in history over 1500 years before Sultan Murat III to see what happened during the circumcision of another boy. Although the event was not celebrated on the scale of Prince Mehmet's, it was nonetheless a significant event. The boy was Jesus and we can read about him in Luke chapter 2 verse 21:

*21 On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.*

Jesus' circumcision was done according to the command God gave Abraham nearly two thousand years earlier. Let's review God's command in Genesis chapter 17 verses 9-12:

*9 Then God said to Abraham, As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. 10 This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. 12 For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner- those who are not your offspring.*

Similar to our Turkish custom, a specific number of days were set-aside for women as a special time of purification. This was a direct

command to Israel during the time of Moses.<sup>7</sup> The woman who gave birth to a boy was ceremonially unclean for seven days. On the eighth day, the boys were to be circumcised. However, women had to wait an additional 33 days before they were allowed to resume religious participation at the temple.

In ancient times the life of a woman was not easy. She did much of the hard work that would ordinarily belong to a man. In fact this is largely the case even today in some places where women work in both the house and field. Therefore God made provision for the mothers, a prescribed period of rest and isolation, so they could regain their strength. Fortunate for them, we still enjoy that tradition today.

Jesus' parents made every effort to be obedient to the commands of the Lord. So after Mary's time of purification was ended, they took Jesus to the temple to be dedicated. Let's continue reading in Luke chapter 2 verses 22-24:

*22 When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord), 24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: a pair of doves or two young pigeons.*

In those days, every firstborn male was to be dedicated to God and the parents were to offer a sacrifice. God's instruction was that a lamb, pigeon, or turtledove be offered according to the parent's financial means. Which of these do you think would be more expensive? Correct, lambs are more expensive. What did Mary and Joseph offer as a sacrifice? Right again, they sacrificed two young pigeons.

In other words, Mary and Joseph weren't wealthy enough to offer a lamb. They were poor, working class people. Never forget that God

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<sup>7</sup> Leviticus 12: 2-8

doesn't look at a person's economic status to determine their worth. He knew their hearts. He knew that they were humble and their family would be the ideal environment for Jesus to grow up in.

Now the story takes an interesting twist. Let's continue in Luke chapter 2 verses 25-35:

*25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 29 Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. 30 For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel. 33 The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.*

Perhaps you have known an elderly, devout, and faithful man like Simeon who was faithful in his daily prayers. One day “moved by the Spirit,” he went to the temple courts and found this poor family holding an infant in their arms. Taking the baby in his own arms, he was moved by the Holy Spirit and started praising God and prophesying about the infant Christ.

Remember, “to dedicate,” means, “to set aside for special use.” This is exactly what Simeon said about Jesus. He said Jesus was set apart for a holy purpose. Let's reread Simeon's interesting comments in verses 30-32:

*30 For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.*

Here we get our first glimpse into the truth that Jesus' ministry was not just intended for Israelites. Simeon's mention of the Gentiles signified that Jesus' work and impact was to extend to both Jew and non-Jew. In other words **Jesus' work was for the whole world, including us!**

We can be sure that Simeon's words warmed Mary's heart. But one of his statements was perplexing. When the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary, he didn't say anything bad would happen. But now, with this newborn baby in her arms, the word "sword" sent a shiver down her spine. More specifically, Simeon said:

“And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

What did he mean “your soul too?” Was he implying that something bad would happen to Jesus? The fact is this is the first mention of Jesus' future suffering.

As Mary and Joseph thanked Simeon for dedicating their baby, their minds must have been full of wonder at the full meaning of his prophecy. On their way out of the temple courtyard their exit was suddenly interrupted again as an elderly woman approached them. Let's read what happened next in Luke chapter 2 verses 36-40:

*36 There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. 38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. 39 When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of*

*Nazareth. 40 And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.*

God uses the consecrated individual, whether they are old or young, male or female, rich or poor. Isn't it interesting that a female prophet would confirm Jesus' young life as holy and special? Though there are only a few female prophets mentioned in the Bible, it is appropriate that God should use one of them to bless and dedicate the baby Jesus. Little did they know that this baby would grow into a man who would completely shatter every cast and class prejudice in society! He was a revolutionary. Jesus would show that the Spirit of God was freely available to anyone who wanted it: educated and uneducated, free and slave, male and female.

Did you notice this sentence from the scripture passage?

*38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.*

Once again, Jesus is linked with salvation. Why?

Mary and Joseph returned to Nazareth from the dedication with a lot to think about! God had again confirmed to them that their child was no ordinary boy. Their minds must have been full of questions. But they would have to be patient and wait to learn the answers.

Let's conclude with a short story from northern Turkey. For years, a village outside of Samsun had enjoyed fresh water flowing from a natural fountain at the entrance to their village. The cold water flowed strongly year round and villagers came daily to the spot to fill their bottles with the sweet, fresh water. The fountain by the road's edge had no special beauty or attraction other than the good water. Old plastic bottles and litter were strewn around the area. It was a muddy mess. People had to walk on random stepping-stones, to get in a position to fill their bottles. The original, 1950's white marble decorating the fountain had fallen apart long ago.

After being elected the new village leader, the chief (muhtar) decided to make the fountain the centerpiece of the village's revitalized entrance. He poured a nice concrete floor, added several benches, installed a drain system, and covered the fountain with a roof. After the project was completed, the village was very proud. The principle of the school suggested they invite all the villagers to a special dedication of the new fountain.

“The students could recite poetry, perform several songs, and you could give a speech. Of course we could serve rice and garbanzos too.” He said.

Everything was going as planned, but during the village leader's (muhtar) long speech an old woman stepped forward. She passed the stage and went over to the running water. She pulled an old dented tin cup from her bag, filled it, took a deep drink, and then, noticing that there was not a cup anywhere on the new fountain, shrugged her shoulders, and set her old cup on a ledge above the beautiful new fountain. She turned to walk away, and as she was passing the village leader (muhtar), she said in a loud voice,

“It's a real fine roof, but people come to a fountain to drink. You forgot the cup?”

Everyone burst into laughter, but it was the perfect climax to the dedication. It was a grand moment that reminded everyone, that though the beauty of the place had improved significantly, the water hadn't changed at all.

Everyone enjoyed the rice and garbanzos at the dedication that day, but interestingly no cola was served. Just water. Good, clean, cold water.

Just as the dedication service at the fountain hadn't changed the water, but only gave recognition to something that was always there; so too Jesus' dedication was an early affirmation of his unique qualities, which were the same in infancy and manhood. He was pure and destined to change the world!

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Consider the unusual experience of the prisoners at Prince Mehmet's circumcision. Why did one man's circumcision set another man free from his debts?
2. Why did Jesus' parents take him to the temple?
3. What did the old man Simeon say about Jesus?
4. Simeon's words and the Prophetess Anna's words helped Joseph and Mary understand the baby Jesus' unique mission. What can we learn from their encounter?

# 3 LEARNING FROM A CHILD

*What can you learn from a 12 year old child?*

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Have you ever held a title along with your name? Were you ever the president of a committee or group in school? Were you the captain of your sports team? If you were, how did you feel about that title? Did carrying the title add an extra sense of responsibility for your duties? Did it make you proud or happy to carry that title? If you have never had a title, maybe you know someone who has. It could be a specialist in some field who is known as an "usta" or "uzman." Maybe it is a doctor or professor.

People are given titles for many reasons. We give titles to people because of their rank, for example a captain in the army. The mayor receives his title due to his office in society. We can also give titles for an accomplishment like being a war-veteran or a martyr. Titles are also given to show familial relationships like big sister, grandfather, aunt or uncle.

Sometimes we attach an attributive name to someone's name and it becomes like a title. We think of Süleyman the Magnificent. In rare cases we can give a title to someone and it actually becomes their name. The best example is Ataturk. What does his name signify? Well it literally means that he is the father of the Turks. Of course everyone knows that he was not the first Turk from whom all other Turks descended. Turks have existed since at least 800 B.C. No, the

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title does not describe a physical relationship, but it does describe the relationship between a nation and its founder.

Ataturk was a heroic, successful military tactician on several fronts including Çanakkale during World War I. After the WWI, he went to Samsun and began to form the national resistance movement in 1919. He called for a national election to establish a new Turkish parliament in Ankara. That parliament, the Grand National Assembly, then made him commander-in-chief. Through a series of hard fought battles, he defeated the Greeks on several fronts. Then Ataturk led out in the formation and international acceptance of the Turkish Republic. He instituted many social reforms and guaranteed equal rights to all citizens. While Ataturk was not the physical leader of other Turkic nations, he still inspires them with the heroism and wisdom that he displayed. Likewise, Ataturk is not the physical father of the Turks. But he is nonetheless the father of a nation that calls its citizens Turks. Therefore he is the father of the Turks.

Titles are really important to us. We show respect to our leaders with the titles we give them. We begin our festivals greeting our most honored guests,

“Sayın Valimiz, Sayın Millet Vekilimiz, Sayın Belediye Başkanımız, Sayın Muhtarımız: törenimize hoşgeldiniz.”

Those people earn titles because of who they are, that is, what position they hold. What titles do you find yourself using everyday?

Did you know that titles are used in the Bible as well? Titles are used throughout the Bible to convey roles, relationships, and special honor. In this lesson we will look at a title that is given to both God and to Joseph, the husband of Mary mother of Jesus. Let's begin by reading Luke chapter 2 verses 40-42, which describe Jesus as a boy.

*40 And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. 41 His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.*

*42 And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast.*

Do you remember the Passover feast?<sup>8</sup> When God delivered the Israelites from slavery, He sent a destroying angel over the land of Egypt. God said that He would destroy all the first-born sons in the land as a punishment for the Pharaoh's stubbornness and refusal to obey Him. But God also said that anyone who believed His word, killed a lamb, and spread the blood of that lamb on the lintels and doorposts of their house would not lose their first-born son. The spreading of the blood of the lamb served as a symbol of their faith in God's word, thus saving the first born from death. As a result of this warning, the Israelites and a few Egyptians obeyed and were saved. They subsequently came out of Egypt and were free from slavery. As a memorial of God's deliverance, the adult males were to come to Jerusalem every year for the Passover feast. Therefore Joseph, Mary, and the 12 year-old Jesus went to Jerusalem to worship and celebrate.

It is interesting to note that when the apostle Matthew recorded this event, he used the title "parent" for both Joseph and Mary. Remember in our first lesson of the New Testament we learned that Jesus was born of a virgin. Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus. So how could Joseph be called his "parent"? He was called Jesus' parent because he was the closest thing that Jesus had to an earthly father.

In modern terms, he was like a stepfather. Joseph would have shared with his wife the responsibilities of teaching Jesus the ways of life: how to dress, to behave in the home and society and how to work. A father is in the primary position to teach his son how to be a man. He can be a spiritual and moral guide for his son. By both word and example he can pass on to his son the knowledge of how to lead and provide for a family, to persevere when the situation is hard, to keep his temper when things go wrong and to be brave in danger. It was in these ways that Joseph was a parent to Jesus although he was

not his biological father. Let us continue reading in Luke chapter 2 verses 43-45:

*43 When they had finished the days, as they returned, the boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it; 44 but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among their relatives and acquaintances. 45 So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him.*

Joseph and Mary must have traveled with a great company of people to Jerusalem. In those days, it was a common practice because it provided fellowship and protection. While returning home with that same crowd, they thought Jesus was among them and when they could not find him they must have been very worried. Can you imagine how the two must have felt to lose their son? Perhaps you have lost sight of a child for a short time and know the feeling. Maybe Joseph and Mary had a similar fear to the Prophet Jacob two thousand years before when his son was missing. Jacob's immediate thought was that "an evil beast hath devoured him."<sup>9</sup>

Let's see what Joseph and Mary did in Luke chapter 2 verses 46-48:

*46 Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. 48 So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously."*

Although Mary reprimanded Jesus for something she deemed to be wrong, it was actually Mary and Joseph who were remiss. Jesus was just doing the work that God had committed to him. Whereas Mary and Joseph, as the guardians of the Messiah, had failed to do their job. For more than a day they had let things of lesser importance

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<sup>9</sup> Genesis 37:33

occupy their attention. They even left Jerusalem without him. You can be sure they were extremely stressed now as they were searching frantically for the child.

When Joseph and Mary found the 12 year-old Jesus, he was not playing games as other boys would. He was sitting in the temple among the teachers, listening to them, and asking questions. He was no ordinary child! Perhaps out of respect Jesus was not just lecturing, but rather asking questions to lead the teachers to greater understanding. What kind of questions do you think Jesus was asking and answering that would astonish these teachers? How could a child trump the religious teachers? Think about how purposefully he must have listened to his mother and father's instruction from his earliest years. The boy Jesus' depth of understanding was unheard of from then even up to our day. How could he do it? Do you remember what the prophet David wrote in Psalms chapter 119 verse 99?

"I have more understanding than all my teachers: for your testimonies are my meditation."

Jesus must have studied the word of God diligently because his knowledge of scripture amazed these teachers. But more than just knowing what the scriptures said Jesus understood what they meant. There is a big difference. A person can memorize scripture and not know what it means. God was enlightening the mind of Jesus and showing him the true meaning of scripture; and Jesus was passing that light on to others.

In more ways than one, Jesus' life can serve as an example to us. God wants us to also be students of His word. He wants us to become wise through the reading of the Holy Scriptures. While teachers can provide valuable assistance in learning the scriptures, we should not be dependent on them for knowing truth. **We have the truth in God's word available to us, and as Jesus did we can study it and know it for ourselves.** But we must study prayerfully and humbly to know the true meaning of the word of God. The scriptures can be twisted to support any kind of idea or interpretation. But to find the true meaning

as intended by God we must enlist God's help. So we see in Jesus not just an intelligent child, but one who in humility sought the help of God in understanding the true meaning of His word.

When speaking to Jesus, Mary refers to Joseph as his father. She knew that he was not Jesus' biological father. But Joseph was filling the role of father in Jesus' life. It is for this reason that she was able to call him by this title. But regardless of this fact, Jesus knew his position in the family and lived out the 5th commandment in perfection:

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you."<sup>10</sup>

Jesus always showed respect and honor to Joseph. But after Mary and Joseph confronted him, Jesus used the word "father" in an astonishing way. Let's read about it in Luke chapter 2 verses 49-50:

*49 And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" 50 But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them.*

Joseph and Mary did not understand the statement that Jesus made. Who was Jesus talking about when he said,

"My Father's business"?

Certainly he was not talking about Joseph's business because Joseph was a carpenter. What exactly was Jesus saying? He was at the temple with the religious leaders (rabbis) asking and answering questions about life, God, and holy living. Whose business is that? That is God's business! Who would Jesus be referring to as "My Father"?

The Bible says that Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb of the Holy Spirit of God. But God was not the father of Jesus in a biological sense because God does not relate to created beings that way. There

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10 Exodus 20:12

was no biological interaction between God and one of His creatures, in this case Mary. No, the expression "father" must have some other meaning. How can we understand what Jesus said?

Perhaps Jesus was using the term "Father" for God as a title. Certainly the relationship between God and Jesus is unique because no other person was conceived in a virgin's womb by the Holy Spirit of God. Perhaps Jesus is telling us that the relationship between himself and God is different and that there is no earthly relationship quite like it. By using the expression, "My Father" we see that Jesus' relationship with God is like that of a father and son. By using the word, "My" we understand that this relationship is unique. There is not another one like it. Just as Ataturk is not the biological father of the Turkish people, so God is not the biological father of Jesus. But there is a special relationship there that deserves a title.

What could that relationship be? In the first lesson of the New Testament we learned that the angel Gabriel instructed Mary and Joseph to name their child Jesus. **The name Jesus means, "God is salvation." Then the angel said that Jesus would save people from their sins.** We also saw where the apostle Matthew quoted from the book of Isaiah that a woman would conceive and have a son named Emmanuel. The name Emmanuel means "God with us." So we need to ask again, what is the relationship between God and Jesus? Let's continue reading in Luke chapter 2 verses 51 and 52:

*51 Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart.  
52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*

Mary had heard the angel tell her,

*"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God."<sup>11</sup>*

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<sup>11</sup> Luke 1:35

Mary gave birth before she had been with a man. She heard the shepherds say that an angel appeared to them and told them that a child was born who was "Christ the Lord."<sup>12</sup> She was an eyewitness to the wise men who came from the east and worshiped the child.<sup>13</sup> Mary saw the boy Jesus teaching the teachers with her own eyes. Mary pondered these things in her heart to understand their full meaning. Surely, her son must be the Messiah.

But what was the Messiah going to do? What was his work? What was Mary's responsibility? How should she relate to this child? He was obviously different than any other child in the world. He was obviously someone incredibly special. But he was a child, under Mary and Joseph's care, and still expected to submit to them. He was growing in wisdom and stature and yet he was completely obedient to them. What kind of a relationship did they have to Jesus? What kind of a relationship did Jesus have with God? Consider this story:

"Buyurun Abi" said Cumhur as a customer walked into the market.

Cumhur was 35 years old and had operated his corner market for more than 10 years. Everyone in the neighborhood knew him as a just and honest man. He gave fair prices and good service. Cumhur's little brother Cem was there and watched each movement of his brother carefully.

"I would like a liter of whole milk and some butter" the customer said.

"Right away Abi. Is there anything else that you want?"

"No. That will be all," said the customer.

"That will be 8 lira 75, Abi."

The man paid and left. Cem said to his big brother,

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12 Luke 2:11

13 Matthew 2

"Abi, why do you call customers Abi even when they are younger than you?"

Cumhur smiled, "Cem, I know that the customer is younger than me and that I am the store owner. That guy who came in here is jobless right now. In society he does not have a higher position than me. But I choose to humble myself and show respect to him as my customer. It doesn't mean that he is greater than me. In reality, we are equals. But I give him the title "Abi" because I have chosen the role as servant in this situation."

Cumhur was Cem's real big brother because they had the same father and mother. Even though the customer was not Cumhur's biological brother, he was honored with the title of Abi because of the situation.

God carries the title of "Father" in relation to Jesus and Jesus carries the title of "Son" in relation to God. But they are not biologically father and son. What do these titles mean? For now, we don't have an explanation from the scriptures. We will have to read further on to better understand what the prophets are trying to communicate to us about this subject. But one thing we do know: the relation between God and Jesus is unique. No other human being was born in the way Jesus was. Why? What is it about Jesus and what Jesus would do that God would desire to make a unique birth for him?

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. How do you think Jesus learned the scriptures so well when he came from a poor family in a small city in Israel?
2. When Jesus said to Joseph and Mary, "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business," they did not understand his words. But the very words, "Did you not know" imply that they should have understood. Why should they have understood? Does that understanding come by knowledge or faith or both?
3. What business was Jesus talking about? What is God's business?
4. Jesus was greater than Joseph and Mary and yet he was obedient to them. What does that tell us about our relationship to our elders? What does that tell us about our relationship to our boss? What does that tell us about our relationship to our workers or anyone else who answers to us? What does that tell us about our relationship to strangers?
5. Why do you think the Bible uses these various titles for God and for Jesus?

# 4 FATE CAN'T BE CHANGED WITHOUT REPENTANCE

*Repentance turns fate upside down. If you don't repent, then you have no right to be in heaven.*

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What makes someone religious? Better yet, what makes a person a Jew, Christian, or Muslim? Is it determined by the place they grew up or live, what their parents say, or what is written on their identification card? Is it based on how we look? Is a religion just a category that we put ourselves into based on the results of a checklist?

- I grew up in \_\_\_\_\_.
- My father is a \_\_\_\_\_.
- Our prophet is \_\_\_\_\_.
- Result \_\_\_\_\_.

Based on what we have learned thus far, it is safe to say that the answer to our first question, "What makes someone religious," would be faith. Religious people have faith in God. Well what about the second question? Is a person a Jew, Christian, or Muslim because they grew up in a certain place, it is written on their identification card, or because their parents say so? No, it is something more; it is a choice. We chose to obey God's laws. We chose to treat others with respect and love. We chose to accept that God is holy and greater than us. **A Jew, Christian or Muslim's choices should be based on fundamental principles that are unalterable and the basis by**

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**which they choose to live.** Throughout the Bible we have learned that one of the most basic principles of God's truth is that every person must repent of his sins to be forgiven. Let's explore this truth further.

Tuba always dreaded going into her seventh grade class. Of course there were some good students, but overall the group never wanted to do their work, always complained, and only wanted to talk to their friends. As a teacher it was unbearable. But despite her previous experiences, before every class she still had hope that the students would act better, be interested, and show respect.

For the most part, she enjoyed teaching. But lately she had noticed several things that bothered her. Students were cheating, lying, and being disrespectful to one another. When she first started teaching years ago, these were isolated incidents. But they were becoming more frequent and the students didn't seem to show any remorse when they were caught.

On that particular day, Tuba was giving a test. Before the test she reminded the students not to talk, to cover their answer sheets, and to raise their hands if they had a question. Then she passed out the test papers.

Within five minutes, Tuba noticed a student looking at another student's paper. Tuba decided to ignore it and give the student another chance, but shortly thereafter he did it again. At the same time, she saw two girls whispering to one another.

"Girls stop talking." She demanded.

"We aren't talking." They responded.

"What do you mean you aren't talking? I just saw you whispering to each other. I should take your tests and give you zeros for cheating."

"No teacher. We are sorry." They pleaded.

“Okay, but don’t do it again. Atıl, come here!”

“Yes teacher.”

“Atıl, you need to stop looking at Bahar’s test or you will get a zero.”

“Teacher, I didn’t look at Bahar’s test!” he emphatically replied.

“Do I look blind? I just watched you look at her test and write an answer.”

“No I didn’t.”

“Atıl are you saying that I am lying and I don’t know what I am talking about?”

He just stood there looking at the teacher.

“Give me your test. You are getting a zero and I am going to call your parents. Now, go back to your seat.”

Just then, Tuba looked over and saw the two girls talking again. It was obvious that they were helping each other on the test.

“Girls! I thought I said no talking.”

“Sorry teacher.” They simultaneously replied.

“If you were truly sorry, you wouldn’t have started talking again.”

Tuba told the students to put down their pencils, close their test books, and listen very carefully.

“Kids, when a person says they are sorry they are acknowledging that what they did was wrong. But feeling sorry doesn’t end with acknowledgement. The next step is to not do it again. If you say you are sorry, but continue to do the same thing, what does it show about your character? It shows that the sorrow you expressed wasn’t real! It makes you look like a liar.”

Tuba then walked over to the girls and took their tests.

“Do I need to tell you the rules again?” Tuba asked the class.

“No teacher.”

We all know that teachers are responsible for teaching our children math, history, science, and foreign languages. Perhaps we sometimes forget that they also have to teach our kids morals like being honest, being respectful, acknowledging wrong, and showing remorse. In the story we just read, although she didn't use the exact word, Tuba found herself teaching kids about repentance.

In the New Testament, there was a powerful, charismatic teacher and prophet who also had a message of repentance. His name was John the Baptist. Although his father was from the tribe of Levi and a priest in the temple of Jerusalem, John didn't attend the religious schools of his day. He was educated at home and in the wilderness of Judea.

John's parents were dedicated followers of God and in the deepest sense very religious. While John's father, Zacharias, was serving in the temple an angel appeared and told him that he would have a child, a child with a special mission. Let's read about it in Luke chapter 1 verses 15-17:

*15 For he (John) shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. 16 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. 17 And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*

John's purpose was clear. He was to be a prophet and teacher much like Elijah the prophet 800 years earlier. In a previous lesson,<sup>14</sup> we studied a prophecy in the book of Malachi. God told Malachi that a

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14 Fate Changer Book 3 Lesson 20

messenger or prophet would come to prepare the way for the Lord. In the verses we just read, we see the fulfillment of that prophecy. John's purpose was to prepare the people for the coming Lord! He was the messenger who would come before the Messenger.<sup>15</sup>

John was to lead by example. He was to abstain from alcohol and encourage people to turn to the Lord. Remember, his message was for the children of Israel who were already supposed to be believers. If they needed to turn, or return, to the Lord it meant they obviously weren't obeying His commandments. In other words, John's message would be one of repentance. Let's continue with Luke chapter 3 verses 1-3:

*1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judæa, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituræa and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, 2 Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. 3 And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.*

We know from the details provided in these verses that John was preaching by the Jordan River in 27 AD. At the time, John was living in the wilderness of Judea, a dry and desolate place far removed from worldly distractions and the influence of corrupt religious leaders. Yes, unfortunately in John's day, just as ours, there were people acting like they were religious but living like everyone else. We are told a little more about John's lifestyle in Matthew chapter 3 verse 4:

*4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.*

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15 Malachi 3:1

John was living in a wild place dressed in a simple garment of camel's hair. On the outside, he may have looked rough and uncivilized compared to the priests living in the city. But on the inside he was spiritually refined. He was dedicated to God and the message he had been given, a message that didn't pull any punches and cut straight to the heart. Let's continue with Luke chapter 3 verses 7-9:

*7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. 9 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

Some people believe that because their father is religious, they are religious. Some people believe that because they live in a Muslim, Christian, or Jewish country, they will eventually go to heaven. In John's day, the idea that descendants of Abraham automatically had a place reserved in heaven was common. It was John's responsibility to correct this false belief. In essence, he said that it doesn't matter who your ancestor is, if you aren't producing good fruits you will be destroyed. So what was the solution to the problem? **Repent and be baptized!**<sup>16</sup>

The one who wanted to save his life had to repent of his sin, ask for God's forgiveness, and be baptized. It was a message that many accepted. But there was still one thing that many wondered. After repenting and being baptized, what did they need to do? Let's read John's answer in Luke chapter 3 verses 10-14:

<sup>16</sup> In a later lesson, we will explore the symbolism and purpose of baptism. For now, we need to know that it was a symbol of cleansing. Interestingly, we don't see any objection from the priests to John's baptizing people. On the contrary, we only see that they didn't think he had the authority to do it. In John's day, it was common for heathens to be baptized when they converted to Judaism and for the Essenes to baptize themselves after they came in contact with non-believers.

*10 And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? 11 He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. 12 Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? 13 And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. 14 And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.*

If you have been blessed with material wealth, give to others. If you are in a position of power, don't abuse it. Don't intimidate people or take advantage of them. In other words, share, be honest, don't physically hurt others, don't lie, and don't be selfish. Did you notice that the prerequisite for these righteous actions was repentance? God can't help you do those things if you don't ask for His help. The first step in asking for help is admitting that you have a sin problem.

When the angel Gabriel spoke to John's father, he said that John would go before the Lord. What do you think Gabriel meant? Perhaps the next several verses can give us some insight. Let's read Luke chapter 3 verses 15-17:

*15 And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not; 16 John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: 17 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.*

Based on what the people thought and what John said, it is clear that the angel Gabriel was referring to the Messiah. It had been prophesied hundreds of years before that a prophet would emerge right before the Messiah appeared. We can read about it in the book of Isaiah chapter 40 verses 3-5:

*3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, **Prepare ye the way of the LORD**, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: 5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.*

John's message of repentance was to prepare the hearts of those who would meet the Messiah whom John said was much greater than he. John didn't even feel worthy to untie his shoes! According to John's statement, the Messiah's coming would have mixed results. For some it would be a great day, while for others it would be terrible. What will be the biggest factor in determining who is ready for the Messiah? That's right, repentance!

Before we close this lesson let's analyze a common misconception. Many people think that there are varying degrees of sin. For example, murder is worse than gambling, drinking alcohol is worse than stealing, and charging interest is worse than lying. But **in God's eyes, sin is sin.**

On the surface, it is easy to think that murdering someone is worse than stealing. But if you look at sin from God's perspective there is no difference. When you murder someone you are taking their life without permission. Most dictionaries would define that act as stealing. From this angle, the root of both murder and stealing is the same; namely the selfish desire to have something that doesn't belong to you (e.g., money, a woman, revenge, etc.). How about gambling? Why do most people gamble?

Most people gamble because they want to get rich with little effort. Of course, some people become addicted. Is it possible that when we gamble, we are actually showing a distrust in God? After all, He is in control. He is able to provide all our needs. Is it possible that the simple act of gambling says to those around us that we don't

think God can take care of us, that we need to help Him by taking control of things? If so, gambling would be worse than murder!

The point is this, sin is sin. Everyone sins! **Thus everyone needs to repent!** If you don't repent, then you have no right to be in heaven. Heaven is not a place for unrepentant sinners! So how do we repent? Let's look at an example.

Tolga's father was always late. He was late for work, dinner, and even movies. He tried turning his clocks forward 15 minutes, but it didn't work. His friends and family even told him to be places 20 minutes before it was necessary. But it was all to no avail. It was like Tolga's dad was in his own time zone.

One day Tolga had an important swim competition. He had been preparing months for this event and if he won, he would go to the regional championships. The meet started at 7pm.

“Dad are you coming to my swim meet on Friday night” he asked.

“Of course son, I will be there.”

“Dad, my race is one of the first ones. Are you sure you can get there on time?”

“Don't worry son, I will be there,” he reassured him.

The night came, Tolga got ready, and scanned the audience to see if his father had kept his promise. But unfortunately he didn't see him. He went through his mental preparations and proceeded towards the diving platform. Before he stepped onto the platform he took one last look. His father wasn't there. In spite of his absence, Tolga said to himself,

“I will win this race and make him proud.”

When the buzzer sounded, Tolga dove into the water and swam as fast as he could, all of his turns were perfect, and when he reached

out he was the first to touch the wall. He made it to the regional finals.

Later that night, after the race, Tolga sat in the car with his father who had come late.

“Dad, I really wanted you to be there tonight.”

“I know son, I wanted to be there too. I am sorry.”

“Dad, you always say you are sorry. But you never change. One of the reasons I race is to make you and our family proud. But it is like you don’t care.”

Tolga’s words pierced his father’s heart. In a flash, he thought about all the times he had missed important events. It was at that moment that he made up his mind to be different.

“Son, I am truly sorry. You are right, I have been irresponsible. I know it will be hard to believe me this time, but I promise to never be late again. I will try my best to always keep my word and be on time, especially to your races.”

Guess what? Tolga’s dad was at the regional championships early and cheered his son to victory. What do you think impressed Tolga the most: his father’s apology or promptness? Of course, it was his promptness because it showed that he truly was sorry. As the saying goes,

“Actions speak louder than words.”

As simple as it sounds, true heart felt repentance consists of two parts. The first part is acknowledging the wrong you have done and saying you are sorry. The second part is trying to make up for the wrong by doing something good or just simply not committing the same offense again. In our first story, Atıl wouldn’t acknowledge his wrong and he had no intention of admitting that he did something bad, much less apologize for it. And while the girls did acknowledge their wrong and apologize, they showed that they weren’t truly sorry

by continuing to disobey. Just as Tuba told the students, they didn't deserve forgiveness and they suffered the consequence of their wrongdoing. Perhaps they thought that the teacher would let them continue to do wrong. Or maybe, they knew she was kind and were taking advantage of her kindness.

Well, God can't be taken advantage of. He knows the true intentions of our hearts. No matter how hard we try, we will never successfully hide anything from Him. So let's stop trying! Repent and ask God to help you stop sinning.

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. In your opinion, was the children's behavior good or bad?
2. In the Bible we have seen many examples of prophets communicating with and learning from God in the wilderness. Why do you think that is?
3. If you continue reading John's story, you will see that his message wasn't popular with many of the religious leaders. What were some reasons?
4. Why is repentance so important when we want to be forgiven?
5. Is there anything in your life that you need to repent of? Lying, gossiping, greed, pridefulness, laziness, coveting, stealing, swearing, etc.?
6. John's message of repentance was to prepare the hearts of the people to meet their God. Remember, the Lord was coming and John was proclaiming it! We also understand that the prophecies were referring to the coming Messiah. What does that say about who the Messiah is?

# 5 THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING A TITLE

*What do you call a man who has no father?*

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Why does a woman plant roses in her garden? One reason is for the simple joy of admiring them. Admiration is an emotion that makes us smile on the inside. Admiration is a feeling of wonder, pleasure, and approval. It is seeing the good in someone else and delighting in them. To admire is respect and love all rolled into one grand experience. For example, it is very pleasant to see a little girl looking admiringly at her grandmother. How interesting it is to watch a music teacher admire her best student during a performance! How wonderful it is to attend a wedding and see the mutual admiration shared by a bride and groom. In this lesson we will look at God's admiration for Jesus. Let's start with a story.

Mustafa Kemal Ataturk was born in 1881 in a poor section of Salonika. The Greek gangs that roamed the streets and practiced extortion pressed his father, Ali Riza, hard. Feeling his opportunities lost and his spirit crushed, Ali sought escape from his miseries by using alcohol. Unfortunately, the situation became worse for seven-year old Mustafa when his father died of tuberculosis. His mother, Zubeyde, was a devout Muslim. Like every other Turkish woman in her day, her entire life was focused on her eldest son. With her deep religious convictions, Zubeyde wanted him to become a pious scholar. But Mustafa had different ideas.

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He didn't always agree with the ideas and manners of his teachers and never shied from exerting his own opinions. Considering himself more of an adult than a child, he didn't enter into children's games and often left himself out of their circles. He preferred to play alone and often fought with the other boys. Once, during one of his fights, a teacher blinded with fury intervened and beat him so hard that his honor was offended. Mustafa ran away and refused to return to the school.

Zubeyde was in despair, not knowing what to do. Finally an uncle suggested that she send Mustafa to the military cadet school in Salonika in an attempt to make him into a soldier. Since the government subsidized it, it would cost them nothing. If the boy demonstrated ability, he would become an officer. If not, he would at least remain a private. In any case, his future livelihood was assured. However, Zubeyde did not approve. But before she could stop him, twelve-year-old Mustafa persuaded one of his father's friends to introduce him to the college authorities. He took the examination and passed as a cadet. It was at that school that he found focus and his giftedness stood out.

Inside this important biography is a very personal story, which illustrates the Scriptural portion of this lesson very well. While in the military school, Mustafa met a math teacher who also had the name Mustafa. Young Mustafa was so successful academically that his math teacher bestowed upon him a special title of which he used the rest of his life. The math teacher said,

“In order that we may not be confused, let your name be Mustafa Kemal from now on.”

As certainly every Turk is aware, the title bestowed by this admiring teacher means “perfection” in Arabic. It is so interesting that a teacher could admire a student in such a way. I wish we could look into the eyes of that professor and see them shining with delight at Mustafa Kemal's success. Likely he imagined in some small way Mustafa Kemal's future accomplishments.

Because of Mustafa Kemal's achievements, he was given other titles and names throughout his lifetime. He earned the title paşa after his military accomplishments in the Ottoman army and the name Atatürk after expelling the armies of the foreign occupiers and helping to establish the modern Republic. Titles are important as they reveal the value that the giver, whether individuals, institutions, society, or even God, places on the recipient. It is a window into the level of admiration that person deserves.

In our last lesson we learned about John the Baptist who was preaching a message of repentance on the banks of the Jordan River.

"Repent and be washed of your sins," he proclaimed.

People came from miles around to listen to his teachings, to repent, and be symbolically washed of their sins.

John the Baptist had stated that his God given assignment was "to prepare the way" for the Messiah. Observe closely what happens as the prophet John looks upon Jesus the Messiah and clearly declares Jesus' identity and purpose. Let's start reading in John chapter 1 verse 28-31:

*28 This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing. 29 The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" 30 This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' 31 I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.*

Why did John suddenly give Jesus a new title? Did you notice his words as he looked at Jesus,

***"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"***

Obviously Jesus wasn't a real lamb. What was the prophet John admiring about Jesus?

Do you remember the lesson about Abraham and his son when they climbed up Mount Moriah to make a sacrifice?<sup>17</sup> In spite of his inability to understand why, Abraham had determined to obey God's order and sacrifice his beloved son. On the journey up the mountain his son asked him,

“Father, we have the wood, and the fire, but where is the lamb?”<sup>18</sup>

His father looked at the boy and uttered these prophetic words in Genesis chapter 22 verse 8:

*8 God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son. And the two of them went on together.*

Do you remember when Abraham faithfully raised the knife over his innocent beloved son? As he was about to bring that knife down, God stopped him and said:

*“Abraham! Abraham! Do not lay a hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”*<sup>19</sup>

The scriptures then say that Abraham looked up and saw a ram with his horns caught in the thickets. It was this miraculous ram that Abraham sacrificed that day.

Think about that event for one moment. Why did God give a ram? What about the lamb that Abraham had prophesied about? He said,

“God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering my son.”<sup>20</sup>

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17 Review Fate Changer Book 1 lessons 13-16 for a complete background on Abraham and this important event.

18 Genesis 22:7

19 Genesis 22:11, 12

20 Genesis 22:8

Was Abraham wrong? No, Abraham prophesied with certainty that God would provide a lamb. The Jews had never forgotten this prophecy. They were waiting for Abraham's words to be fulfilled because this lamb would be of great significance.

Almost 2000 years ago, while John the Baptist was standing in the midst of the Jordan River, he saw Jesus approaching. Suddenly the Spirit of God brought this ancient prophecy to John's mind. John, a prophet himself, saw that Jesus was the fulfillment of Abraham's prophecy. John called out,

“Look, the Lamb of God!”

It was not an ordinary title and certainly Jesus had no ordinary mission. **He was to take away the sins of the world!** He was to be God's sacrifice. He was the long awaited lamb!

Jesus slowly stepped into the water and moved forward to be baptized. Let's see how John reacted in Matthew chapter 3 verses 14 and 15:

*14 But John tried to deter him, saying, I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me? 15 Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness. Then John consented."*

When Jesus came to John to be baptized, John was startled and unwilling to baptize him. It was John's conviction that he needed to be baptized by Jesus. How could he as a sinner baptize a sinless man?

Why was Jesus baptized? First we need to understand that it was not typical for Jews to be baptized. Yes, they had purification baths before religious holidays, but baptism had been reserved for proselytes who came into Judaism from other religious backgrounds. It made sense that a sin-stained, polluted foreigner should be baptized. But the Jews had come to think, that as descendants of Abraham, God would automatically forgive their sins. In their minds, it just didn't

seem plausible that they themselves could be sinners shut out from the blessings of God.

John came at a unique time of national insecurity. Judea was under the direct control of Rome. For the first time in nearly 400 years, the Jews realized their own sin and their own personal, pressing need of God's offer of forgiveness. All longed for freedom from Rome, but those who gathered at the Jordan longed for an even higher and nobler freedom, the freedom from sin!

John came onto the scene when Israel's religious life was at its lowest. Ritual and formality were at their highest, with men paying great amounts of money for sacrifices and parading around during religious holidays. But in private behind closed doors, adultery and all sorts of perversions abounded. Women were far from virtuous, spending days in gossip and vanity. They were more concerned with the outward adorning of gold and silks, than with the inward beauty of a humble heart. The men had an outward form of piety but they lived a lie. Their prayers at the temple were only a show. In reality they cheated in the marketplace and looked for ways to rob one another and their government. But John's words pierced their consciences and awakened a desire to live differently.

This was the very moment for which Jesus had been waiting. Men were conscious of their sin and the need to ask God for forgiveness. God had orchestrated this opportunity. The Jordan River's banks were filled with people who were deeply convicted that God was calling them out of their lives of hypocrisy and deceit.

In baptism Jesus identified himself with the men he came to save. Just as he mingled with the poor villagers and the low of society during his whole ministry, he would not miss the chance to be baptized. Being baptized was his first strike at the hypocritical religious structure of his day.

In fact, there are several vital lessons that we can draw from Jesus' consent to be baptized. First, he showed that his ministry and

teachings were in perfect harmony with John's. In other words, all true prophets are in harmony. Jesus was to build his efforts on the foundations of that which had already been laid. Second, Jesus was baptized as an example to us. The first century historian Josephus, himself a Jew, wrote this about John the Baptist:

John, surnamed the Baptist . . . was a good man and had exhorted the Jews to lead righteous lives, to practice justice towards their fellows and piety toward God, and so doing to join in baptism. In his view repentance was a necessary preliminary if baptism was to be acceptable to God. They must not employ it to gain pardon for whatever sins they committed, but as a consecration of the body implying that the soul was already cleansed by right behavior.<sup>21</sup>

These are important words for those of us who do ritual washings to gain God's pardon or favor. **Baptism was an act of "consecration," a confirmation of the heart cleansed through the act of repentance and changed behavior.** Baptism was not a deed done to earn God's favor. And so Jesus, as one who was already pure and sinless and who also had no need to repent, entered into baptism as a consecration for ministry.

Now it was the custom of the time that when a man or woman was baptized they were fully submersed under the water. They weren't doused with a bucket of water or sprinkled on the head. No, baptism was full submersion into a body of water. In spite of its near disappearance in some churches, this custom has remained alive for centuries.<sup>22</sup>

**Baptism represented a person's death, burial, and resurrection.** When baptized, the person leaves behind their sinful life and starts a new one. A Jewish community of 1st century esoterics named the Essenes called this process, "becoming a Child of the Light".

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21 Book 18, section 116.

22 An interesting side note, archeologists recently uncovered a 4th century baptismal tank in Hagai Sophia and Laodicea.

But there was a huge difference between Jesus and the other people who were baptized. Jesus was sinless and didn't need to repent! It is for this reason that Jesus' baptism was special and surrounded by extraordinary events. We have a record of those events because the apostle John recorded John the Baptist's eyewitness account. Let's read it in John chapter 1 verses 32 and 33.

*32 Then John gave this testimony: I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. 33 I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'*

We find the same testimony of the event given in the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Here is Matthew's description in chapter 3 verse 16.

*16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.*

Let's imagine the scene for a moment. A crowd is standing on the riverbank, the sun is shining, and the sky is blue. Suddenly, they see something gracefully descending from the sky. It is moving towards Jesus and begins to envelop him. In an instant a voice from heaven booms like thunder echoing through the Jordan valley. Let's see what God said in Matthew chapter 3 verse 17:

*17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*

God called Jesus Son! Why? Obviously, God was so pleased with Jesus' character and life that He wanted to show everyone how much He loved and valued him. To be called God's son implied that Jesus resembled God; that is, he had the same love, thoughts, desires, and aspirations as the Creator. Is Jesus God's offspring? No. Did God father a boy? Definitely not. Did God in heaven call Jesus "son"? Absolutely yes!

“Son” is a title of extreme honor. Did you know that God never called any other prophet “son”? It may be hard for us to understand, and for some people it may even seem wrong, but God unashamedly proclaimed His love for Jesus and called him son in front of everyone who was standing on the banks of the Jordan River. Historically wars have been fought over this subject! Men have attempted to control what God can and can’t say. Some have even assumed they were defending God’s reputation by claiming that the holy scriptures were changed to say this. Is God not strong enough to protect His holy writings? Can Holy Scriptures really be altered? Does God have holy books or “formerly” holy books? Thankfully, God has preserved His word for us since ancient times and there is solid proof to counter man’s made up accusations.

Did you know the Messiah was called son 700 years before Jesus was born? It wasn’t a title made up to suit someone’s twisted theology. It was a truth that stood the test of time. The first time the coming Messiah was referred to as “God’s Son” is in the Psalms, whose ancient manuscripts far precede the New Testament. Let’s read several verses written by King David in Psalm 2:

*2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and **against his anointed**, saying, 3 Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. 4 He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. 5 Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. 6 Yet have I set **my king** upon my holy hill of Zion. 7 I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, **Thou art my Son**; this day have I begotten thee. 8 Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy ossession. 9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. 10 Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. 11 Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. 12 **Kiss the Son**, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his*

*wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.*

Based on what we just read, would the Messiah's title of son have been difficult for Jews to accept? Jews are a monotheistic culture. They believe in one, all-powerful God. Yet, surprisingly from ancient times the Jews knew that "Son" was a title God would give to his Messiah. In fact they knew it since the time of King David.

While studying the life of Jesus we will see Jews freely using the term, Son of God. Even the Jewish High Priest said it! Why did they not take offense to this title? Because they remembered this Psalm and knew that the Messiah's character would resemble God's. Besides, what would you call a man who had no earthly father and was born of a virgin?

Let's answer that question by looking at Jesus' genealogy as recorded in Luke chapter 3 verses 37 and 38:

*37 the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, 38 the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.*

What do you call someone who has no father? Adam was called the Son of God. Jesus, born of a virgin, in a sense was a second Adam because he also had no father.

People stood on the banks of the Jordan River and watched Jesus with admiration. John the Baptist had called him "the Lamb of God." Now God had thundered from heaven,

*"This is my Son in whom I am well pleased."*

Is it wrong to take pleasure in that which pleases God? Should we not feel obligated to show respect and admiration for what He admires and loves? If God says something, should we be ashamed to proclaim it as truth?

Let's bring this lesson to a close by asking a simple question. What should we tell every foreigner who asks us what being a Turk means?

Words cannot express the scope and depth of the trauma visited upon our ancestors from 1877-1922. The calamity that befell Turks during the wars with Russia (1877) and in the Balkans (1912-1914), not to mention WWI (1914-1918) and the Turkish Independence War (1919-1922) is staggering.

The Family Name Law of 1934 in Turkey gave us a truly unique opportunity to immortalize our family stories once and for all. Our fathers selected with dignity last names that accurately conveyed their stories. Some selected the names of quaint little towns, faraway villages, golden wheat fields, emerald rivers, snow capped mountains, pine scented valleys, and charming ports where they were expelled from and/or where they lost their loved ones. Others chose names of character like Yilmaz, Korkmaz, Son of a Lion, Son of a Wolf, Son of a Pepper, or Son of Iron. These survivors had been through hell and only their will to fight, a bit of cleverness, and the hand of God had kept them alive. It was a different generation than the one we live in, and the names may seem foreign to a pampered generation filled with televisions, computers, cell phones, and supermarkets. Nonetheless, the names are ours. We don't forget our grandfathers because there is great admiration and character behind our last names. They are our titles. As Turks let us defend the glory of God by preserving the title that He gave to Jesus: Son of God. If a man can be Son of Steel, let us allow God to give His own applause in His own way to whomever He admires.

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Who do you admire? Why? What pleases you about them?
2. What did John claim that the “Lamb of God” would do?
3. It is interesting that the people at Jesus’ baptism likened God’s Spirit to a descending dove. Can you remember another story from the Bible that had a dove in it? What did the dove symbolize?
4. Take a moment to imagine what God meant when He said, “In whom I am well pleased.” Discuss.
5. In our country, we have last names that mean "son of the lion" and "son of iron," which were chosen by people when the Surname Law was passed in 1934. Most assuredly, people chose these names because they wanted to declare that they had the special characteristics of the things they admired. Lions are brave, iron is strong, etc. How can these surnames help us understand why God gave Jesus the title of "Son of God"? What characteristics was He wanting to say that Jesus had?

# 6 OVERCOMING SATAN'S ATTACKS

*What did Satan want Jesus to do?*

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Most people believe in the existence of Satan and that he does evil in our world. Less clear in people's minds is why Satan does evil things. What is his motive? What purpose does he hope to accomplish by doing evil? These are questions that we want to answer so that we have an understanding of the issues in the battle between good and evil. This lesson will reinforce what we have already learned about Satan's work and also add a dimension to it that we haven't seen before. To introduce our topic, let's look at a story from the history of Anatolia.

Pergamum is a city about a two-hour's drive north of Izmir. Some think that people fleeing the destruction of Troy settled ancient Pergamum. In any case, by the time of Alexander the Great the city was in the hands of the Greeks. When Alexander died one of his generals Lysimachus took control of Pergamum. Do you remember our lesson on Daniel 7<sup>23</sup> where there was a leopard with four heads? Well that leopard represented the kingdom of Greece led by Alexander. When he died his kingdom was divided into four parts governed by one of his four generals. Lysimachus was king of one of those four kingdoms.

After Lysimachus died, Pergamum expanded into a kingdom under the Attalid dynasty. The kingdom did well and was independent

of Rome. But in 133 B.C. the last king, Attalus III, died without an heir and willed the kingdom to Rome. Rome wasn't very quick to intervene in the situation and a man named Aristonicus came forward with an interesting claim. He said he was the half-brother of Attalus III and heir to the throne!

Aristonicus said that Eumenes II, the father of Attalus III, was also his father. He was obviously not in favor of Pergamum going into the hands of the Romans. So, he started a revolt and made himself king. Although he tried to exert his control over various cities like Izmir and Ephesus, he was not successful. Aristonicus was losing his grip on Pergamum, so he tried to gain the support of the people through an interesting offer.

He promised economic and social opportunity to the poor and freedom to the slaves in return for their allegiance. Well, his kingdom didn't last very long. The cities of Pergamum, assisted by kings from Bithynia (in the area of today's Iznik and Sakarya) and Cappadocia (near today's Nevşehir) rebelled against him. When five ambassadors and the armies from Rome came they captured Aristonicus and took him prisoner. According to the historian Strabo he committed suicide in a Roman prison.

With this story in mind, let's see how Satan approached Jesus while he was in the wilderness after being baptized by John. To understand the event it is important to remember that John the Baptist's mission was to "prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."<sup>24</sup> John understood that it was none other than the Lord who was coming. You will remember that Jesus was born of a virgin and it was prophesied that his name would be Emmanuel, which means "God with us."<sup>25</sup> Then after baptizing Jesus, John heard a voice from heaven saying,

"You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."<sup>26</sup>

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24 Mark 1:3

25 Matthew 1:23

26 Mark 1:11

We learned in a previous lesson that Jesus carries the unique title of "Son of God."<sup>27</sup> Of course, Jesus is not the biological Son of God in the same way that Ataturk is not the biological father of the Turkish people. But Jesus has such a unique relationship with God that God calls him "son". It is very important to keep this in mind as we do this lesson because Satan challenged Jesus on this very issue. Let's start by reading Matthew chapter 4 verses 1-4:

*1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. 3 Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.' "*

Did you see what Satan did? He questioned Jesus' identity by saying,

"If you are the Son of God."

In other words,

"Prove you are who God claims you are."

When Jesus was baptized, he heard God declare that he was His son. After 40 days of fasting, what was the first thing Satan tried to do? He tried to make Jesus doubt his identity and that the title of "Son" was real. Why would Satan be concerned with Jesus being called the Son of God? Perhaps because it is more than just a title! The word son suggests an identity, a relationship. If Satan can get Jesus to doubt his identity and how God feels about him, he can get Jesus to doubt the mission that God gave him. In other words, Satan is trying to tempt Jesus into not believing what God said. This is exactly how Satan deceived Adam and Eve.

*Satan had said to Eve, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"<sup>28</sup>*

The words Satan said were not true and the way he asked the question and the insinuation in his voice cast doubt about God's honesty. Satan tried to convince Eve that God's love and compassion for man could not be real because He would not allow them to eat such a beautiful, delicious looking fruit. Using the same technique, Satan suggested that God's love and affirmation for Jesus wasn't real. After all, if Jesus really were God's Son why would Jesus be alone in the desert with wild beasts? Why would he be hungry to the point of death? **Satan was trying to lure Jesus into disbelieving what God said about his identity.** Disbelief in God's word is what brought sin into the world and Jesus is being tempted on this very point. Satan wanted Jesus to doubt God's word and fall into sin so that he would be overcome just like Adam and Eve. Quite simply, Jesus would come under Satan's power. Why would that be so important to Satan?

Let's review briefly what we know about the fall of Satan, who was once called Lucifer.<sup>29</sup> In Fate Changer Book 3 lesson 11, we learned that Satan was once a covering cherub.<sup>30</sup> A covering cherub is one of the angels who stand next to God. He became proud of his beauty and desired to take God's place on the throne of the universe.<sup>31</sup> Later, Satan came to the Garden of Eden<sup>32</sup> and said to Eve,

*"You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."<sup>33</sup>*

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28 Genesis 3:1

29 Isaiah 14:12

30 Ezekiel 28:14

31 Isaiah 14:13 and Ezekiel 28:17

32 Ezekiel 28:13

33 Genesis 3:4, 5

Satan suggested to Eve that God was selfishly withholding good things from her and exalted himself by saying she could have it.

In the book of Job Satan said to God,

*"Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"<sup>34</sup>*

The implication of Satan's words call into question the very foundation of God's government, which God declares to be unselfish love. Satan claimed that Job's loyalty is based on the physical benefits he receives from God. In other words, his allegiance to God was not based on love, but on selfish gain.

Satan established his rebellion against the kingdom of God by accusing Him of oppression and selfishness. Interestingly, God gave dominion of the earth to Adam and Eve. If He were selfish, why would He allow Adam and Eve to reign over the earth? Nonetheless, when they sinned they surrendered their dominion over the earth to Satan. Fortunate for humanity, God said that the dominion Satan usurped would be broken. In the Garden of Eden God said to Satan,

*"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall crush your head, and you shall bruise His heel."<sup>35</sup>*

Satan remembered those words. So he worked against the Messiah, the seed of Eve, who was prophesied to come. Satan knew that Jesus, carrying the given title "Son," had a special relationship with God. **That title signifies that Jesus has the power to overthrow Satan's dominion of the world.** Jesus is intricately tied into God's plan to save people from their sins and Satan is trying his best to thwart it.

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34 Job 1:9-11

35 Genesis 3:15

Let's continue by reading Matthew chapter 4 verses 5-7:

*5 Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.' " 7 Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.' "*

Again Satan is challenging Jesus on his unique status as "Son". The son of a king is above the other subjects of the kingdom. Satan wanted to sit on God's throne and be the king. But Jesus, who has a status higher than Satan, was in his way. We see Satan literally trying to kill Jesus by trickery and eliminate his competition.

Satan quotes scripture but his interpretation is not only misleading, it is incomplete. Satan said,

*"For He shall give His angels charge over you."*

But he omitted the words,

*"To keep you in all your ways."<sup>36</sup>*

This second part is important because “your ways” means the ways of the Lord. We are not to put ourselves in a position where it will require God's miracles to save us in order to test God's fidelity. The counterfeit of true faith is presumption.

Satan said to Jesus, "Throw yourself down."

Satan can tempt us to sin but he cannot force us. It is only by our consent that we sin.

The added dimension that we see in Satan's anger and rebellion against God is that it is also fiercely directed toward Jesus. In Satan's third and final temptation of Jesus, we see this issue more clearly. Let's see what happened next in Matthew chapter 4 verses 8-10:

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<sup>36</sup> Psalm 91:11

*8 Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.' "*

By offering to give all the kingdoms of the world to Jesus, Satan claimed to have the authority to do it. Jesus did not dispute Satan's claim. Why? Because when Adam sinned, he yielded the dominion of the world to Satan and Satan took control of it to some extent. But like the rebel Aristonicus of Pergamum Satan is not the real owner of the kingdom. He is a usurper. Aristonicus promised greater freedom to the citizens if he were in power instead of Rome. Likewise, Satan tells people as he suggested to Eve,

"If you support me as the ruler, I will give you greater freedoms than God. You will be as gods."

Satan wants worship. He comes right out and says it. If Jesus bowed down and worshiped Satan, he would have stolen Jesus' special title and authority; just like he stole Adam's. If Jesus obeyed Satan, he would be yielding the dominion given to him by God to someone else. **We are servants to whom we obey.** Just as Aristonicus claimed to be the son of the king and rightful heir to the throne, Satan is falsely claiming his right to sit on the throne of the universe.

There is a power struggle going on between Christ and Satan. God says that Jesus is Son. Jesus has a higher status than Satan. Satan wants to be worshiped like God, but he can't obtain that while there is someone greater than himself. So he tries to place himself above Jesus.

Satan tried to tempt Jesus to step outside of God's will in three different ways. Three times Jesus quoted from the Old Testament to rebuke Satan's insinuations. **We too have a special weapon against temptation; it is called the word of God.**

When you are tempted to do wrong, what do you do? Do you pray to God for help? That is the right thing to do. You can also strengthen your soul against temptation by repeating the commands and promises found in God's word. Memorizing scripture is so important for these types of situations.

God had said,

*"And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD."*<sup>37</sup>

We are dependent on God for our daily bread. In the wilderness, God showed the Israelites that without Him they would die of hunger. But that does not solve the problem of eternal death. **God showed them, and he also shows us, that if we trust in God and obey His word we will not be forsaken either in this life or for eternal life.**

Satan will come to each person and create a situation where they cannot serve God and carry on their normal activities. Perhaps it appears that obedience to God's word will cut off their means of support. Satan will suggest that it is necessary to break God's commandments to survive. But Jesus showed by example that it is better to suffer than to depart from the will of God. Our question should be,

"What is God's command, what is His promise?"

Then we should do the will of God and leave the results to God. Let us finish the story by reading Matthew chapter 4 verse 11:

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<sup>37</sup> Deut. 8:2, 3

*11 Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.*

We notice that angels ministered to Jesus after Satan tempted him in the wilderness. Angels do play a part in the events that happen here in this world. We cannot see them. But there are obviously evil angels on the side of Satan and good angels on the side of Christ.

Christ's angels minister to us, protect us, and sometimes even save our lives. In the conflict with sin and evil God has not left us alone. Though we may not see them, angels help true believers.

In this lesson, we saw that Satan's rebellion against God reached a new dimension when he attacked Jesus with his lies. Satan challenged Jesus' title of "Son." He tried to entice Jesus to worship him. Let's look at an example of how jealousy and self-exaltation motivates someone to do evil.

Uçar Bey was a doctor in a hospital trauma unit. One day, he had to leave the ward for a meeting. He said to the nurses,

"I'm leaving Tunç Bey in charge. If there are any questions, ask him."

Namik Bey, however, was one of the other doctors in the trauma unit and he wanted to be in charge. So he began to give orders to the nurses. When the nurses objected he said,

"Uçar Bey left me in charge. I am a doctor. You do what you are told."

The nurses were naturally scared to disobey the doctor. But they were uncomfortable with his rebellion against Uçar Bey's decision and disrespect to Tunç Bey's authority. They hesitated to accept Namik Bey's claim. Namik Bey, seeing that his authority was in question, decided to discredit Tunç Bey in front of everyone. Namik thought that if he could get Tunç Bey to make a mistake, he would be in charge.

Namik Bey suggested to Tunç Bey,

"Look, you can dismiss this patient. He doesn't need 24-hour observation with just a single intracranial bleed. It is less than 5 mm and he has no history of a clotting disorder, no intoxication, and no multiple associated injuries. We have other patients coming and we need the bed."

Tunç Bey knew that the risk of releasing the patient was very low under such circumstances. Yet he also knew that the hospital protocol for such situations was 24-hour observation. Tunç Bey refused to break protocol. He knew it would require more work for him and the other staff. They would indeed have to make room for more patients.

When Uçar Bey returned and learned of the situation, he commended Tunç Bey for his decision and extra work.

"Our protocols are there for a reason. I see that I can trust you to do what is right when I am not here."

Namik Bey's suggestion to Tunç Bey was not for the benefit of the patients. He was jealous and wanted to see Tunç Bey fall from his superior rank. He sought to exalt himself by tearing someone else down.

Satan tried to usurp Jesus' position as the Messiah and "Son" by causing Jesus to doubt God's word. But Jesus didn't listen. He remained faithful to God and His commandments. Jesus relied on the promises of scripture to counteract the insinuations of Satan. When Satan looked at Jesus, he saw the "seed of the woman" that would destroy him. When Jesus looked at Satan he saw a snake that needed to be crushed. Although Jesus didn't crush Satan's head this time, his time is coming!

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Read back through the verses. Who was it that led Jesus into the wilderness?
2. When you come into difficult circumstances, through no fault of your own, how can Jesus' experience in the wilderness encourage your faith?
3. Think of a time when you saw jealousy at work. What was the end result?
4. Satan was clearly working to destroy Jesus. Satan is at work today as well. How does he work and what is he hoping to accomplish?
5. Are there people today who challenge Jesus' title of "Son"? How do you think Jesus would respond to that?

# 7 WE HAVE TO BE BORN AGAIN

*A new heart is key to changing your fate, but how do you get it?*

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There has been a lot of talk in the last few years about change. Perhaps the most discussed topic is climate change. Although change is sometimes hard, it is often necessary even beneficial. It brings new challenges, makes us think harder, and provides new opportunities to grow and learn.

The purpose of doing these lessons and studying the Bible is to learn if fate can be changed. We have come to the crossroads in determining the answer to that question. Although we won't find all the answers in this lesson, some of our original questions will be answered. So get ready because you are about to read some very shocking truths!

Esat was a typical man. He worked hard, paid the bills, enjoyed sports, and cared greatly for his family. He always considered himself to be a good man. But he had an inner struggle that just wouldn't end. It seemed like no matter how hard he tried, in the end he always did the things he didn't want to do. For example, he didn't want to get angry with people, yell at his kids, or be dishonest. But it always seemed to happen. It was like a bad habit that he just couldn't kick, a battle raging in his mind and body that he had no control over. It was about to drive him insane.

One day Esat decided to talk with an older man in the village. He had always respected this man because he was honest, calm, humble,

and wise. During his whole life Esat had never heard anyone say something bad about him. If anyone could help him, it would be the old man.

“Peace be upon you uncle,” Esat said.

“Peace be unto you my boy” He replied.

They spoke for a little while about the weather, the coming harvest, and the recent roadwork. The weather was hot and even though they were sitting in the shade, they periodically wiped the sweat from their foreheads. Then Esat started to open up.

“Uncle, I need some advice. I was hoping you could help me.”

“Ok, explain. I will do what I can.”

Esat then began to explain his struggles. He described his fits of anger, jealousy, dissatisfaction with life, and desire, but inability, to always be honest. He even illustrated his point with many examples. While Esat was talking the old man just nodded his head and listened. Then Esat stopped speaking and waited attentively for the old man’s wise words. This was his only hope for change. If this old man didn’t have the answers nobody would.

The old man just sat there in silence, looking off into the distance. Then he spoke just one sentence,

“You need a new heart!”

Esat was stunned and confused. He didn’t know what to say, so he just sat there and listened to the dialogue in his head.

“What does my heart have to do with this? I don’t smoke or drink alcohol. I am still young. Why would I need a new heart when the one I have is healthy?” He thought to himself.

“But then again, he is old and he must know what he is talking about. Maybe I am just confused.” He continued to think. “Yes, if the old man says so, he must be right.”

Then Esat broke the silence by asking the old man, “How do I get a new heart?”

“Son, you will need to talk to God about that.”

It was very hard for Esat to swallow what he had just been told. Perhaps he was looking for a solution that was more tangible or logical. Something he could do to change things. But sometimes there isn't anything we can do because the problem is bigger than us. Well there was a man about 2000 years ago who received similar advice on more than one occasion. His name was Nicodemus. Let's start reading about his experience in John chapter 3 verses 1 and 2:

*1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: 2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*

Nicodemus was from a sect of Jews called the Pharisees. These were the same men that John the Baptist called “vipers”. They believed that a person could attain salvation by keeping the Law of God. In other words, if they lived a good life, in line with God's laws, they would be guaranteed a place in heaven. But there was a fundamental problem with their logic. **It was impossible for them to keep God's law!** Just like Esat, they couldn't keep themselves from doing wrong.

It was for this reason, and the fact that they stubbornly refused to believe the truth much less teach it, that John the Baptist called them vipers and told them to repent. **They, just like each one of us, needed to repent of their sins and ask for forgiveness.** Unlike many of the Pharisees, Nicodemus understood this and wanting to know more he secretly visited Jesus at night. It is obvious Nicodemus had respect

for Jesus because he called him “Rabbi” which means teacher. Let’s see how Jesus responded to him in John chapter 3 verse 3:

*3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

What? We can only guess how perplexed Nicodemus must have been. First, he was told by John the Baptist that being a descendant of Abraham wouldn’t get him into heaven. Then he was told that he wasn’t better than anyone else, he was a sinner who needed to repent and be baptized.<sup>38</sup> Now this young teacher/prophet/miracle worker is telling him to be reborn! What would you have asked Jesus if you had been there? Probably the same thing Nicodemus asked in verse 4:

*4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?*

Now if you were speaking on a physical level, those questions would be very logical. We can’t reverse time. We can’t change back into an unborn baby! But, as you probably already guessed, Jesus wasn’t talking about a physical change. He, like the old man in the village, was talking about a spiritual change, a spiritual rebirth. In fact, we can imply from Jesus’ declaration that if a person isn’t reborn they will not be in heaven. In other words, **without spiritual rebirth our fate is eternal destruction!** Let’s listen to Jesus’ words in John chapter 3 verses 5-8:

*5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.*

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38 The baptism of John symbolically represented the washing away of sins.

What a shock this must have been to Nicodemus. Jesus said that Nicodemus needed to be born again! Nicodemus was on the high court of Israel, a Pharisee, and Jesus was telling him that his position and "goodness" was not enough to enter heaven. If Nicodemus isn't good enough, who is?

Jesus said that two things were involved in the spiritual rebirth of a person: water and Spirit. Nicodemus had already learned the role of water while listening to John the Baptist. Although the water itself doesn't actually "wash away" the sins of the person, it is a fitting symbol of God's forgiving and forgetting the person's sins. When a person repented and chose to be submerged in the water, it was as if their sin had washed off and floated away, never to be remembered again. **It meant their status before God was changed. They went from being guilty and ashamed to forgiven. They went from defiled and dirty to pure and clean.**

It is clear in the scriptures that John didn't want to baptize Jesus because he knew that Jesus had not sinned and there was no need for Him to repent. But Jesus insisted and after His baptism we witnessed something amazing. The Spirit of God descended upon Jesus like a dove.<sup>39</sup> It is this same Spirit that Jesus is referring to while talking with Nicodemus. **If we want to be changed, we also need God's Spirit.** Let's read chapter 3 verse 8:

*8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

To say that Nicodemus was perplexed would be an understatement! It is hard enough for us, after 2000 years of debate, research, and experience, to understand what Jesus is saying here. But just as Jesus said, there are some things that are just too hard to comprehend. Even in our day we know a lot about weather, but we still can't determine where every gust of air came from or where it will go. Naturally, Nicodemus had to ask,

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<sup>39</sup> John 1:32

“How can this be?”

Jesus’ answer was both harsh and astonishing! Let’s continue by reading what Jesus said in John chapter 3 verses 10-13:

*10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? 11 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. 12 If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? 13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.*

Jesus was reading Nicodemus’ heart. He could sense the pride mixed with confusion. In essence, He was saying,

“Wake up Nicodemus! Stop trying to figure this out with human logic. Don’t you remember what you have read in the Holy Scriptures? How can you call yourself a teacher if you haven’t learned what is already there? Salvation is all about change. You have to be changed! And you can’t do it on your own.”

Then Jesus begins to explain how that change takes place by mentioning two stories that Nicodemus would have been familiar with. First he referenced the judgment scene depicted in the book of Daniel.<sup>40</sup> In this vision, Daniel watched as someone approached God sitting in heaven. This person’s title was the Son of Man and it is clear from the scriptures that He was very important! In fact, God makes Him the ruler of an everlasting kingdom. When Jesus said “the Son of Man”, Nicodemus knew whom He was talking about. But more interesting was that Jesus said the “Son of Man” descended from heaven. Then Jesus reminded Nicodemus of an event shortly after the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt. Let’ read it in John chapter 3 verses 14 and 15:

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40 Daniel 7

*14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.*

After the Israelites left Egypt, they did a lot of complaining. On one occasion God punished them with snakes.<sup>41</sup> The snakes were biting people and hundreds were dying. Obviously this caused people to cry out for help and God ordered Moses to make a brass serpent, hang it from a pole, and command the people to look at it. If they looked at it and believed, God would destroy the serpents and heal them. Basically, it was a test of faith.

With this story as the backdrop, Jesus told Nicodemus that the Son of Man who had come down from heaven had to be lifted up. And just as the Israelites who looked at the serpent and believed were saved, so would all those who looked at the Son of Man. Moreover, their salvation would last forever. In other words, **those who look upon the Son of Man and believe, get baptized, and are filled with the Spirit of God will be in the kingdom of heaven!** Not only will their fate be changed, their characters will begin to change. You can't be filled with the Spirit of God and continue struggling with old habits. One by one, they will fall away because victory over sin is the evidence that God's spirit is working in a person.

Now brace yourselves because what Jesus said next is radical. He unlocked the true meaning behind all that He was saying and predicted the future to Nicodemus. Let's continue in John chapter 3 verses 16-18:

*16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. 17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that **the world through him might be saved.** 18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

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<sup>41</sup> Numbers 21

Jesus said the “Son of Man” is the “Son of God”! In others words, Jesus as the “Son of God” is the “Son of Man.” This means that Jesus was in heaven before he came to earth. Why did he come to earth? Jesus chose to come to earth as a man for one sole purpose. It wasn’t to judge the earth, but to save it. According to Jesus, **all who look upon the Son of God (i.e., him) and believe will have eternal life.**

Many people believe that Jesus is the Messiah and a great prophet. Many believe that he was born of a virgin and sinless. But Jesus isn't talking about this kind of belief. He was saying that salvation could only be found in him. When the Israelites were in the desert dying from snakebites, Moses made a bronze serpent and placed it on a staff. God told them to look at the snake and they would be healed. When they looked at the bronze serpent, it was an act of faith that God would save them. Likewise, Jesus is saying,

"If you look at me, you will be saved!"

Salvation is achieved when we act on our belief. Of course it is imperative that you believe in the right thing!

Let's see what Jesus said next in John chapter 3 verses 19-21:

*19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. 21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*

Jesus loved to teach in parables and He followed up his astonishing remarks with an excellent illustration. The Son of Man/God is like a light that comes from afar to brighten a dark world. Do you remember when we first started studying and looked at the Creation of the world? At that time the earth was with out form and lifeless.

There was a darkness that covered the planet. What was the first thing God did? He said, “Let there be light!”<sup>42</sup>

He exposed the world for what it was. Even so, God sent another light, the Son of Man, into the world to expose the darkness in people’s hearts and the evil intentions of Satan. So why don’t they approach the light? Simply, they like the darkness of ignorance, stubbornness, and selfishness. They don’t want to be told that they are bad. They don’t want to change! And until they choose to look at the light and believe, their fate is eternal destruction.

Mevlana Rumi wrote an amazing poem about change. Here are three stanzas from “Seeking the Source”:

A voice out of this world calls on our souls not to wait anymore,  
get ready to move to the original home.

You've been tied up, your feet in the mud, your body roped to a  
log. Break loose your ties. Get ready for the final flight.

You may not like what I'm going to tell you. You are stuck. Now  
you must seek nothing but the source.<sup>43</sup>

You are being called. But the choice is yours. Will you choose to stay in the darkness and stuck in the mud? Or will you look to the light and be freed? Will you choose eternal life or destruction? Will you choose to be changed or stay the same? Will you look to Jesus the “Son of God” or will you look away? Fate, the choice is yours!

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42 Genesis 1:3

43 [http://www.poetry\\_chaikhana.com/R/RumiMevlanaJ/Seeking Source.htm](http://www.poetry_chaikhana.com/R/RumiMevlanaJ/Seeking Source.htm).

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. Do you think that you are good enough to earn God's forgiveness?
2. Are there things in your life that you want to change? Have you tried and tried without success?
3. Which part of this lesson fills you with hope?
4. Who is the Son of Man? What does it mean for Him to be lifted up?
5. How do we get a "new heart"?

## 8

WE CAN BE IN HEAVEN,  
WITHOUT A DOUBT!

*Did the Messiah come only for the Jews?*

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Hope is one of the most powerful forces on earth. Again and again, history has shown that people with an unrelenting hope are able to surmount amazing obstacles and overcome life-crushing difficulties. We have all heard stories that could be called nothing but miracles. Whether it was a soldier in a POW camp or a citizen trapped under the rubble of an earthquake, they were able to endure privation and near death existence for an amazing length of time only because they held on to the hope of being saved. Stories of such hope amaze and encourage us because in some small way we are all in a desperate situation reaching out for help.

This lesson is intended to stir the hope that is within you. You began these lessons because you are unique. You have been hanging on to the hope that your life could be better by knowing God and His Word. Let's find out how that hope can be realized.

It was an incredible discovery. In 2006, a misplaced and forgotten letter dated September 1933 had been found. The letter was addressed to "Your Excellency," so it was most likely intended for Atatürk. But it was President İnönü who received the letter. Imagine the moment when President İnönü's secretary placed a stack of mail on his desk and said,

"Sir, there is a very unique request for your immediate attention from Paris."

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Taking the letter in his hands the President surely would have been surprised at the signature he saw there, “Prof. Albert Einstein.”

Prof. Einstein’s letter began,

“I beg to apply to Your Excellency to allow forty professors and doctors from Germany to continue their scientific and medical work in Turkey. The above mentioned cannot practice further in Germany on account of the laws governing there now. The majority of these men possess vast experience, knowledge, and scientific merits and could prove very useful when settling in a new country.”

As the Nazi party of the 1930’s was shaping up, it became an increasingly hostile environment for thought leaders, particularly those with Jewish backgrounds. Einstein worked feverishly to rescue relatives, friends, friends’ relatives, and even strangers from Hitler’s henchmen. Einstein became a savior for hundreds. He was personally invested in the cause, not only writing letters like this one to the Turkish government, but also by establishing bank accounts in their names and depositing the \$2,000 required by immigration authorities. With only a premonition about the future, it was his hope to rescue intelligent men from prison or death.

The letter was translated from English into Turkish on Sept. 30, 1933. The question was what do with such a request? It was a big opportunity for a young nation attempting to establish a modern educational system, but it was also an expensive one. It was for this reason that the letter was passed from one person to another within the president’s cabinet. The notes of several men in the letter’s margins bear testament to the fact that making a decision was difficult. The top right notation shows that İnönü transferred the letter on October 9th to Maarif Vekaleti, Ministry for National Education. The other annotations are attributed to Reşit Galip, the sitting Minister. One said,

“This proposal is incompatible with clauses [in the existing

laws].”

Another declared,

“It is impossible to accept it due to prevailing conditions.”

Surely İnönü must have pondered deeply,

“What should I do with such a letter and from such a predominant member of the world’s scientific community?”

On one hand, importing teachers who could train Turks in subjects the Ottoman Empire had long neglected could hurdle Turkey light years ahead in industry and science. On the other hand, it could place them at odds with long time ally Germany. Moreover, where would they place these men? Not to mention that it didn’t seem to be legal according to their canon. We must also remember that Turkey wasn’t a robust country with financial capital and a network of universities like it is today. We can be sure that Einstein’s letter was the center of lots of conversation in Ankara.

Prof. Einstein closed the letter with a personal appeal,

“In supporting this application, I take the liberty to express my hope, that in granting this request your Government will not only perform an act of high humanity, but will also bring profit to your own country.”

Then his farewell,

“I have the honor to be, Your Excellency's obedient servant, Prof. Albert Einstein.”

How would Turkey respond to such a candid appeal to serve as the hope and savior to a handful of very desperate souls?

Let’s pause this interesting story to consider the scripture portion of our lesson. We have been studiously looking at the life of Jesus. In our last lesson, Jesus had just finished a 40 day fast and overcome

the temptations of Satan. He is now 30 years old and about to start 3 years of public ministry. Let's look at what happened next as we turn our attention to Luke chapter 4 verses 14-16:

*14 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. 15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. 16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read.....*

Galilee was a small area just 80 kilometers long and 40 kilometers wide with a fresh water lake in the middle. The area was extremely fertile and every type of fruit, olive, and nut tree was grown. Because of its ideal agricultural conditions there were nearly 200 small villages around the lake. This part of Jesus' ministry has been compared to springtime, because it was the beginning of his work and he was welcomed everywhere like the welcome joy of spring flowers.

We notice from the text that Jesus was faithful in going to the synagogue. Similar to the local mosque, the synagogue was a place for prayer and the reading of the Holy Scriptures. However, the teaching portion was slightly different from the mosque's. Typically a local person or guest was given the opportunity to speak because there was no professional ministry or theological credentials required. Thus Jesus was invited to speak.

Of course you remember, the Sabbath is the seventh day, which God had blessed and made holy. God gave the Sabbath to Adam and Eve and their generations as a day of worship, rest, and fellowship. Jesus was honoring God by going to the synagogue on Saturday, the seventh day, as God had established in Eden. It was the custom to read from some portion of the ancient prophets and comment on it. Let's see what Jesus did in Luke chapter 4 the second part of verse 16:

*16 .....And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,*

There were no books in those days, only scrolls. These were the same type of scrolls as those found near the Dead Sea in 1948. Amazingly, a shepherd who had thrown a rock into a cave to scare out his goats found the over 2000-year-old scrolls. When he heard the rock strike something that broke, he entered the cave and found clay jars filled with old parchments. These scrolls were the entire Old Testament including the Books of Moses, Psalms, the scrolls of Daniel, Isaiah, and the other prophets. It was an incredible find because the scrolls dated to 200 years before Christ. Thus in some way putting to shame those in modern times who had said that the scriptures had changed in their present form. Yes! The scrolls found at the Dead Sea were nearly identical to the one's today! The Dead Sea scrolls give solid evidence contradicting accusations that God's word had been tampered with. Those scrolls help to verify that God has protected his word from 2200 years ago to the present!

It was one of these types of scrolls that Jesus would have been given. The scroll would have been laid out on a big stone or wooden table. One of these old tables can still be seen in the remains of the Jewish synagogue attached to the coliseum in Sart near Salihli. When the scroll of Isaiah was laid on the lectern, Jesus opened it and began looking for a very particular passage. Finally Jesus found his place in Isaiah chapter sixty-one. As Jesus read he also combined some themes from Isaiah chapter 43 verse 7. Imagine Jesus standing and reading these words as recorded in Luke chapter 4 verses 18-20:

*18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." 20 And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.*

Now it became clear why Jesus had been looking for that particular portion of scripture. He wanted to read a hope filled passage written almost 700 years earlier about himself, the Messiah! While every eye was still fixed on him, Jesus put an exclamation point on the passage. Let's read what he said in Luke chapter 4 verse 21.

*21 And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

What was Jesus claiming here? First, that ancient scripture was pointing ahead to someone great. In other words, scripture isn't just a compilation of stories or wise thoughts. On the contrary, Jesus made clear that all scripture has a destination, a north star, and a fulfillment. Second, Jesus claimed he was that fulfillment, the Messiah, the Lord's anointed. In essence, he said,

"I am that north star! I am what the scriptures points to. Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus was extremely bold in his assertion. This was the beginning of his ministry, and yet, he didn't shrink from having the people place all of their life's hopes on himself.

In modern language, this was his inaugural speech. It outlines his agenda and assignment from God. Jesus said he would fulfill five specific assignments as the Messiah. Let's look at his words closer.

First, he said,

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me:"*

Jesus acknowledged that he was the Messiah.<sup>44</sup> As the Anointed One, he would:

- 1) Proclaim good news to the poor.
- 2) Proclaim liberty to the captives.

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<sup>44</sup> Look back to Psalm chapter 2 for more on this "anointing".

- 3) Give recovery of sight to the blind.
- 4) Set at liberty those who are oppressed.
- 5) Proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

The good news Jesus would preach to the poor was an open invitation to the kingdom of heaven. His gospel message is concisely conveyed in Matthew chapter 25 verse 34:

*34 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'*

What is Jesus' invitation? It is to receive a gift, an inheritance, prepared for you. Can you see why Jesus' message was called a "gospel?" Jesus' message was to tell people,

"You are written into the will (testament) of God!"

This promise is for you as well, words you can rest your eternal hope on! **Jesus opened the doors of the Kingdom of God to all who would believe.**

Jesus also set captives free. Everywhere he went he cast out demons. In fact today, people have found relief from the oppression of demons through the power of Jesus Christ. Jesus freed people who were bound under the spell of Satan or the curse of demonic powers. Jesus had authority to break the devil's grip and help people to lead normal happy lives. **Jesus still has that power!**

Jesus literally gave sight to blind men. He healed them so that they could see again. How marvelous it must have been to follow Jesus and see blind men, leaping and jumping with joy because they could see flowers and fields for the first time. There must have been a continual excitement and happiness in the crowds when they were around Jesus. He laid his hands on some and others he simply spoke to. The Bible contains four specific instances of Jesus healing different blind men and gives reference to several others. Here is the story of one of them from Mark chapter 10 verses 46-52:

*46 And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. 47 And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart. Get up; he is calling you." And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 50 And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" 51 And the blind man said to him, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight." 52 And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.*

Jesus also opened the spiritual eyes of people whose life vision had grown dark through depression, self-hate, and worry. He continually gave hope to those who had been oppressed by the religion of Judaism and its heavy burden of ceremonies. He opened men and women's eyes to the truth that religion was something other than ritual. In Luke chapter 11 verses 34-36, Jesus told men that they must be careful stewards with the spiritual eyesight that God had given them:

*34 Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness. 35 Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. 36 If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light.*

Yes, Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy. John the Baptist asked Jesus very directly if he were the "fulfillment" of all that the prophets had spoken. Listen to John's question and Jesus' answer in Matthew chapter 11 verse 2-6:

2 Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples 3 said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" 4 And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. 6 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

Oh to be one who is blessed! Jesus said,

*"And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."*

Unfortunately, some were offended by him, and still are. Let's get back to the story and see what happened after Jesus read the scroll. We can continue with Luke chapter 4 verses 23-32:

23 And he said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself.' What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well." 24 And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. 25 But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, 26 and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 27 And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." 28 When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. 29 And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. 30 But passing through their midst, he went away. 31 And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath, 32 and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word-possessed authority.

How could this crowd suddenly go from elation and awe at Jesus' words, to such anger that would compel them to throw him off a cliff? The answer to that question is hidden in the stories Jesus used regarding Naaman and the widow who helped Elijah. You see, Naaman and the widow were not Jews; they were Gentiles! Who was Jesus' audience in the synagogue? They were Jews. In essence, Jesus said that the Gentiles were smarter than the Jews because they had listened to the prophets! The congregation at Nazareth thought of themselves as the blessed of God and that the Gentiles were the ones who needed to be set free and have their eyes opened. But when Jesus said, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your ears," he was saying that Jews were the ones in darkness and needed to hear the good news! They refused to accept this and drove Jesus out.

Let's go back to our story of Einstein and İnönü's conundrum. Just as Jesus had done, President İnönü was about to disappointment a Jew, namely Einstein. Here is İsmet İnönü's letter of response to Einstein dated November 14, 1933:

Distinguished Professor,

I have received your letter dated 14 November 1933 requesting acceptance by Turkey of 40 professors and physicians who cannot conduct their scientific and medical work in Germany anymore under the laws governing Germany now.

I have also taken note that these gentlemen will accept working without remuneration for a year in our establishments under our government.

Although I accept that your proposal is very attractive, I have to tell you that I see no possibility of rendering it compatible with the laws and regulations of our country.

Distinguished Professor, as you know, we have now more than 40 professors and physicians under contract in our employ. Most of them find themselves under the same political conditions while having similar qualifications and capacities. These professors

and doctors have accepted to work here under the current laws and regulations in power.

At present, we are trying to found a very delicate organism with members of very different origins, culture and languages. Therefore I regret to say that it would be impossible to employ more personnel from among these gentlemen under the current conditions we find ourselves in.

Distinguished Professor, I express my distress for being unable to fulfill your request and request that you believe in my best sentiments."

At face value, President İnönü's letter appears to have closed the doors to Einstein's plea just as Jesus may have seemed to close the doors for the Jews of his hometown of Nazareth. But, in truth a larger plan was already at work in our Turkish government.

You see several months earlier, as a result of Atatürk's University reforms, a professor named Phillip Schwarz, who was the first to be fired from his job in Germany because of his Semitic roots, requested permission for 30 Jewish professors to fill various positions throughout Turkey. Unknown to Prof. Einstein, by the time his letter arrived İnönü and his staff had agreed to rescue the men of Schwarz's request by placing them in the newly established Istanbul University. But Turkey's role as savior was to be much broader than that. Before the end of hostilities in Europe, Turkey had saved not just 30 as originally agreed to by Schwarz (nor forty as indicated in the İnönü letter) but over 190 men plus their families. Intellectuals, scientists, doctors, legal scholars, architects, librarians, and musicians were all rescued!

Just as Jesus, a Jew, would become the unlikely hero for Gentiles, Turkey, a Muslim nation, became the unlikely savior for the Jews! Unusual, but that is exactly what happened. Moreover Turkey saved Jews from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, France, and Spain. Turkey actually fulfilled Professor Albert Einstein's greatest wish.

Turkey altered the fate of nearly two hundred men and their families. What about Jesus? According to himself, he has the power to change the fate of the blind, the oppressed, the poor, and the hopeless. And he did!

A wealthy businessman returned to the elementary school he had attended almost 50 years earlier. He had come to address a class of sixth graders. The man agreed to make a motivational speech out of sentiment to his childhood memories of the school. But the truth was that neither the school nor the neighborhood resembled what he had remembered from years ago. It had turned into a ghetto and was now poor, run down, and dangerous.

The man intended to tell the students,

"Work hard and you'll succeed."

But during the preliminary events of the program, the school principal leaned over and whispered to the businessman that three-quarters of the school's students would probably never finish high school. They would end up working in nearby factories. This prompted the man to spontaneously change his speech. He promised free university tuition to every sixth grader who finished high school and graduated. He urged the students to dream their own dreams and promised to do all that he could to help them achieve their goals.

It was a turning point for those youth. The man had given them something they had never had before, hope. More than an empty promise, the man set up a foundation to give active coaching and renewed vision throughout their high school experience. Six years later, 90% of the original 61 who heard that promise had finished high school. In the end, 37 completed university, previously unheard of in that poor neighborhood. Hope! Those youth had believed the man, and it made all the difference in their lives. Of course the man was a millionaire, and that helped make their hope all the more solid. They knew he would fulfill his promise!

What about you? Jesus has made a promise, worthy to hang your hope on. He asked the blind man,

“What do you want me to do for you?”

It was the faith of the blind man that made him well. What do you believe Jesus can do for you?

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. What made Turkey a good candidate for Albert Einstein to write and ask for help? How would you have felt if you had been one of the family members of the 190 who received a letter of invitation to come to Turkey?
2. Why did Jesus go to the synagogue?
3. What was Jesus claiming from the passage he read in Isaiah?
4. Review from the lesson the “good news” that Jesus was preaching. Do you believe this message was just for the people of his day? Does his message apply to us today? If it does apply to us today, do you think most people would be humble enough to believe that they were in need? How about you?

# 9 TO BE SHAPEABLE

*Jesus said, "Follow me." What does that invitation mean?*

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Why would you change jobs? Well you would change jobs to be closer to family, to make more money, or to have better working conditions. Why would you change careers? You might change careers because the occupation you are in doesn't support the lifestyle you want to live. Regardless of the reasons, it would be a big step to completely forsake all that you have been trained or educated to do and go do something completely different. There would be a lot of uncertainty as to whether or not you were making the right choice.

Another reason that you might change jobs is because you believe your new job is more important than your current one. For example, a doctor might make more money working in a private hospital, but choose to work at a state teaching hospital where he can be of greater service to his community and country.

People everyday are faced with the decision to change jobs and careers. Unfortunately, God does not write the answers to our questions in the sky. We have to make a choice, a choice that can change our lives forever. In this lesson we will examine how Jesus called men to be his disciples and the kind of decisions they were forced to make. We will also see how those decisions affected their lives. Let's look at Buket's experience first.

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Buket got up from the couch and went to the kitchen for some sunflower seeds. She returned, sat on the couch across from the television, and continued listening to the news reports concerning the teacher appointment lottery. (öğretmen atama kurası). The lottery would begin in a few minutes and would be done by computer. Of 10,000 new appointments, 2700 would be classroom teachers like her.

Buket's shaking hand fumbled for the bag of sunflower seeds as she couldn't take her eyes off the television. She had worked so hard to get to this point. She had graduated from Ankara University, passed the KPSS10, and been among those who were entitled for the drawing. But what were her chances? Tens of thousands of people were competing for those jobs. It wasn't even the first drawing she had lived through. On two other occasions, she had followed the same routine hoping that somehow she would get a teaching job.

Her emotions had gone up and down so much that she wasn't sure if she could stand the stress anymore. She said to herself,

"If I don't make it this time, I am going to look for work in another field. I have to make some money."

Her husband Varol had not mentioned it but she knew from the look on his face that her unemployment was straining their finances.

As she watched, the bowl beside her began to fill with the empty shells of the sunflower seeds and her hopes became as empty as the bag she was pulling seeds from. At last the final announcements were made and Buket was still without a job.

Buket's whole life was spent preparing to be a teacher. Now there was nothing. When Varol came home, she took one look into his eyes and burst into tears. There was nothing Varol could do to comfort her. Now what would they do?

That night an unusual phone call came. It was Buket's friend Elif who said there was an unannounced job opening at the Renault

factory. It was in the personnel department.

"Would you be interested in looking at the job?"

"I don't know, I have never thought about being anything other than a teacher. How can I be a personnel manager? I have never done that before. I don't have any training in it. I don't have a degree in it."

"You don't know until you try. What have you got to lose? Nothing. What have you got to gain? Everything."

"But that means saying good-bye to being a teacher forever. I don't know if I could do that."

"The decision is yours Buket. I can't make it for you and no one is forcing you. It's your life. What do you want to do with it?"

That is a good question for all of us. When the decisions of life come, what are we going to do? Buket can wait for a teaching career that may never come. She can try something different which is hard to do in our culture. What would you do?

Changing jobs can be unsettling if we are not sure that we are making the right decision. Even when we are sure that the decision is the right one, we still have to adjust to a new environment. This is true in our time and it must have been true in old times as well because people are people. One day Jesus approached some men with an offer that would change their lives. Let's read about it in Luke chapter 5 verses 1-5:

*1 So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, 2 and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets. 3 Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. 4 When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out*

*into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." 5 But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net."*

Simon called Jesus, "Master." This was not their first meeting. This event took place probably more than a year after Jesus was baptized. You can read how the disciples were loosely connected to Jesus at that time.<sup>45</sup> Jesus had ministered in Judea and was largely rejected by the leaders of the Jews. In fact, he had very few followers after the first year of his ministry. John the Baptist was in prison and the prospects that this new teacher named Jesus would amount to something were not very promising.

Simon and his fishing partners had had a bad night and they returned from their labor empty handed. Perhaps their disappointment in not catching any fish matched their outlook for being a follower of Jesus. In the daytime, the clear water of Lake Galilee would make it easy for fish to flee from their nets. That is why they fished at night. But out of respect for their teacher, they did as he commanded. Let's find out what happened next by reading Luke chapter 5 verses 6-11:

*6 And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. 7 So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" 9 For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; 10 and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men." 11 So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.*

It was at the time of greatest prosperity that Jesus called the disciples to forsake worldly gain and enterprise. They had never seen anything

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<sup>45</sup> John chapter 1

like that catch of fish. But Jesus immediately called them to leave it all behind and follow him. Usually we think of someone changing jobs or careers for financial benefit. Just the opposite was happening here. Jesus gave them prosperity and then called them away from it!

Jesus didn't have many disciples up to that point. In a similar way the fishermen had had no fish. But all that changed in a moment with the miracle working power of Jesus. The same power that brought the fish to the net could change the hearts of men to believe the truth.

Simon saw the power of Jesus in miracles and understood that he was a sinner in the presence of the sinless One. His heart melted and he understood that he was not worthy to follow Jesus. It was when Simon was most vulnerable and humble that Jesus called him to be a follower. It was then that Simon's heart was open to receive the words of Jesus; open to a transformation of both life and character. Jesus didn't choose the educated scribes and Pharisees to be his disciples because their hearts were not open to truth. No, he chose the outcasts, the ones that all the leaders had given up on. **He was looking for those who could be shaped and molded.** Those who had nothing to lose and everything to gain!

It is when you have come to the point of spiritual helplessness that Jesus can work with you. When you are proud, think that you know a lot, or think that your good works are sufficient for God to accept you into heaven, Jesus can do nothing for you. He is not inviting you to be a disciple in that condition. He invites you to be a disciple when you understand that without his help and miracle working power in your life you can't do anything to change your fate, spiritual status, or sinfulness.

Simon and the others decided to enter a new occupation. They had no education or training to do what Jesus was calling them to do. They simply trusted that the One who could fill their nets could prepare them for their new life. Jesus will do the same for you. **When he calls you to be his disciple, he will supply all you need for your new life.** You will learn directly from him. You will learn

from the one who turned ordinary fisherman into skilled teachers, writers, and miracle workers!

The fishermen were not the only ones that Jesus called from successful businesses to follow him. Let's find out who else he called in Mark chapter 2 verses 13-17:

*13 Then He went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them. 14 As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him. 15 Now it happened, as He was dining in Levi's house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him. 16 And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, "How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?" 17 When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."*

Levi was making good money! He definitely didn't follow Jesus to be closer to his family. Did he think he would make more money or have better working conditions? The Bible doesn't say. But we do have a record later on where Jesus made it very clear that he was not offering money, power, or position to those who chose to follow him. We can read about it in Luke chapter 9 verse 57-58:

*57 Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." 58 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."*

In some cases, we take on a different job because of the opportunity it offers. But sometimes we do it out of a sense of duty. Consider this story about the independence war.

Ekrem was 17 years old and lived in a small village in the Aegean. It was late July, 1920, and news came filtered out of parliament that Mustafa Kemal didn't think the Turkish revolutionary units (Kuvayimilliyeye) could stand against the Greek army. The Greeks had started their attack on the twenty-second of the previous month and already the revolutionaries had lost Bursa. Mustafa Kemal called for the qualified soldiers in the revolutionary units to become part of the regular army. A call also went out for mobilization, anyone who could handle a weapon was to come and join the army.

Ekrem walked from the village square to his home. He walked past the familiar cafe and the spring. He paused to look out over the fields in the valley below. He said to himself,

"If I go to war I may never see this place again."

He walked home and saw the flowers that his mother planted by the front door. He entered slowly but the noise of the door caught his mother's ear.

"Son, is that you?"

"Yes, mom," Ekrem said with a weak voice.

His mother understood something was wrong and entered the hallway from the living room where she was knitting.

"What's the matter, son?"

"Mom, they need help with the war. I'm not a soldier, I've never done that before. But how can I stay here and see my country overrun by enemies. How can I leave the responsibility of defending our homeland to others? Mom, I've got to go."

Tears came into his mother's eyes as she understood the implication of what her first-born son was saying. How could she let him go? Which was more important, her son or her country? How could she give her son over to almost certain death?

She embraced him and plunged her head against his chest. She remembered the first time she held him in her arms. That was so many years ago. Now he was not a little baby anymore. He was a man with a responsibility and a mission. She could not hold him back from being a man. Ekrem had decided that he must leave his home, leave his mother and father, leave everything he knew behind, and go do something he had never done before. He would do something he was not trained to do. But he was answering the call to do something greater than himself. He was answering the call to self-sacrifice.

What about you dear reader? You have read what Jesus said to Nicodemus:

"You must be born again."

You feel in your soul that Jesus is calling you to be his disciple. But the issue still comes down to a decision. Perhaps you are thinking about what will happen to you if you make this choice. Perhaps you are thinking like Buket that your life will never be the same, you would be saying good-bye to your life as you know it forever.

You may be thinking like Simon and the other disciples that the prospects for worldly greatness and success don't seem very good if you live a life with Jesus. But then you are also reminded that Jesus filled their nets by the miracle power that resides in him. You recall that Jesus told one potential follower that the Messiah had no place to lay his head. Jesus made himself very clear. He was not inviting people to financial prosperity in this world. He was offering hardship in this world but with the promise of eternal life in the next.

But you also want to think like Ekrem, that you are being called to something more important than yourself. The prospect of being Jesus' disciple involves your salvation, yes. But it is also calling you to the higher task of being a messenger of salvation for others. As Ekrem and thousands of others gave their lives for Turkey, are you willing to give your life for the kingdom of God? You will not have

the courage to stay in the kingdom of God to the end if you really aren't committed to the idea that the kingdom of God is everything. So you need to make a decision. Jesus, invited those fisherman and they saw miracles, they experienced amazing transformation, truly their fate was turned, and their lives were changed. What about you, why not also follow Jesus? Just like Buket and Ekrem, there is no looking back, there is no changing plans later. Other options have failed and they will fail again. But Jesus never fails. Your destiny, your fate is in your hands. What are you waiting for?

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. What was the real struggle in Buket's mind about taking the new job offer? Have you had to make such a decision? Explain.
2. What quality was Jesus looking for when he was choosing his disciples? Why was that essential to the kingdom of heaven? Do you have that quality?
3. Ekrem was willing to give his life for his country. What things would you give your life for? Can you imagine yourself as not just a citizen of Turkey, but as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven? Could you give your life for that kingdom?
4. Can you make a verbal commitment right now to God, in front of the other people in your study group, to follow His Messiah?

# 10 BEING FRIENDS WITH THE JUDGE

*Jesus has been given all authority to judge -- what should your relationship be to someone with that kind of power?*

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When someone says the word “authority” how does it make you feel? Does the hair on your arms stand up? Do pictures of previous employers or teachers flash before your eyes? Is it something you wish you had more of?

Just like most things in life, the way you think about authority is often the way you respond to it. If it is something you fear, you go out of your way to avoid those with authority. But if it is something you envy and desire, you will draw close to those who have it. And if it is something you crave, you may find yourself abusing others to obtain it.

Jesus himself said some of the most profound things about authority including where it comes from and who has it. But before we read his commentary, let’s look at how a group of workers responded to authority.

During the Ottoman Empire, a landlord of Anatolian descent was known for his vast vineyards. He was a hard worker and had amassed his fortune after many years of toil. After his first few harvests on a small plot of land, he slowly bought up the adjoining fields one by one. He knew everything about grape varieties, soil, cultivation, pruning, harvesting, and producing grape products. Because of this, over the years he had earned the respect of all his neighbors.

After a long summer of watering and tending the vines, harvest time was fast approaching. So he hired some temporary workers to help his full time employees. Soon thereafter, he had to go on a business trip. But before going he gave detailed instructions to his son about how often and how much the workers should be paid, how much to sell the grapes for, etc. In short, he gave all his authority to his son and trusted him to do the work correctly.

About a week later, the workers came and started to work. The first week passed and everything was on schedule. But the workers quickly noticed that the landowner wasn't present and started thinking of ways they could exploit the situation. They started working slower, showed up late for work, and demanded to be paid early. They even threatened to quit. It was then that the son called all the workers to a meeting.

“This is a good sign,” one worker said to the others. “I knew he was a soft man. At the first sign of trouble, he decided to give in to all our demands.”

The son stepped forward and began to speak, “I have heard the grumblings and noticed that you aren't working very hard. I want to remind you that you agreed to do this work under specific conditions. If you don't keep your end of the bargain, I will be forced to find other workers!”

The workers looked at each other and started whispering, “Do you think he is serious?”

“I guarantee if we threaten to quit he will back down.”

“Let's take a chance and call his bluff.”

One of the workers stepped forward and spoke, “I have been chosen to speak for all the workers. When we came here, we made an agreement with the landowner. But he isn't here now and we don't know you! So, we will make a new agreement with you. If you don't accept it, we will quit!”

The workers stood there waiting for the son's response.

“I am the landowner's son. Before my father left, he told me many things. But most importantly, he gave me his authority. I am standing before you now in my father's place demanding that you fulfill your contract. If you can't, leave now!”

The workers, enticed by a few bad apples, had disrespected the son by not recognizing his authority. It wasn't like the son was mistreating them or deserved their disrespect. He had every right to demand their obedience because he had been empowered by his father. He carried his seal of authority.

Fortunately, some of the workers were ashamed, backed down, and returned to work. But a handful were proud, and instead of acknowledging their wrong, strutted off blaming the son for their misfortunes.

As it has been shown in previous lessons, the religious and political leaders of Jesus' day did not want to recognize his authority or status as a prophet. They felt threatened by his teachings and the fear of losing their own positions of authority prompted them to attack his character. They were constantly trying to trick him into making a mistake or saying something wrong. Some even wanted to kill him!

There were two things that really made the religious leaders angry: Jesus' actions during the weekly Sabbath and his comments about his relationship with God. So what was Jesus doing on the Sabbath? Mostly he was healing people. Does that seem like something to get angry about? After all, God would rather have people healthy than sick. The problem was that the religious leaders had made hundreds of rules about the Sabbath, what you could and couldn't do. In their eyes, Jesus was not respecting their rules. The people were beginning to listen to Jesus and not to the religious leaders. But there was a good reason why the people should listen to Jesus. He had God's authority! Let's start by reading John chapter 5 verses 18-20:

18 *This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but **he was even calling God his own Father**, making himself equal with God.*

19 *So Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.*

20 *For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel.*

On the surface, it may be hard to understand what the Jewish leaders got upset about. So let's dig a little deeper into the text to better understand what Jesus was saying. We already know that they were angry because Jesus was "breaking the Sabbath". But we know that Jesus was only doing good works: healing others, teaching, and preaching. So that couldn't have been the main reason they were angry. To find the real source of their anger, let's look for the word "own" in verse 18. Did you find it? The Jews were angry not because Jesus called God "father," but because **he called Him his own father**. By calling God his father, **Jesus was claiming the right to heal, preach, and teach with all the authority of God and also showing his true relationship to God**.

Actually, Jesus was acknowledging what God had already said. Do you remember what happened when Jesus came out of the water when he was baptized? In Matthew chapter 3 verse 17 it says:

*17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, **This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.***

Jesus was telling the Jewish leaders that he was the "Son of Man", the "Son of God", the Messiah who the prophets said would come! But he didn't come under his own authority or to do whatever pleased him. No, Jesus came to do what God does. Well what does God do? Let's continue in John chapter 5 by reading verses 21-23:

*21 For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. 22 The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, 23 that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.*

Undaunted by their reaction, Jesus continued to shock the religious leaders. He said that God gave him the authority to judge mankind. **If a person doesn't honor the Messiah, they can't honor God.** Were the workers honoring the landowner when they went against his son? No, they were dishonoring him because they weren't recognizing his authority which had been given to the son. Even so, those who were opposing Jesus were opposing God! And Jesus had the authority to judge them for their actions. Let's see what Jesus said as recorded in John chapter 5 and verse 24:

*24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

Let's review that first sentence again.

***“Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.”***

There are two amazing truths in this one sentence. The first is that Jesus was saying his words came directly from God. The second amazing truth is that **if you hear and believe those words, you will have eternal life. Talk about a fate changer!**

Jesus continued to speak in John chapter 5 verses 25-27:

*25 “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. 26 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. 27 And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.*

In these verses, Jesus is actually speaking literally and metaphorically. Let's first explore the metaphorical meaning of his statement. Jesus said that if you believe his words you pass from death to life. That means that before you hear his words, you are dead! Of course you eat, breathe, walk, and are scientifically alive. But you are spiritually dead. **Because of your sin, you will be judged, found guilty, and condemned.** You are like a walking dead man. It is in this context that Jesus says,

*“an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.”*

If we continue reading verses 28-30, we will see the literal meaning of what Jesus said.

*28 Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice 29 and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. 30 “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.*

Not only does Jesus have the authority to judge and give life to those who are spiritually dead, he has the authority to call the physically dead back to life in the resurrection!

When the workers came to the vineyard, did the son change any parts of the agreement? Did he use the authority that his father gave him for his own benefit? Did he attempt to do anything other than what his father asked him to do? The answer to all of those questions is a resounding NO! Likewise, Jesus is saying the same thing. Up until this point, he has only told the truth, a truth that came from God and had the seal of His authority. Just as the landowner's son had the authority of his father, **Jesus has the authority of God.** The question is do you want to hear what he has to say and believe or rebel like the hired workers?

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. If you had more authority what would you do with it?
2. Should the workers have treated the son better? Why?
3. Why did the Jewish leaders want to kill Jesus?
4. Why did Jesus have the authority to say what he said?
5. If Jesus has the authority to give life and judge, what should your natural reaction be? What are you waiting for?
6. When Jesus returns to this earth, the dead will hear his voice and be resurrected. If you are physically dead when he returns, which resurrection do you want to be in?

# 11 WE NEED A LAWYER!

*There certainly will be a last day and a judgement?  
Do you have a lawyer?*

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We all wish life were fair. But sometimes it seems like bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people. Of course we all like to think of ourselves as the “good people.” In our minds it only seems reasonable that if a man works hard and helps his community and family, there ought to be good results. And often there are. But why does it often seem like the stingy or mean boss who overworks and underpays his employees comes out ahead? Why does the man who breaks contracts end up with the nice summerhouse? Why don’t bad things happen to those guys? In this lesson Jesus discusses this subject and reveals a few surprises.

Gökhan was a butcher by day, but at night he had begun an interesting hobby. In the last few years he had gotten into computers. The Internet was fascinating to him because he could get so many things for free. His most favorite discovery was free music downloads. Using a program called a “torrent” he had learned how he could download music albums that others had made available from their hard drives and music collections. He began collecting music from all the artists he loved from all over the world. There were famous singers of the past and every style of music. He loved it. He found stuff by Barış Manço, Cem Karaca, Sezen Aksu, Ajda Pekkan and hundreds of others including foreign groups that he loved like Abba, Michael Jackson, and even classics like Engel Bert Humperdinck.

Gökhan was totally absorbed by this hobby and felt like a millionaire with his free collection. He had amassed literally thousands of songs using up 100's of gigabytes of computer hard drive space. All day long while Gökhan was cutting chickens into pieces and cutting meat from lamb bones, his computer was at home working hard to download music.

He loved quitting time because he could hang up his bloody apron, go home, and review the new music his computer had downloaded while he was at work. On a strict legal basis, Gökhan's whole music collection would fall under the category of "pirated." But, he reasoned that because he paid monthly for an unlimited Internet connection he had in a sense paid for the albums. Besides, all the members of the "torrent" software group were simply sharing the music with each other. Any laws, which prohibit sharing, are bad laws anyway he thought.

One day, while Gökhan was visiting a website, a little window popped open. It said,

"Windows recovery: 11 errors detected, click here to fix."

It actually wasn't a message from Microsoft Windows, someone had just made it to look like one. Worried that it may be true, Gökhan clicked on it. That was the beginning of the end of Gökhan's great music collection. Afterward, Gökhan noticed that his computer's hard drive was spinning and spinning and wouldn't stop. He assumed his computer was updating or fixing something. So he went to bed and left it run all night. Little did he know that his computer had a computer virus specifically designed to destroy hard drives! Not only had someone written the virus, they designed the pop up message to fool people so that they would "choose" to click and thereby open the lethal virus. In essence, Gökhan had actually invited the virus by clicking!

The next day at work Gökhan chopped meat ferociously. Whack! Whack! Whack! All he could think of was his frozen, dead computer.

He wished he could use his big meat knife on the guy who had destroyed his music collection! But there was nothing he could do.

Gökhan's experience teaches us that we can't always see our enemy. It also reminds us that though life may seem prosperous and happy one day, the next day may have surprising even disastrous results. In Gökhan's situation he couldn't call the police. He couldn't call a lawyer. He had no one to help him. Partially because the culprit was a virus, and partially because his whole collection was pirated!

On a much grander scale, doomsday is coming. It will be a day that doesn't just erase hard drives, but will erase evil from the whole world! **It is a day of judgment that will fairly divide good from evil and reveal our smallest, hidden secrets.** Let's see what Jesus said about doomsday and the judgment.

Some people are surprised when they learn that Jesus was a fantastic storyteller. Children and adults by the thousands came and sat on the grassy slopes around the Sea of Galilee to hear Jesus tell his stories. Everyone loves a good story, and perhaps it is for this reason that Jesus made story telling his primary means of teaching. Jesus always told stories that had a double meaning, parables that made people think. It was quite clever of him to use this method of teaching because it allowed him to say politically charged statements without anyone really being able to prove that he was talking about them! Jesus described this hidden purpose to his disciples in Matthew chapter 13 verse 13:

*13 This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.*

For example he told stories about a farmer hiring workers who were neglectful. The wise listeners understood that Jesus' story was really about the local, two-faced religious leaders, the Pharisees. If he had shared all his views openly, they certainly would have killed him sooner! But who could prove that Jesus' story about untended

grapevines was really about the Pharisees not taking care of the peoples' spiritual needs?

We will be exploring a collection of Jesus' stories in upcoming lessons. Today we look at one in the book of Matthew chapter 13. It is unique because Jesus gave his disciples both the story and its interpretation. Pay close attention to how Jesus interprets this parable. Hopefully, it will give you greater insight and some tools to help you study the New Testament.

The story begins in Matthew chapter 13 verses 24-28:

*24 He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, 25 but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. 26 So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. 27 And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' 28 He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"*

It is odd to think of someone deliberately sowing weeds in someone else's field. But then again, there are no boundaries in the evil that people commit against one another. Perhaps a modern equivalent would be a bad neighbor getting revenge by scratching someone's car with keys.

In Jesus' day, getting revenge by sowing weeds was actually so common that the Roman government passed a law forbidding it. The seeds they sowed grew into weeds that were so hard to distinguish

from good grain that they had to wait a very long time before pulling them. One historian described these tares:

"The Arabic name for tares is zawan, and they abound all over the East, and are a great nuisance to the farmer. They stand tall and erect like wheat. The grain is small, and its taste is bitter, and when eaten separately, or when accidentally ground into ordinary bread, it causes dizziness, and can cause vomiting. In short, it is a strong poison causing drowsiness, and must be carefully winnowed, and picked out of the wheat, grain by grain, before grinding, or the flour is not healthy. Of course the farmers are very anxious to exterminate it, but that is nearly impossible."

The advice of the landowner was to let them grow together. His reasoning was that the wheat would have time to mature. He would rather harvest the wheat with the weeds and then separate them than risk losing all of the wheat attempting to destroy the weeds while they were young.

Fortunately we do not need to guess the real meaning of this story. After Jesus had told it publicly, he reviewed the lesson with his students privately and explained its real meaning.

Let's read Matthew chapter 13 verses 36-39:

*36 Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." 37 He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels.*

Do you remember from previous lessons who the "Son of Man" was? Yes, he was the one who approached God during the judgment and received an everlasting kingdom as described in the book of Daniel. The term "Son of Man" was also another name for the Messiah. Of

course, we all know that Jesus was the Messiah. Therefore, in this parable Jesus is the one who sowed the good seed.

**Jesus said the field is the world and the good seeds are the “sons of the kingdom.”** What kingdom? This is the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, a place filled with loyal angels and humans who choose righteousness. It is the kingdom founded on God’s holy commandments, a kingdom of light and holiness, which fights against Satan and the fallen angels. Jesus said the kingdom of God is like a buried treasure that a man finds in a field. He wants it so bad that he sells everything he owns to buy the field and thus obtain the kingdom.<sup>46</sup> Oddly enough, everyone is invited to be in this kingdom, but not all will come. The way to the kingdom is narrow, and few choose to walk on such a path to find it. But those who find it will experience a joy that will never end.

In Jesus’ parable we see a major contrast between two types of people, those who are like wheat and those who are like weeds. What is the difference between wheat and weeds? The answer is simple: their usefulness to the field owner! Wheat feeds others. Weeds feed only themselves. So too, Jesus says, there exists a category of people who are like weeds, only serving themselves.

The second thing this parable teaches us is that there is a hostile power in the world seeking to destroy the good seed. It has a name and an agenda. Beware because Satan is at work! You can agree that there are two kinds of influences that act upon people’s lives, the influence, which helps the seed of God’s word to flourish and to grow; and the influence, which seeks to destroy the good seed before it can produce fruit at all. Therefore, we must be on guard our whole life to insure that the field of our individual lives is producing good fruit.

This is important for us to remember when bad things happen to us. Many say,

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46 Matthew 13:44

"God chose this for me."

Whoa, wait a minute! Don't forget that Satan is also at work in this world! He is the enemy who works against us. People are quick to say God was behind some disaster and sometimes even blaspheme Him by saying so. **The Bible stresses that we are in a war. Satan is at war against God. He is God's enemy and trying his very best to sow disaster and trouble into the lives of people.** Satan loves it when we blame God for bloodshed and heartache because he knows it affects the way we view God. Jesus helped us better understand the source of pain and heartache when he called Satan a thief in John chapter 10 verse 10:

*10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*

The third point this story teaches us is how hard it is to distinguish between those who are in the kingdom of God and those who are not. A man may appear good on the outside, but be bad on the inside. Likewise, a man may appear bad on the outside, but be good on the inside. Let's not be too quick in classifying and labeling people based solely on how they appear. Only God knows the heart, and He will sort things out in His time.

If the reapers had had their way, they would have torn out the weeds early and destroyed the wheat as well. So they waited, until the crop was mature and ready to be harvested. Yes, it will take a little more work but the wheat would be safe. Likewise, God waits until the end of a person's life to judge the sum of his actions and the motives of his heart. Sometimes we try to force God's hand by taking justice into our own hands. But, Jesus says this is wrong. A man must be judged at the end of his life, not by any single act or stage in his life. A man may make a mess of his early life, but by the grace of God, later call out sincerely and find pardon. Or a man may appear to live an honorable life, but be destined for eternal destruction because he was selfish and focused on worthless and ignoble interests. No

one who sees only part of a thing can judge the whole; and no one who knows only part of a man's life can judge its entirety. Jesus continues his explanation of the story in Matthew 13 verses 40-42:

*40 Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, 42 and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Is there a time when the cheating employee, the lying boss, the crooked government official, the perverted uncle, or the gossiping crabby aunt will get their reward? Yes. Jesus made it very clear that a judgment day is coming. He said that everyone who breaks God's laws and all evil will be consumed by fire. For many, it will be a day of burning and weeping.

Did you notice who is in charge of this judgment? Jesus said,

*“The Son of Man who sends out his angels.”*

**Jesus will be the judge!** He will send out the angels who are under his command to separate the righteous from the wicked. He will oversee the final judgment. Wouldn't you like to have him as a friend? Do you remember what we read in the last lesson about Jesus' authority to judge? Let's review by rereading a portion from John chapter 5 verses 22-24:

*22 The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, 23 that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

Yes, God has given the Messiah a very responsible role. All judgment has been given to Jesus. (We will examine the judgment in further detail in a future lesson.) We can be sure that Jesus, who is alive in

heaven right now, will thoroughly do this work, and that there will be no “weeds” in God’s kingdom. Fortunately, God is full of mercy, and His primary intent is to save as many people as possible. But this mercy doesn't come without condition. How do we qualify to receive His mercy? Notice Jesus' words regarding God’s aim and wishes in John chapter 3 verses 17 and 18:

*17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that **the world might be saved through him.***

*18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.*

The condition to receive God's mercy is belief in his Messiah. God’s purpose is not to condemn man. In fact, **His desire is to save them.** From what? According to the verse we just read, we (the human race) already stand condemned! In other words, God is rescuing you from certain death. You are on death row waiting to be judged for the sin you have committed. This is your fate. You inherited death from your great grandfather Adam, who as prince of this world made a bad trade with Satan. His children were not made in the image of God. They were born in the image of Adam (i.e., sinful). Adam’s decision defiled the natural condition of every person descended from him. God’s objective is to pull the human race, you included, out of the mess that Adam’s choice threw us into. There will be more on this in subsequent lessons.

Jesus closed his explanation of the story of the wheat and tares with these hopeful words in Matthew 13 verse 43:

*43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.*

Those who love good and those who love evil must “grow together,” be neighbors, call each other family, and work together. But in the end, judgment will certainly come. May you take seriously the opportunity and call to live wisely.

In 1897, The New York Times newspaper headlines proclaimed,

“The former Turkish Consul General in Boston Convicted of Embezzlement.”

The article continued:

“Joseph A. Iasigi, formerly Turkish Consul General in the city of [Boston] who has been on trial for the last few days in the Supreme Court, is charged with embezzling about \$200,000 from Pierre, Charles Deriuex of France of whose estate he was trustee. [He] was today found guilty on 21 of the 78 counts in the indictment against him.”

Here is how the crime came about. In the 1830’s, Joseph’s father came to the United States from Greece and opened a fruit store. He was educated and cultured, and because he prospered, he earned a spot in high society. Speaking Turkish and having good connections in Turkey helped him get appointed as the Consul General in the city of Boston. He also became the trustee of several European owned estates on American soil. In this way in 1849, he became the trustee of the Derfeux estate of Paris, valued at about \$400,000. (A lot of money 160 years ago!)

When Joseph’s father died, his brother Oscar became trustee. However, in 1887, Oscar drowned in a boat wreck. Thus, the trusteeship of the lands and the office of Consul General were handed down to Joseph.

What a position of responsibility the younger brother had inherited! The job had gone from his father, to his older brother, and then to him. But he was not a faithful steward of the trust he had been granted. The newspaper reported:

“Joseph Iasigi was arrested in New York last summer soon after the charges of embezzlement were first made. Proceedings in a civil suit were begun, but Mr. Iasigi's coming to New York in early February excited suspicion. It was believed that he

intended to sail for Europe so it was decide to proceed against him criminally.”

What a shame! The good name that his immigrant father had won had been discredited. Mr. Iasigi had shamed himself and momentarily shamed the sultan of Turkey. The same newspaper reported:

“Prior to his arrest Mr. Iasigi was one of the prominent members of Boston society. He lived in luxurious ease on Beacon Street.”

Interesting! Let us always remember that the wheat and tares grow together. What had appeared to be wheat had really been a tare.

Prior to Joseph Iasigi’s trial, he requested an appeal of his arrest because of his official position. He believed the US government had no jurisdiction or right to charge him because he was a diplomat for the Turkish government. But upon examination of Joseph’s request, it was discovered that the Turkish government had officially severed ties with him four days before the arrest! In other words his hope of mediation by the sultan or Turkish officials was gone. His connections were severed and he had no mediator.

Jesus said there would be a judgment. The wheat and tares will be separated. Jesus will send out his angels to collect the righteous and destroy the wicked. Jesus is the judge, mediator, and savior. This is a connection you will definitely want to have.

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. Why do you think people write computer viruses?
2. With one click of a mouse, Gökhan's computer received that virus. How do we sometimes alter our own fate by "choosing" something destructive?
3. Who sowed the tares in the field? What did Jesus say the meaning of this was?
4. Have you ever wanted revenge on someone who has done you wrong? How do you feel about leaving justice to God?
5. Why do you think the weeds were burned? Why do you think God burns up the wicked?

# 12 THERE IS SOMETHING MORE IMPORTANT THAN OUR FAMILIES

*Jesus taught that there is one thing more important than your family, do you know what it is?*

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Is there anything more important than your family? When we choose an occupation we think about whether it would take us away from our family. When we choose our spouse it is important to know that the families go well together. When we choose a place to live, we consider first the education of our children and how close the house will be to a good school. Family is everything, isn't it?

God gave the 10 commandments on Mt. Sinai as His law for all people at all times. In that law there is a very special commandment about the family. Do you remember the fifth commandment?

*"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you."<sup>47</sup>*

Jesus placed a high value on the 10 commandments saying that if someone wanted eternal life they needed to keep the commandments. Then to insure that there was no mistake about which commandments he was talking about, he quoted from the Ten Commandments and specifically mentioned the fifth commandment.<sup>48</sup> Is there anything in this world that could be more important than obeying your parents? Is there a loyalty greater than our loyalty to our parents? This may come as a surprise, but Jesus spoke about a family that is more important than our immediate physical family. Our loyalties to

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<sup>47</sup> Exodus 20:12

<sup>48</sup> Matthew 19:19

that family supersede all other physical family relationships. What family is that? As usual, let's start with a story.

Pakize gave one last adjustment to her hair-band and turned away from the mirror in the hall.

"O.K. mom I'm ready to go!"

"I'll be just a few more minutes Pakize, I've got to get these tomatoes in the refrigerator. We will be gone three days and they won't last out here on the countertop."

"Mom, we are already so late. "

"Sweetie your father's in the car and he is ready to go. I am almost ready. I know it is your first dormitory experience and you are excited about college. You have every right to be. You worked hard. But you can just settle down a little bit; that dormitory isn't going anywhere. It will be waiting for you when you get there."

Unfortunately her mother's words were about to be proved wrong. During the three-hour drive to Ankara, Pakize was either telling her dad to drive faster or calling her friends on the phone to talk about who her roommates might be. When they got to the university it was late afternoon and they went straight to the dorm. They waited in line for twenty minutes to do the final registration. When it was Pakize's turn it didn't seem like she would be able to stand still long enough to wait for the clerk to find her name on the list.

Finally the clerk spoke up:

"I'm sorry Pakize, you won't be able to stay at the dorm. Your room is full."

Pakize's face turned red. "There must be some mistake. I signed up a long time ago. I was one of the first on the list. It has been there for months."

"I'm sorry, but your bed was assigned to another."

Pakize was confused at first, then her confusion turned to anger. What was going on? She had registered. She paid her down payment. Everything was ready.

"How could you give my bed to someone else?" She shouted, "What is happening here?"

The clerk simply said, "I'm sorry, I don't know how this happened but there isn't anything I can do about it."

The clerk was mixing truth with lies. She knew how it happened but she couldn't do anything about it.

As Pakize's mother and father tried to calm her down a student approached them.

"I saw what happened and I am really sorry. If you want to know what happened I can tell you. You got bumped from the dorm to make room for a granddaughter of the guy who donated the money for the dormitory. It is all about connections. The dorm was full. But you know family gets the privileges. He insisted that his relative get in the dorm and they had to bump someone. That just happened to be you. I'm really sorry. I hope you can find cheap housing near campus."

Almost all of us have seen how family connections can get things done. Maybe you have been the beneficiary of it or, like Pakize, the victim. Perhaps the relative of a doctor was seen before you at the hospital. Maybe you have seen the relatives of the rich and powerful get away with crimes that we would have gone to jail for. Either way, we have all seen how family connections can be convenient for some and not so convenient for others.

People place a lot of importance on family connections and hereditary positions. It was true in Jesus' day. The Jewish people had been given the scriptures, the promise of the Messiah, and the services of the tabernacle to point them to eternal life. Unfortunately, many of the Jewish people believed that because they were born as Jews,

they were entitled to salvation. They viewed themselves as having a special connection to Abraham by ancestry and that this tie would guarantee a place in heaven. They thought they were the privileged class. **But Jesus taught that this idea was not God's idea. Jesus stressed that a hereditary connection to Abraham was not a guarantee for salvation.** In a shocking event, one that we need to look at in the light of Jesus' respect for the fifth commandment, we will see that Jesus places "connections" in their proper perspective. Let's start by reading Mark chapter 3 verses 31-35:

*31 Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him. 32 And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You." 33 But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?" 34 And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! 35 "For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."*

Jesus didn't do what the crowd expected, and it must have been shocking! He was definitely not being disrespectful to his family. He was calling into question the crowd's beliefs about loyalty. He made it clear to the people that those who did the will of God were closer to him than any bond of human kinship. Jesus is still speaking about family, but he is talking about the spiritual family of God. This spiritual family is connected to Jesus and one another not by common blood, but by common faith. As hard as it may be to understand, Mary was more closely united to Jesus as a believer and doer of Jesus' words than through her natural kinship.

Jesus used very shocking language to emphasize the serious truth of the spiritual relationship in God's family. It is very important that we understand the spiritual implications of what he is saying because if we don't we might think Jesus was doing away with the fifth commandment. But he is not. Let's carefully read Matthew chapter 10 verses 34-37:

*34 Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. 35 "For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; 36 "and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' 37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.*

Jesus made it very clear that his followers might be rejected by their own families simply because they choose to follow Jesus. What should a person do in that case? Does the fifth commandment require us to do whatever our parents say, even if it means rejecting Jesus? Jesus said, "No."

He knew that many would reject him and persecute those who accepted him for who he claimed to be. It would even happen within families and be the source of division. Jesus' call to discipleship was very sharp. Let's continue in Matthew 10 verse 38:

*38 "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.*

The cross was the cruelest form of torture and death known in that part of the world. It was used by the Romans and pointed to their power. Criminals were often required to carry their own cross to the place of execution and many times they resisted violently. But Jesus expected something entirely different from his disciples. **If we want to be his disciple, we must be willing to deny self even to the point of death.** This is a bitter pill to swallow and there is no middle ground. Jesus continued to speak on this theme of self-renunciation in Matthew chapter 10 verses 39-42:

*39 "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. 40 " He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. 41 "He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the*

*name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. 42 "And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward."*

Jesus stressed two things. Did you notice them? First, Jesus said that to be a true follower of him you must lose your life. What does that mean? Does "losing your life" mean physical death? Perhaps, because Jesus just used the expression of the cross to explain the level of commitment required. Or does "losing your life" mean that your life will be forever different, that you will have different aims and purposes? Since Jesus said that we must lose our life "for his sake" we see that the commitment is to Jesus and his teachings. This brings us to the second point. Jesus assures us that God will accept us if we accept him who was sent by God. **If we lose our life for his sake, we will find life and receive a righteous man's reward.** We would become part of the spiritual family of God, a family that has higher claims on your life than your natural family. Consider this story.

During the independence war, a corporal ordered one of his soldiers to remain in a certain area and hold the enemy back. The soldier obeyed and did as he was ordered.

A short while later, a general sent a guard to the soldier with an order to retreat from the position.

"Sir, I have orders from my commander to remain here. Do you still want me to pull back?" He asked.

"Yes," said the guard, "I am carrying the authority of the general and I am overriding your commander's orders."

What should the soldier do? Indeed there was an authority in his life, the corporal. But there was another authority in his life, the higher authority of the general. In the end, he obeyed the general's command and retreated.

We have a command to obey our father and mother and to honor them. But there is one who is higher than the command. God Himself. God said,

*"Honor your father and your mother."*

But He also said,

*"You shall have no other gods before Me."<sup>49</sup>*

If we put our parents commands above God's commands, we have made them gods. God has commanded us to be followers of Jesus. We are not only to listen to his words, but to believe them regardless of the cost. Could we lose friends? Yes. Could we lose our family? Yes. Will people hate us? Possibly. But don't forget what Jesus said,

***"He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."***

You may already be calculating in your mind the cost of being a disciple of Jesus. You may be thinking that to do something your family disapproves of will be a terrible thing. But you must remember that God's family is not about bloodlines and ancestry. It is about faith and devotion to His will. God's family is a spiritual one and it supersedes our family ties on this earth. Of course, we should never be rude or disrespectful in any way to our family. But when the decisions of our earthly family conflict with God's standards or will, there can be no compromise. Our eternal life depends on the loyalty that we have to the higher family.

The cost for you personally may be very high. In God's strength, by faith and trust in Him, you can carry out His commands through the messenger He has sent.

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49 Exodus 20:3

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Do you think that the man who donated the money for the dormitory made the right decision to bump someone out to make room for his relative? Why or why not?
2. Do you feel a kinship to people in your community when you hear them call you "big sister" or "big brother"? Jesus said that in his spiritual family he had mothers, brothers, and sisters. What do you think it means to have a spiritual brother, sister, or mother?
3. Jesus said, "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it." Describe the life that you think you will find if you follow Jesus.
4. Do you think the soldier holding his position made the right decision to obey the general's guard? Who has ultimate authority in your life, your father, mother, or God?
5. What kind of difficulties could you face in your family and community as a follower of Jesus?

# 13 IS THERE A STORM IN YOUR LIFE?

*What did Jesus do that no other prophet could do?*

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Have you ever been in a situation and you didn't know what to do? How did you feel? Who did you turn to or ask for help? At this point, you can probably guess that the Bible recommends we turn to God. He alone has the power to save and protect us. He alone controls our circumstances. Only He can remove our greatest afflictions. But it also true that God has given His authority and power to Jesus. In this lesson, we will see that nature submits to the will of Jesus just as it does to God. Let's start with a short story.

Haluk was a seasoned fisherman who lived in the Black Sea coastal town of Görele. Like all fisherman, he felt most comfortable when he was in his boat. Of course he had to work on land sometimes. But while he was mending nets, repairing his boats, and selling his fish, he was always thinking about the next voyage.

Only those who live near the sea know the freedom that one feels when you are far from land with the wind blowing across your face. Just like every fisherman, Haluk loved going out early in the morning before sunrise and watching the first rays of the sun glimmer across the open sea. If he could guess what heaven was like, it would be like one of those mornings. The only difference being that he wouldn't be alone. All his friends and family would be there with him.

But there were mornings, and sometimes whole days, that were the complete opposite to those heavenly mornings. Moments and hours that could only be described as “hell on earth.” It doesn’t matter how much experience you have or time you have spent on a boat, in those moments you know that your life is hanging in the balance. One strong wind gust, wave, or slip could mean death.

On one particular winter day, Haluk went further out into the sea in search of sardines. He didn’t like to venture too far from the coast in the winter because violent northwestern storms can pop up out of nowhere. But he needed the money and thought that the chance of success was greater than the chance for failure. Unfortunately, he guessed wrong.

After a beautiful sunrise, Haluk was backtracking to check his nets when he noticed the winds were getting stronger. The slowly undulating sea had become a churning mass of medium sized waves. For a few minutes he thought about what to do next:

“The storm is coming from the northwest. Just my luck! It could easily change directions or pass over quickly. Then again, it could get stronger. If the sea stays like this, I can wait a little longer to collect my nets and return home with a good catch. But if it worsens, I may lose all my nets.”

Haluk didn’t dwell on the thought, but he knew that if the storm got stronger he might not even make it home. After a few minutes, he decided to retrieve all his nets and start heading home. But his worst nightmare was unfolding before his very eyes. As each minute passed the waves got bigger, the boat started violently rocking from side to side, and Haluk’s priorities quickly changed. The sea became so rough that he abandoned his nets and started working to save his life. It was too late to escape from the storm, so he started to plan his next moves. He tied a rope around his waist, put on a life jacket, and steered the boat into the oncoming waves. As he crested each wave, he cried out to God for help,

“God please help me. I don’t want to die. I want to see my family. Thank you for blessing me with a long life. But please, please let me live!”

As soon as he finished praying, the boat exploded over the top of a 5-meter wave and Haluk came face to face with a wall of water at least 10 meters high. Instinctively, he shifted the engine into full throttle and went straight towards the wave. As the boat started moving up it lost speed and Haluk wasn’t sure if he would clear the wave before it collapsed. And then it happened!

The boat slammed through the wave’s ridge and for a split second, Haluk was able to look out over the horizon. In the distance, he could see the sun’s rays seeping through the clouds. God had answered his prayers! Thirty minutes later, the sea was calm and smooth as glass.

When Jesus began his ministry of teaching and healing, he chose several men to be his students. They ate, slept, walked, and laughed together. Jesus knew each one of these men and for his own reasons chose them to be his disciples. Among those men were two sets of brothers. All of which were fishermen. Their names were James, John, Peter, and Andrew.

Jesus spent a lot of time travelling in the eastern parts of Israel, especially in the towns and villages surrounding the Sea of Galilee. Sometimes, instead of walking they would cross the sea by boat. So these brothers’ experience with sailboats was very beneficial. Let’s begin looking at an extraordinary event they all experienced by reading Mark chapter 4 verses 35-36:

*35 And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side. 36 And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships.*

At the end of the day, after hours of teaching, Jesus told his disciples it was time to leave. As the crowd of people began to disperse, they pondered the words that Jesus had just spoken. He had been telling

them stories all day, but his last story was puzzling. The disciples themselves must have been talking about it as they prepared the boat.

It was about a man who went out to sow seeds.<sup>50</sup> As he was sowing, some of the seeds fell along the path, some among rocks, some among thorns, and obviously some fell into good soil. Even though all the seeds sprouted, only the ones that fell into the good soil grew to maturity and were harvested. Birds ate the seeds that fell on the path. The sun dried up the seeds that fell onto the rocks. Whereas the seeds that fell among the thorns never got enough sunlight, were choked out, and died.

It was only because they asked, that Jesus' disciples were able to understand the true meaning of that story. It was so simple and yet so deep. The seed was Jesus' words, the teachings of God. And the places where the seeds fell (i.e., path, rocks, thorns, and good soil) represented people's hearts. The birds, sun, and thorns symbolized the things that prevent us from fully trusting what Jesus says. Most likely, the disciples didn't know that their hearts would be put to the test that very night as they crossed the sea.

They knew their journey would be long, so they untied the boat and started across the sea. Let's continue with verses 37 and 38:

*37 And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. 38 And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?*

As stated earlier, Peter, Andrew, James, and John were experienced fisherman. They had grown up fishing these waters and were tough men. So if they were scared, you know this wasn't a little storm! While they were fighting for their lives, trying to control the boat and bail out water, Jesus was sleeping.

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50 You can read the full story in Mark 4

Have you ever been sleeping in your bed and been woken up by a storm outside? Not a little storm, but a big storm. A storm filled with the sounds of howling wind, rain slamming into the windows, and loud thunder. If we can't stay asleep in our beds during a storm like that, how do you think Jesus stayed asleep in a boat? Do you think he was tired from healing and teaching all day?

Before waking up Jesus, the disciples had tried everything they could to survive. They were tired, soaking wet, and waiting to die.

“Wake up Jesus!” They probably yelled to one another. “Let him know what is happening. Maybe he can help!”

Maybe it was the disciple sitting closest to Jesus that woke him up. Maybe it was someone on the other side of the boat who had to wade through the water and squeeze by the other students frozen in fear. Regardless, they cried out:

“Jesus wake up! Don't you realize we are about to die?”

What do you think Jesus did? Let's find out in Mark chapter 4 verse 39:

*39 And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.*

Jesus commanded the storm to stop. **And it did!** The Bible doesn't say that the storm passed over them or that it slowly calmed down. It says that when Jesus spoke, nature reacted. Think about that for a minute, **Jesus can control nature.**

In a previous lesson, we learned that God had given Jesus the authority to judge and give life. It was a privilege that had never been given to any other prophet. In addition to that authority, we see that Jesus also has power over nature. Who else has the power to control nature? The Creator! It is obvious from the Bible texts that God has also given Jesus power or authority to alter natural law, to control what we call “acts of nature”. If this is astonishing, wait

until we see what Jesus does in a later lesson. Let's see what Jesus did next in Mark chapter 4 verse 40:

*40 And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?*

The men just sat there stunned as they listened to Jesus speak. This holy man, this teacher, the Messiah had just stopped a terrible storm by saying three words. Then he looked at them and, although the Bible only records two sentences, with that same voice he basically said,

“Why are you so afraid? You live with me, you listen to my teachings, and you have witnessed miracles. Do you not believe what I have taught you? When the wind blows and the waves get big, will your faith shrivel up like the seed that fell on the rocks? The next time you are afraid, remember what happened today!”

How would you have reacted? What would you have said? Let's see what the disciples did as recorded in verse 41:

*41 And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?*

When the Indian leader Gandhi was killed, many people mourned. Dignitaries from all over the world attended his funeral and journalists remembered his life accomplishments. Albert Einstein himself said,

“Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.”

Did you know that Gandhi liked to read the Bible? In fact, a lot of his ideas came directly from Jesus. Yes, he led his nation to independence. Yes, he preached non-violence. And yes, his fasting encouraged people not to fight. But he never stopped a storm by speaking three words! Albert Einstein's comment may have been appropriate for Gandhi. But it was better suited for a man like Jesus.

**He had the authority to judge and give life. His words were more powerful than a storm.** Yes, Jesus' disciples were right to ask,

*“Who is this man that even the wind and sea obey?”*

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Have you ever cried out to God and seen immediate results?
2. Reread all of Mark chapter 4. What part of that chapter stands out the most to you?
3. What types of things in your life are like the sun in Jesus' parable?
4. What types of things in your life are like the thorns that Jesus spoke about in the parable?
5. Did you realize that the sun, birds, thorns, and storm are all part of nature? If Jesus has power over nature, which the Bible says he does, do you believe that he can help you with the problems and obstacles in your life?

# 14 OVERCOMING DEMONS

*Why are demons afraid of Jesus?*

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What can we know with certainty about demons? Are they good or bad? Are they clever or dumb? Do they really exist? These are just a few questions that each of us have about the invisible realm. From scriptures we learn clearly that an invisible realm does exist. There is a God, Satan, angels, and demons. Loyal angels are strong, noble, and good servants of God. But what about demons? Occasionally in life, there is hard evidence that some other unexplainable force is at work. Is there any way to understand this? In this lesson we will learn biblical principles of what demons are, where they come from, and what they do by looking at the experience of a man who was possessed by a demon and freed. But first a few words from a very wise father.

Metin worked as a forest ranger between Izmir and Manisa. Every day he walked his route with a gun slung over his shoulder. His job was to guard the forest and the people who lived nearby. Sometimes he would have to shoot wild pigs and dogs. He also made sure that people weren't stealing lumbered trees. Of course he watched for forest fires in the summer because careless picnickers from the city often left fires untended.

One dark stormy night, while his wife was in the kitchen cooking, he sat with his aging father near the stove in their village house.

The wind outside was strong and it made strange noises as it blew through the rafters of the house.

Metin's seven-year-old son, Remzi, asked him,

“Dad do you think those sounds are demons?”

Metin looked surprised and asked, “What makes you think that son?”

The boy said, “The kids at school have been talking about demons lately. They said they live in trees and old buildings. Is that true?”

Metin thought for a moment and then said, “Well, Remzi, I can tell you the truth, or I can tell you fables. Which do you want to hear?”

Up to this moment, the boy had been sitting next to the window looking outside, suddenly he turned, looked at his father, and said,

“Well, of course Dad, I want to know the truth.”

Metin asked the boy another question, “How do you think you can know the truth about something you have never seen?”

Remzi sat for a moment in silence. The father helped his son by asking,

“Have you ever seen a forest fire?”

The boy said, “No.”

Metin continued, “But you know they exist because I have taken you to see the black hills covered with ashes. You know that the only thing that can make a forest into a barren, black wasteland is a fire. Plus, you trust what I say because I am your father and a forest ranger who has seen many forest fires.”

The boy pressed, “What about demons? Where do they live, and what do they do?”

The father said, "Before I answer your question, I have one more question for you son. Is fire good or bad?"

Remzi blurted out, "Bad."

Then blinking he said, "I mean, unless I want to eat barbeque, then it's good. I mean it is bad if it burns me or someone's house or a whole forest. But it is good if it is under control."

The father looked at his son, "Good job! You were right by saying, 'under control.'" Now listen to me closely and I will tell you the truth about demons. The scriptures say that God's angels are like flames of fire.<sup>51</sup> But different than real fire, they are intelligent, powerful, and do God's business. Like fire, they are "safe" when they are "under control." For an angel, that means, conforming to God's laws. God's laws are about love and unselfishness."

Pointing to his wife at the kitchen stove Metin continued, "Fire is meant to be our servant, to warm our house, cook our food, even clean up an area. But it must be under our control. Similarly angels are God's servants who do good, protect people, and deliver messages. These are all good things while under God's control and direction."

Then speaking very seriously making clear and deliberate sentences he said, "However, son, not all angels are 'under control.' We know that some angels stopped following God's laws and are like wild fire. They are 'out of control' and very dangerous."

"Well how did that happen?" Remzi asked.

Metin went over to a cabinet and pulled out a tiny book.

"This, my son, is a New Testament. It is part of God's holy writings, which were given to us as a guide to stay on the straight

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<sup>51</sup> Psalm 104:4

path. Without it, we can never understand what God has revealed to humans. Unfortunately, not a lot of people have these.”

Flipping the pages carefully but purposely, Metin leaned up close to the light bulb and said,

“Listen. I am reading from the last section called Revelation. Here it is chapter 12 verses 7- 9.”

*7 And war broke out in Heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, 8 but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in Heaven any longer. 9 So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who leads the whole world astray; he was cast out onto the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.*

Remzi gulped.

“Satan was thrown to the earth?”

“You asked for the truth.” His father said. “ Now, let me ask you. According to what I just read, who is the dragon?”

Remzi whispered, “Satan.”

“Right.” Metin continued. “Now did you notice that it says the dragon had angels fighting with him against God? According to the Bible, a portion of the angels that had been ‘under God’s control’ rebelled with Satan and chose him as their leader. In other words he deceived them into disobeying God’s law of love and subjected them to his own laws of evil.”

Remzi said, “So, Dad, are you saying demons are really angels turned bad?”

Just then his mother who had been in the kitchen listening said,

“Exactly right my boy. Now you are beginning to understand.”

Wiping her hands on her apron she continued, “TV shows like to portray genies in a silly way by making them look dumb or comic. But really they are intelligent beings that work for Satan. They are fallen angels determined to harm people.”

Metin inserted, “They fight against God and all that is good. Like a forest fire raging out of control they destroy people’s lives.”

“What? Do they burn people?” Remzi inquired.

“No. Well, they would if God didn’t restrict them.”

Metin looked at his son inquisitively for a moment, wondering if a seven year old could follow what he was saying.

“Demons are angels working with Satan to lead people away from God. They rebelled against God and want others to join them in their rebellion.”

It was silent for a moment while the wind howled outside.

Remzi sat quietly for a while and then said to his father, “So all the stories of genies being playful and silly are wrong. They are actually tricking us to believe something that isn’t true.”

Metin, surprised at his son’s discernment responded in a very reflective tone.

“Yes son, there is a war. Demons will do all they can to make us believe that their side is harmless. Because if they can trick us, they will be more free to accomplish their goal of destroying as many people as possible.”

After a moment of pondering Remzi said, “Thanks dad for telling me the truth.”

Then, stepping near the stove and putting out his hands, he smiled and said, “I am glad we have the stove to keep us warm this winter. It’s fire under control.”

While here on earth Jesus encountered demons on many occasions. Eyewitness accounts testify to demons possessing people and abusing them. In each of these stories, Jesus cast out the demons and helped individuals regain control and authority over their own lives. Let's look at one such account in Luke chapter 4 verses 31-37:

*31 And He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths. 32 And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority. 33 And in the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice, 34 saying, Leave us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are; the Holy One of God!*

Imagine what it was like in that synagogue. People had come there to pray and read God's word. In the middle of Jesus' teaching, while the people were quietly listening, this wild man began to shout in a shrill demonic pitch. He was obviously out of his mind and under the control of evil forces because he spoke of himself in the plural.

"Leave us alone! What have we to do with you, Jesus?"

Have you ever been in the presence of someone you didn't like? Perhaps you felt irritated and your heart was racing. Imagine if it was so unbearable you cried out for the person to leave. That is basically what happened for the demons. They were unable to be in the presence of Jesus. Like cockroaches fleeing when the kitchen light is turned on, these demons wanted out of Jesus' way!

Though depicted in many horror films as fictitious events, the reality is that demon possession really happens. It is a reality which psychology struggles to adequately explain. Superhuman strength, multiple voices, clairvoyance, floating objects, and disappearing figures are all paranormal activities associated with demonic activity. Fortunately, it is also true that there are principles and laws that govern how the supernatural works. If we choose to follow these principles, there is salvation and freedom for those who are harassed

or possessed. Some have seen demon possession frightfully close. Thankfully, we don't encounter this kind of thing everyday!

Around the world, and within our homeland from Istanbul to Van, from Trabzon to Antalya, there are many people desperate for help and who want relief from demonic oppression. Let's see how Jesus provided that kind of help and relief by reading Luke chapter 4 verse 34:

*34 saying, Leave us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are; the Holy One of God!*

In this verse we see the first principle. **Demons are terrified of Jesus.** Why? Because they know that Jesus has the authority of God. There is a war between good and evil, fought on both earth and in the heavens. Jesus is the captain of goodness, and demons are the pawns of Satan. Who is stronger? Of course, Jesus is! Did Satan overcome Jesus when he tempted him in the desert? No. Just the opposite, Jesus overcame Satan. If Satan can't overcome Jesus, how could demons ever hope to?

What was the source of Jesus' power over evil? His power was derived from the relationship he had with God and the authority he had been given. The demons themselves acknowledged this when they said,

“We know who you are, the Holy one of God!”

Jesus had a title that was higher than every other. He was the Messiah, the one anointed to liberate the human race from the slavery of Satan. Do you remember where the very first promise of the coming Messiah was mentioned? In Genesis chapter 3 verse 15, God told the serpent, or Satan, that one would come and crush his head,

*15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”*

Did you notice that it says He? This wasn't a message in general. It was specifically pointing forward to a special person, the Messiah. Let's see how Jesus responded to the demoniac in Luke chapter 4 verse 35:

*35 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" And when the demon had thrown him into their midst, it came out of him and did not hurt him.*

The second principle is that **demons are subject to Jesus' commands**. Just like nature responded to Jesus' words, the demons obeyed his command to leave the man. Jesus has authority over demons and the invisible realm. His words have power. Read them, memorize them, and live by them.

It is interesting to note what the demons feared.

"Have you come to destroy us?" they asked.

They know that this is their ultimate fate. Did you know that one of Jesus' jobs is to destroy the demons?! We can read about it in Matthew chapter 25 verse 41:

*41 Then He will also say to those on the left hand, Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire having been prepared for the devil and his angels.*

In short, **Jesus has power over demons because he has Gods' authority, the power to overcome evil, and the right to judge.**

Let's look at another incident when Jesus encountered demons. We can read the story in Luke chapter 8 verses 26-31:

*26 And they sailed to the country of the Gadarenes, which is across from Galilee. 27 And when He stepped out onto the land, there met Him a certain man from the city who had demons for a long time. And he wore no clothes, nor did he live in a house but among the tombs. 28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before Him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with*

*You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me! 29 For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had often seized him, and he was kept under guard, bound with chains and shackles; and he broke the bonds and was driven by the demons into the wilderness. 30 Jesus asked him, saying, What is your name? And he said, Legion, because many demons had entered him. 31 And they begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss.*

What a welcome! Immediately after stepping out of the boat, Jesus was confronted by a maniac. The man was naked, bleeding, and acting like a wild animal, all signs of demonic possession. So how did he become possessed? Unfortunately, we are not told that part of the story. But, by looking at other parts of scripture and reviewing the experiences of people with similar problems we can learn that there are certain things that invite demonic powers. **For example, involvement in spiritualism, casting spells, and sorcery can all lead to demon possession. Harboring deep-seated resentment, being unforgiving, and hatred, including self-hate, can also be an open invitation to demons.** Exposure to the occult through film or music is also a way in which Satan and his angels take “possession” of a person.<sup>52</sup> Can you think of any reason why you should be involved in any of these things?

Let’s return to the story of Jesus and the demon-possessed maniac on the beach. The demons were begging Jesus not to throw them into the abyss. Based on their plea, it is obvious that Jesus is not only strong enough to destroy them but that the demons expect to be destroyed! They know that God will punish them for their evil acts. In spiritual warfare, only spiritual strength matters. In this sense Jesus was a strong man. When Jesus asked their name, they said, “Legion.” A roman legion was about 6000 men. In other words, this man was possessed by more than one demon. But it didn’t matter

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<sup>52</sup> For more on this subject review Fate Changer Book 2 lesson 18, which covers the sad demise of King Saul. His immense hatred and jealousy toward David clouded his judgment and invited demons into his life. In the end, he committed suicide. Death is always the demons’ greatest aim.

how many there were, Jesus was stronger. He could destroy them and free the man with one word. Let's continue in Luke chapter 8 verses 32-35:

*32 Now a herd of many swine was feeding there on the mountain. So they begged Him that He would permit them to enter them. And He permitted them. 33 Then the demons went out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the lake and drowned. 34 When those who fed them saw what had happened, they fled and told it in the city and in the country. 35 Then they went out to see what had happened, and came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid.*

Pigs! What a clever solution to the problem! Just like the Bible tells us that eating pig is forbidden, the ending of this story is a great reminder that we should also view demons as unclean and forbidden. They can not and will not ever be of any benefit to us. They will only cause harm, sickness, and death.

In the end we see the man "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind." Jesus restored this man to sanity. In a sense, many people are insane with worries, fears, and problems. If Jesus can bring peace to a demoniac, what can he do for you?

Part of Jesus' ministry was to help those under the influence of demonic power. In fact, he was so concerned with it that he sent out his disciples, in his name, to rebuke the demons. Let's read Luke chapter 10 verses 17 and 18 to see what happened when they returned:

*17 Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name. 18 And He said to them, I saw Satan fall like lightning from Heaven.*

What was the key that made the demons submit? Jesus' name. Yes, the demons knew who Jesus was and their powers were no match for him.

One day Metin was walking his route between villages when he saw a truck backing up to the edge of an abandoned road on the forests edge. Metin knew immediately what was happening. Some men were about to illegally dump a big load of construction debris. The truck was loaded with broken bricks, concrete, and glass. It was Metin's job to defend the forest against such intruders. The truck engine was roaring, and any second the dump truck bed would begin to raise, pouring its contents into a pile. Metin knew if he didn't act immediately all that garbage would lay on the forest's edge for centuries. He pointed his shotgun at the air and fired. BAM! The two men looked at Metin in shock. They knew who Metin was and what he could do to them. In an instant, the two men jumped into the truck and fled away. But it was too late; Metin got their license plate number.

What do you think the men were really afraid of? Although Metin had a shotgun, the men were really afraid of his authority which had been appointed by the Turkish government! Consider these words of Jesus in Luke chapter 11 verses 20-22:

*20 But if I by the finger of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you. 21 When the strong man fully armed guardeth his own court, his goods are in peace: 22 but when a man stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him his whole armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.*

Yes, Satan is a strong man. But Jesus is the stronger man! In the invisible realm among angels, demons, and Satan himself, Jesus has no equal; he is superior. The demons knew who he was and fled when they saw him. The good news is that Jesus is alive today. He is still winning victories for those who call on him. When you are down and out, when you feel like you can't take it anymore, if you

feel like Satan or his demons are trying to push you down, call on the name of Jesus and he will save you!

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Why did Metin ask his son if he wanted to hear fables or the truth?
2. According to the Bible, where do demons come from?
3. Why are demons afraid of Jesus?
4. Who did the demons say Jesus was?
5. How could a person living in fear of evil spiritual forces find help from Jesus today?

# 15 FINDING THE SOURCE OF HOPE

*Hope is really what we all need. But is there any source of certain hope in this world?*

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If you could wish for a miracle what would it be? Would it be a miracle of healing for yourself or a loved one? How would you define a miracle? Do you use the word "miracle" simply to describe something that is very unusual? Or can something only be a miracle if God uses supernatural power to change the normal course of events? Do you consider getting a new job or winning the lottery a miracle or just luck? For example, international and local newspapers have described Turkey's economic recovery from 2002-2011 as a "miracle." Was it really a miracle or just a well planned out economic plan?

Should we expect miracles from God? If so, what are the conditions of a miracle? What role does faith play in miracles? What is the purpose of a miracle? In this lesson we will answer these questions. To help us prepare, let's consider the following events and determine if they were miracles.

On June 29, 2011 at 2pm, a 34 year old man named Ersin stopped his car on the Boğaziçi Bridge, got out, and threw himself off the structure. He fell 64 meters to the water and lived. Other than a few broken bones, he was physically okay. The newspapers all called it a miracle. Actually Ersin was the 21st person to survive the fall. Was their survival luck or was it the direct intervention of God?

Ten year old Figen was swimming in the Marmara Sea near Gallipoli. Her father was in the military and they had gone for an outing. Figen wanted to swim to a distant point but couldn't make it. She went under the water and when she was pulled to the shore she was not breathing. A doctor had just been transferred to the base. The doctor's family was also swimming at the beach that day. They were going to leave the beach earlier but were delayed. At that time (mid 1970's) he was one of only two doctors in Turkey that knew CPR. He revived Figen and she lived. When Figen wanted to personally thank him, she found that he had already been transferred somewhere else. His departure was as mysterious as his arrival. Was the appearance of a uniquely qualified doctor, at the right time and place, just a coincidence or was it the providence of God?

At Çanakkale, Mustafa Kemal Paşa and his forces were in the midst of a battle surrounded by enemies. While observing the ranks he felt something strike his chest. He looked down and saw a bullet hole on the right side of his coat. An officer named Nuri Conker Bey was standing at his side and immediately said,

"Sir, you have been struck!"

Mustafa Kemal Paşa, thinking that the event might have a negative effect on the troops, put his finger on the officer's lips and said to him,

"Be quiet. Don't say anything."

A piece of shrapnel had hit Mustafa Kemal Paşa in the chest and destroyed his pocket watch but left him unscathed. Was it coincidence or was it the direct intervention of God? How can we really know?

Let's turn to the Bible and read two stories about miracles. Perhaps they will give us better insight as to the nature and purpose of miracles. The stories can be found in Mark chapter 5 verses 22-34:

*22 And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and when he saw him, he fell at his feet, 23 And*

*besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live. 24 So Jesus went with him, and a great multitude followed Him and thronged Him. 25 Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years, 26 and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse. 27 When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment. 28 For she said, "If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well." 29 Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction. 30 And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My clothes?" 31 But His disciples said to Him, "You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?' " 32 And He looked around to see her who had done this thing. 33 But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. 34 And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction."*

Perhaps you have been to a hospital and seen a waiting room full of people who have spent the night there. The pillows and blankets tucked into the corners of chairs are proof that they are trying to make themselves comfortable as they constantly attend to the needs of a loved one undergoing long-term care. They have spent nights with only a few hours sleep, without shower or change of clothes, waiting for news that their loved-one is getting better. Sometimes this goes on for years. They have sold their last cow, their money is all gone, and yet they cling to a hope that life will get better.

In the biblical account, the woman who touched Jesus had received medical care for twelve years. Her money was spent and she only had one hope left, Jesus Christ. She had heard of his healing power and believed that he could heal her too. She said to herself,

"If I can only touch his garment, I will be healed."

Guess what. She was healed! Healed at last! Imagine her joy. How could she ever explain or show her appreciation to Jesus? She was free of the sickness that had ailed her for 12 years.

Many people who read the story may think that there was special power in Jesus' clothes. After all he is a holy person. Throughout history people have visited shrines, temples, and "holy" places with pools of water hoping that the water would heal them. Archaeologists have found clay figures shaped like feet, hands, eyes, and other body parts, which people offered to gods like Asklepios in an attempt to be healed. In the Middle Ages people wanted to touch or be near relics of dead saints thinking that God's blessing would accompany the touch. But notice what Jesus says to the woman,

"Daughter, **your faith has made you well.**"

Jesus made it very clear that it was not the garment or any other "holy relic" that caused the woman to be healed. **It was her faith in Christ that made her well. She believed who Jesus was and what he could do.**

Where did the power that healed the woman come from? The Bible says in verse 30:

*30 And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My clothes?"*

Jesus perceived that power had gone out from himself. What kind of man has power in himself to heal people?

Jesus asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

What a question! There was a crowd, everyone was pushing and shoving. Jesus was touched on every side. Besides why did it matter? A touch is a touch, right? Wrong. This touch was different,

it was done with faith. As a result the woman was healed. There is a very important lesson here for us.

A lot of people touched Jesus, but very few benefitted from it. In a similar way, many people believe that Jesus is the Messiah but receive no benefit from simply believing. They believe Jesus is the Messiah just like they believe Turkey is surrounded by water on three sides. It is an opinion that happens to be true. But there is no healing power in that kind of belief.

What was it about the woman's faith that made the difference? Jesus said her faith made her whole. Faith in what? There were others in the crowd who believed he had power to do miracles. And yet, they were not healed. The faith that Jesus is talking about is deeper than simply acknowledging he can work a miracle. Could it be that the woman's belief was not only about Jesus' ability to heal, but also the message he was proclaiming about eternal life and salvation?

One thing we can point out is that her faith was not the result of her healing. The woman did not say within herself,

"If he heals me then I will believe that he is the Messiah of God, the savior of the world."

No. Her healing was the result of her faith! She believed and was healed. There were many people waiting to see a miracle before they would believe. Unfortunately they missed out on the faith that could change their lives. Is it any different in our day?

We looked at three stories in the beginning of our lesson and asked if they were miracles of God or just chance. Because we believe that God is good and that He is involved in our lives, it isn't hard to imagine that God would do such things to save lives and to guide the course of history. However, in the end, we can only surmise what is divine providence and what is chance. What about the miracles that Jesus did? Is there any question that this event could have happened by coincidence? Is it possible that this woman's disease just happened to disappear the moment she touched Jesus' garment?

If it was an isolated event, we could perhaps answer yes. But after reading what happened next, there should be little doubt that the miracle was the result of supernatural power.

Do you remember what happened right before the woman approached Jesus and was healed? A man came to Jesus and asked him to heal his daughter. Let's find out what happened to her by reading Mark chapter 5 verse 35:

*35 While He was still speaking, some came from the ruler of the synagogue's house who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?"*

What a crushing blow that must have been to Jairus! If this other woman had not delayed Jesus' coming, his daughter might have lived. Why did Jesus delay? It just didn't seem fair that one person should be healed and another die, especially a child. It was too late; surely Jesus couldn't help her now. Or could he? Let's see what happened next in Mark chapter 5 verses 36-43:

*36 As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, He said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not be afraid; only believe." 37 And He permitted no one to follow Him except Peter, James, and John the brother of James. 38 Then He came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and saw a tumult and those who wept and wailed loudly. 39 When He came in, He said to them, "Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping." 40 And they ridiculed Him. But when He had put them all outside, He took the father and the mother of the child, and those who were with Him, and entered where the child was lying. 41 Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, "Talitha, cumi," which is translated, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." 42 Immediately the girl arose and walked, for she was twelve years of age. And they were overcome with great amazement. 43 But He commanded them strictly that no one should know it, and said that something should be given her to eat.*

**Jesus holds the keys of life and death in his hands.** He has authority to raise someone from the dead by simply speaking the words! It reminds us of the authority that God, as well as Jesus, has over nature. When God created the world, He spoke and things started happening: land came from water, the seas were filled with fish, and animals started roaming the earth. Likewise, when Jesus speaks nature is subdued and death is undone. In other words, **the creative power of God was at work in Christ Jesus.**

Both of these miracles changed someone's fate. The only conclusion we can come to is that **miracles alter fate.** The fate of the woman was sickness, constant bleeding, and perhaps an early death. The fate of the girl was that she would remain dead. But Jesus, by working miracles, shows that **he has power to change fate.** The fate of all people is hardship, humility, and ultimately death. But Jesus was able to break that power by performing miracles for those who believed in him.

In 2002, the New York Times reported that Prof. Dr. Arnold M. Ludwig of the University of Kentucky, USA, placed Atatürk first in his list of 377 world leaders who changed the fate of their countries and the world. Ludwig said the criteria included:

"Forming a country, broadening territories, period of remaining in power, military achievement, social and economic success, statesmanship, being an example morally, political heritage, and population of the country".

In a similar way, what kind of list would we make to compare the prophets of God? We might talk about the amount of people who turned to God through their work. We might consider the words that they wrote or spoke. It would also make sense to evaluate their miracles. But regardless of the criteria, only one person could be at the top of the list, Jesus Christ. He stands supreme. No one else was sinless.<sup>53</sup> No one else "spoke as he spoke."<sup>54</sup> No one else had the

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<sup>53</sup> 2 Corinthians 5

<sup>54</sup> John 7

authority to forgive sins.<sup>55</sup> No one else was given authority in heaven and earth.<sup>56</sup> No one else raised the dead by simply speaking.<sup>57</sup> No one else will be the judge of the last day.<sup>58</sup> **Jesus alone did all these.**

We asked, "What is a miracle?"

We know that God can order circumstances to do His will. We also saw in this lesson that Jesus has the power to change the fate of people through his authority over sickness and death. Can we expect miracles from God and if so, what are the conditions for a miracle to happen? In this lesson we saw that we can expect miracles. We also learned that Jesus worked miracles for people who had enough faith in him to come and ask for help. In other words, the miracle was the result of faith in Jesus Christ. Miracles can certainly awaken faith in people who have none or are spiritually weak. But those that received power from Jesus were the ones who believed in him. Why were the miracles performed? Jesus wanted to spread his blessings and teach deep, spiritual lessons about faith. He showed us that the faith required to experience a change in fate is deeper than simply believing that Jesus can do the miracle.

It is important to remember that all miracles do not come from God. In the last days, Satan will be working to deceive the whole world by using great signs and wonders. But there will be one difference; they will not exhibit the things we saw in this lesson. Miracles are God's way of blessing our faith in Him and the Messiah that He sent. Miracles are object lessons of faith. Lastly, **miracles show us that Jesus is the changer of fate, even the fate of death.**

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55 Mark 2

56 Matthew 28

57 1 Chronicles 17; 2 Chronicles 4:32-35; Acts 9:36-43

58 John 5

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. The bleeding woman trembled at the thought of being exposed as the one who touched Jesus. Why do you think she was afraid? In the end, was there anything to fear from Jesus?
2. Many people saw that Jesus could work miracles. They knew he had the power to do so. Yet they received no healing. What was the difference in the woman's faith that caused her to be healed?
3. What do you think was going through the mind of Jairus when he saw his daughter resurrected? Do you think he had faith in Jesus before the miracle? What do you think his faith was like after the miracle?
4. Do you need to see a miracle before you will believe that Jesus is the one who holds the keys of life and death? Based on your answer, what does that say about your faith?

# 16 BREAD THAT CAN'T SPOIL

*Normal bread gives us physical life. But what kind of bread can give us eternal life?*

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What are the essentials of life? That is, what things do we need to live? Although people might order these differently, the basics are food, water, and air. From a survival standpoint, we would need to add fire and shelter to the list. Sociologists would claim that community and a sense of importance are also key ingredients to a healthy, happy life. If you took a close look at your own life, what could you not live without?

Of course, you might think about electricity, computers, cell phones, washing machines, and cars. But these things are comforts of life, not necessities. If we think even more basic, specifically in regards to the first thing we listed above, we might be surprised at what we find. The first clue is that it is a food. The second clue is that we eat it everyday. Do you give up? The answer is bread.

“Bread? That is ridiculous!” Some may claim.

But did you know that Turks consume more bread than any other country in the world? According to research, the per capita average for bread consumption is 146 kilos a year. Most of us eat two times our body weight in bread each year! If we break it down, the daily average for bread consumption is just under one half kilo. If we compare that to other foods, we learn that 45% of our calories and 47% of our protein comes completely from bread. If we removed bread from our diets, it would be the equivalent of losing half our

food! Yes, bread is more important than we think.

Have you ever thought about how we use bread in our idioms? When someone tries to take our job, we say:

“He is playing with my bread.”

When someone gets his first job or a new one, we say:

“He is grown up now, he is taking the bread to his hand.”

We all know someone who seems to succeed at everything. Just like King Midas of the Phrygians, everything he touches seems to turn to gold. We marvel at his abilities and success by saying:

“He can pull bread from rocks.”

Bread is like money. You can't live without it! Of course, we could try to live without bread if we had to. But can you imagine eating breakfast without bread? What would you eat with your soup? It is quite possible that your stomach would only be half as empty as life itself. Yes, bread is a necessity. Some might even go so far as to say that bread is life!

Almost two thousand years ago, a man said that very thing. But the bread he was talking about was not the ordinary bread we eat at every meal. He was talking about something even greater, himself. Perhaps you are wondering,

“But why would someone call himself bread?”

Let's find out by reading John chapter 6 verses 1-3:

*1 After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. 2 And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. 3 Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples.*

As we have seen in previous lessons, Jesus was always moving from place to place, teaching, and healing the sick. Instead of staying in one place and having the people come to him, he went to the people. **In Jesus' daily life, we see a perfect example of God's attempt and desire to reach out to all humanity.** When Jesus spoke, peoples' hearts were opened and their fears went away. It was an experience that many people wanted everyday.

On this particular occasion, a large crowd had followed him from the other side of the Sea of Galilee. As the news spread of his previous miracles, the crowd began to grow into the thousands. When Jesus and his disciples found a nice place to rest, and from which he could speak to the crowd, they stopped and sat down. Let's see what happened next in John chapter 6 verses 4-10:

*4 Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. 5 Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat? 6 He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. 7 Philip answered him, Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little. 8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 9 There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many? 10 Jesus said, Have the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number.*

Jesus was always aware of his surroundings. He knew that a lot of these people had travelled all morning to hear him speak. He also knew that many of them were poor and had very little food. How could he send them home with empty stomachs? But then again how could he feed them? Just as Phillip pointed out, they didn't have enough money to buy bread. Moreover, what was Andrew thinking? How could two fish and five loaves of bread feed over 5000 men and their families? Fortunately for the disciples, Jesus was no ordinary man.

He had already cast out demons, calmed a storm, and raised a girl from the dead. **He had power over evil spirits, nature, sickness, and death.** Their problem wasn't a lack of food. It was their lack of faith! Let's continue with verses 11-14:

*11 Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. 12 And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost. 13 So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten. 14 When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!*

Let's pause for a moment and imagine the scene. The people's stomachs are growling, they have no food, and then all of a sudden there are baskets full of bread and fish. They rush forward and reach into the baskets. Hand after hand takes a loaf and a fish, but the baskets never become empty. The people knew it was a miracle. They had never seen anything like it since their ancestors left Egypt. There were shouts of excitement while the children ran to and fro with filled bellies. The parents were praising God while the disciples just stood there in wonder. It isn't hard to imagine that Jesus just stood back and watched with a smile on his face.

Isn't it interesting that before Jesus distributed the food he gave thanks to God? No matter how little we have it is always more than nothing! **We too should remember to give thanks.**

It is also interesting that Jesus didn't allow any of the food to be wasted. When the people were full, he immediately had the disciples collect the leftovers. But did you notice that they only mentioned the bread? There is no mention of the fish. In Jesus' day, bread was just as important as it is today and Jesus didn't want any of it to go to waste. In all likelihood, bread was probably even more important than it is today because it was so much harder to produce back then. So he had the disciples collect and redistribute it to the poor. But

that wasn't the only thing he used that bread for. He also used it to make a greater point.

The next day, Jesus and his disciples arrived in a town called Capernaum. It was actually a small fishing village on the opposite side of the Sea of Galilee and the hometown of Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Perhaps Jesus was tired and wanted to rest. Maybe Peter and Andrew wanted to visit their families for a few days. We don't know. However we do know that a group of people who ate the fish and bread followed Jesus to Capernaum. Let's pick up the story in John chapter 6 verses 25-27:

*25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, Rabbi, when did you come here? 26 Jesus answered them, Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 27 Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.*

Ouch! Did you sense the tone of Jesus' voice? To say that he rebuked them is an understatement. He spoke directly to the small crowd and basically said,

“You aren't interested in me. You just want your stomachs to be filled.”

In other words,

“The bread is more important to you than the person who gave it to you.”

Jesus knew that many people were following him for worldly gain. For many, the spiritual lessons they were receiving were just a side note. They wanted that which would make their lives easier, more comfortable, and secure. They wanted to be around Jesus if he were to use his powers to destroy the Romans, become the King of Israel, or just simply feed them a good meal. The problem was that these

things were all temporary; they wouldn't last forever. Jesus said they were focusing on the wrong thing. They needed to spend their time working for eternal rewards, not temporal. Let's read verses 28 and 29:

*28 Then they said to him, What must we do, to be doing the works of God? 29 Jesus answered them, This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.*

Jesus gave perhaps the simplest answer to one of the most complex questions. It is quite natural to think we need to do a lot to appease God. And yet, **Jesus says that all we need to do is believe in “the one that God has sent”**. Of course, in the context of this event Jesus is talking about himself. As we saw in a previous lesson, he is the one who was sent from heaven.

As if Jesus hadn't already done enough to prove who he was, the people wanted Jesus to perform another miracle. Their request was no better than Satan's when he tempted Jesus to turn stones into food. Let's read about it in John chapter 6 verses 30-33:

*30 So they said to him, Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? 31 Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. 32 Jesus then said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 **For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.***

Does the group's question seem a bit strange to you? The people were asking for a miracle like the one Moses performed in the desert. They wanted Jesus to give them bread from heaven. Did they already forget that Jesus had fed thousands the day before with two fish and five loaves of bread?

Jesus wasted no time in setting these people straight. It was God, not Moses, who provided the manna in the desert. Moses was just a

tool in the hand of God. Furthermore, the manna was just a symbol, or foreshadow, of something greater. Jesus called it “the true bread” that “comes down from heaven and gives life to the world”.

In a previous lesson, we learned that Jesus as “God’s Word” came down from heaven and has the power to give life. We also witnessed that power when he brought the dead girl back to life. Jesus could compare himself to bread because he had the power to give life. Jesus wasn't shy about his identity or authority. In fact, he was saying

**"I am as essential as bread."**

If the people had any doubts as to who or what the “true bread” was Jesus’ next statement eliminated them.

After hearing of the “true bread” the people begged Jesus to give it to them. We can read his reply in John chapter 6 verses 35-40:

*35 Jesus said to them, **I am the bread of life**; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. 36 But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. 37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. 40 For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*

For some of us, Jesus’ words are shocking and they should be! Jesus is clearly identifying himself as God’s gift to humans for the nourishment and replenishing of the soul. Normal bread gives us physical life. **But Jesus gives us eternal life!**

Jesus is the bread of life! Let’s contemplate that for a minute. It is almost too profound to understand and very easy to reject. What should we do with this kind of statement? In the crowd's own words,

“What must we do?”

Our work, as stated earlier by Jesus, is to believe that God sent Jesus to this earth and the words that he spoke. It is that simple! When we believe, what happens? We will never hunger or thirst and we will have eternal life. He will not cast us out or turn us away. He wants our thirst to be quenched. If you are reading or listening to this lesson you are spiritually hungry and thirsty. You are searching for something that you haven’t been able to find in other places. Jesus is saying,

“Stop being thirsty! Come, eat, and be filled! My words are more nourishing than any water or bread this world can offer!”

Right here, we find the answer to one of our original questions. No matter how miserable or hopeless your life may seem, **Jesus can change your fate!**

But many in the crowd weren’t happy with what Jesus said. His claims were too extreme. At best, they thought he could only be a prophet. Some of them had even known him their whole lives. We can read their thoughts in verses 41 and 42:

*41 So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, I am the bread that came down from heaven. 42 They said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, I have come down from heaven?*

Jesus expected this type of reaction, so he immediately answered their questions. His words are recorded in John chapter 6 verses 43-51:

*43 Jesus answered them, Do not grumble among yourselves. 44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets, And they will all be taught by God. Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— 46 not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has*

*seen the Father. 47 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.*

Jesus is the bread of life! According to Jesus, the only ones who can accept this are those who are listening to God. **If you are truly listening to God you will be led to Jesus.** He is the only one who has seen God because he was with Him in heaven. He is the “living bread” because he has the power to give life; moreover, eternal life!

But Jesus didn’t stop there; he continued to speak until he came to his central point. Just as God gave the Israelites manna so they would live, Jesus will give his body.

You are probably wondering where Jesus is going with this. Don’t worry, it is a natural reaction. The Jews were also astonished and shocked. They wouldn’t eat unclean animals or meat with blood in it, much less a human body. If they hadn’t already walked away in disgust, many of them were about to. Was Jesus promoting cannibalism? The answer is obviously no! So let’s look for the spiritual meaning behind what he said. We can continue reading in John chapter 6 verses 52-58:

*52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? 53 So Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven,*

*not as the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.*

In short, Jesus is saying that we need to learn the exact same lesson the Israelites learned when they were lost in the desert. If you recall, every morning they went out to collect the manna. As they were collecting that manna they remembered that God provided all their needs. They didn't need to worry about food, water, or even protecting themselves. The manna was a daily reminder to them that God would keep His promises. Likewise, we are to expend our time and energy collecting the "manna" of Jesus' words. His actions, teachings, and overall life are spiritual nourishment. When we consume, that is listen to and meditate upon, his teachings and apply them to our lives we will never experience spiritual hunger or thirst. Jesus must become our focus because his life is the epitome of God's message to humanity!

If you are still struggling with Jesus' words, you aren't alone. The disciples who lived with Jesus everyday were also confused. But Jesus didn't want them to be confused, so he explained himself further in John chapter 6 verses 60-63:

*60 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, This is a hard saying; who can listen to it? 61 But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, Do you take offense at this? 62 Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? 63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.*

Jesus reassured his disciples that he was speaking figuratively. He didn't expect them to really eat his body. But he did expect them to understand the deeper meaning behind what he was saying. Unfortunately, some of them couldn't.

This was actually a very critical moment in the life and ministry of Jesus. As Jesus said, many people were following him in the

hopes that they would get something material. When they heard him talking about eating flesh, drinking blood, and dying, they naturally became disillusioned with his teachings. They didn't understand his words because they were more focused on the world than God. They wanted the bread and the fish, not the "living bread that came down from heaven". Therefore it shouldn't surprise us that some of them left. Let's finish our lesson by reading verses 66-69:

*66 After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. 67 So Jesus said to the Twelve, Do you want to go away as well? 68 Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.*

A woman and her little son were walking along the shores of the Bosphorus Sea on a warm, sunny Sunday afternoon. They bought some birdseed, threw it to the gulls and pigeons, and watched as the birds competed for the precious morsels. They sat on the rocks and ate a sweet wafer. Later while sitting in the grass, they watched the colorful kites dancing across the sky in a strong wind. They listened to the shouts of children and breathed in the fresh, salty air that had carried a thousand ships to their ports.

After a few hours, they decided to take the ferry to the other side of the sea. As they were walking to the port, the mom looked down and stopped. The boy watched as she knelt and picked up a piece of bread. She touched it to her forehead, mumbled something, walked to the seashore, and then threw it into the sea. The boy had never seen this done before. He looked up and asked,

"Mom why did you pick up that piece of bread and throw it into the sea?"

"Son, when I was a little girl my mother told me that bread should never be left on the ground to be stepped on. So I picked it up and gave it to the fish for food."

“But why can’t it be on the ground?”

“Because bread is a blessing from God.”

Bread is a blessing from God! In this lesson, we learned that Jesus is the living bread that came down from heaven. **He is a blessing from God for each one of us.** The question now is what do we do with that blessing? There are only two options. We can believe what he says or we can walk away in disgust like some of his disciples. The choice is yours!

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Have you ever thought about how important bread is in your daily life?
2. What affected you the most about Jesus feeding the 5000 men and their families?
3. What does the title “bread of life” imply about Jesus?
4. Why was it so hard for the Jews to accept what Jesus was saying?
5. Thus far, what do you understand about fate?

# 17 WE NEED A CLEAN HEART

*Is the careful observance of traditions enough to make us pass the inspection of God?*

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How can we avoid being eternally condemned when we stand before the great judgment seat of God? Perhaps that is the most important question a human can ask himself. Are there things that can actually destroy our chance of getting into paradise? Are they things we do, or things we don't do? No one wants to face the judgment and find themselves rejected and labeled "unclean," "unacceptable," or "defiled." We have been given certain traditions that help us deal with the shame of defilement and give us hope of being acceptable to God. Are the careful observance of these traditions enough to make us pass the inspection of God? Who will be ashamed and who will find favor on the Day of Judgment? We will search for answers to these questions in this lesson.

After 38 years of marriage, Zeki decided his wife was just too hard to live with. It was time to get a divorce. One day he was telling his neighbor, Ali, about how difficult the divorce proceedings were. While they chatted over the fence between their gardens, Ali replied,

"What divorce isn't hard?"

Zeki was a retired banker who had been successful his whole life. On the side, he had made several real estate investments and even owned a successful upscale restaurant. After retiring from the bank, he started a transportation company. All of his efforts had been profitable, and Zeki had done quite well for himself. Quite

well, that is, if financial success is the measure of a successful life. Unfortunately, it wasn't until Zeki was fighting depression at age 60 and paying for a professional counselor, that he realized money isn't everything.

Ali had known Zeki for many years and contemplated his neighbor's unfortunate circumstance. Zeki was certainly a hard worker; his villa style house was beautifully groomed like a five star hotel. But Ali thought that somewhere along the way Zeki had missed the point of life. Zeki had almost no friends because he was a very shrewd man and had made enemies of each neighbor. He often argued, never backed down, and certainly wouldn't apologize. In fact, Ali was one of the few neighbors that would even talk to Zeki. When Zeki hired an electrician, plumber, or gardener, Ali would often hear them shouting over the fence when the job was done because Zeki shortchanged him by 10 or 20 lira. Zeki took pride in paying almost half of what most people paid their day laborers.

Ali stood there listening to Zeki as he shared his woes. In all likelihood, he would lose everything to his wife and only keep the summerhouse in which he currently lived. It also bothered Zeki that both his sons were getting divorced. He wanted grandchildren, but there were none. He shrugged his shoulders and simply said to Ali, "Fate." But as Ali looked into Zeki's eyes he knew that Zeki felt like he had let his boys down. He didn't teach them how to have happy marriages. He didn't prepare them for life.

About a month after the divorce papers had been filed, Ali noticed a woman going into Zeki's house. The next day Zeki came to the fence where Ali was watering his fruit tree. Zeki smiled broadly and said,

"I have a new lady friend. Please don't tell anybody because if my wife learns, or the court hears about it, my chances of getting anything are over."

Ali smiled weakly and nodded. Zeki then added,

“I have begun doing prayers each morning.”

Zeki’s last statement struck Ali as odd. It seemed like Zeki was attempting to make up for his infidelity by increasing his observance of religious rituals. Almost like he was hoping that his new religious interest would act as a smokescreen to baffle God. As if God doesn’t know what is going on!

In fact, Zeki liked to boast about his newfound “piety”. He had never been one to drink alcohol, so this life pattern didn’t change. But he did like to brag about his abstention from alcohol. Namaz had never been that important to him before, but now he was doing namaz everyday. He fasted and made every effort to purify himself by following regular rules of ablution. He even started showering after sex. Perhaps facing the judge in the divorce court made him think more about the final judgment. Who really knows?

Do you think Zeki improved his condition and increased his chances of avoiding damnation in the final judgment? Did performing more religious rituals really change his status in God’s eyes? Would he be ashamed when he stood before the God of the universe? You see, Zeki was missing one very important thing. **To enter into paradise you need righteousness; and righteousness doesn’t come by ritual.**

Using this story as a backdrop, let’s look at what Jesus had to say about religious rituals, defilement, and the judgment.

When Jesus lived on the earth, he didn’t see eye to eye with the religious leaders of his day. At the time, the religious leaders were composed of two arguing parties: the Pharisees and Sadducees. These two Jewish groups had slightly different ideas about how the writings of Moses should be interpreted and practiced. However, they did share the characteristic of religious arrogance. Their pride set them at odds with Jesus’ humble style. They didn’t like that he spent time with poor and uneducated people. They also didn’t like

him teaching about religious subjects without their permission and approval. They were control freaks who had no idea how to control someone who was healing blind men and casting out demons! In short, Jesus didn't revere them and this frustrated them. They should have sat at Jesus' feet and listened to him. But their pride got in the way and they wouldn't humble themselves to heed Christ's teachings.

The Pharisees took it upon themselves to insure that the people strictly adhered to the rituals and traditions of Judaism. They viewed themselves as enforcers of religion. Because of their own rigor in keeping "rules," they felt superior to the "sinners" around them. They loved receiving honor at public gatherings and would often pray loudly so that others would hear their prayers. When they fasted, they liked to draw attention to themselves, trying to appear more pious than the average man on the street. Though they loved religion, they didn't really love God. They could talk about God and debate about God's writings, and they most certainly studied all the holy books. But their hearts had not been changed and filled with the holiness of God! They were religious legalists who loved their national history, religious laws, and traditions. They saw themselves as "defending God" rather than being defended by God! These men were so vigorous in their religiosity that they made other people's lives miserable, similar to the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Jesus was opposed to their legalistic, formal religion. A person who hasn't read the New Testament might assume that Jesus, being a prophet, would be vigorously strict about religious ritual. They might assume he demanded more prayer, ablution, and fasting from his disciples than John the Baptist did. But surprisingly, Jesus' work and message was just the opposite! In Luke chapter 5 verse 33 we see that the religious leaders even accused his disciples:

*33 And they said to him, 'The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink.'*

Jesus responded with a simple question. Let's read it in verse 34:

*34 "Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?"*

Jesus defined his mission this way,

"I have come to bring life in abundance!"<sup>59</sup>

He also said,

"Come to me, my burden is light."<sup>60</sup>

Does this mean Jesus wasn't strict about anything? No. He may not have been strict about the traditions of man, but he was strict about keeping God's commandments. **God's commands bring freedom, whereas the added laws of human tradition bring drudgery.** Let's read Jesus' thoughts about the law in Matthew chapter 5 verses 17-20:

*17 "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. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*

The Pharisees lives were full of fasting, washing, and sacrifices far beyond what God had laid out in the Old Testament. Their lives were hard, and they resented Jesus' light and even joyous approach to religion. But don't think that Jesus wasn't serious about his faith. He prayed a lot! But there was a major difference. The Pharisees

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59 John 10:10

60 Matthew 11:28-30

had a mechanical obedience to God's laws and a rigid adherence to traditional rituals. Jesus knew and loved God and obeyed because he wanted to, not because he had to. Obeying God's commands was an act of pleasure. At the same time he had no tolerance for human religious ritual.

The greatest defect of the popular religion taught by the religious leaders of Jesus' day was that they made sin and defilement purely external. Thus they reasoned that they could solve their sin problem by a series of actions or religious rituals. But Jesus taught that true religion started from the inside and worked its way out, ultimately transforming the whole person. He taught in Luke chapter 17 verse 21:

*21 Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.*

This created a head-on clash between Jesus and the leaders of the Jews. We can see one of those instances in Matthew chapter 15 verses 1-9:

*1 Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, 2 "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." 3 He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' 5 But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," 6 he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. 7 You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: 8 "'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; 9 in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"*

Jesus called them hypocrites, and that is what they were. A hypocrite is someone who promotes one idea, or standard, but then does the opposite. Hypocrites pick and choose the laws of God that appeal

to them. Or they may set up their own tradition to excuse in their minds the need to obey God's requirements. A hypocrite usually has high standards for others, but makes exceptions for their own deficiencies. For example a woman wants forgiveness from God, but refuses to forgive her neighbor. She is a hypocrite. Another example is a man who wants his son circumcised, in an effort to be faithful to God's law, but at the same time is committing adultery. What if he tells people not to cheat and lie, but he himself lies? He is a hypocrite.

As for the Pharisees, they loved the laws of ablution. Why? Because they thought that they could wash away their hypocrisy. The washing rituals were external, and could be performed easily without really reforming their life.

Jesus labeled them as hypocrites and said they were breaking the much more important law of "honoring their mother and father" (the fifth of God's 10 commandments).<sup>61</sup> They were worried about external defilement, and yet they were guilty of moral sin. They were choosing to follow the laws that suited their interests. They liked the hand washing law because it didn't require a humble heart to wash; it only required a habit. Ablution was easier than cleansing their hearts from wickedness and their minds from jealousy, anger, and self-righteousness. Not to mention that it stroked their egos and swelled their pride because others could see them washing. Their religion was only a show and in some ways an attempt to bribe God. But God doesn't play games.

Jesus said this about them in Matthew chapter 15 verse 6:

*6 ...So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God.*

Whoa! They had put tradition over God's clear words. They were on dangerous ground because damnation awaits those who "make void the word of God." To value tradition over God's words is really

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61 Exodus 20

making the tradition a god! So we learn we must be very careful with traditions. What traditions should we value?

We have many traditions. Some of them are from God, some from humans, some from our grandparents, some from our faith, and some from superstitions dating back to shamanism. Most traditions have been taught to us since childhood. We have traditions about what we eat, what we wear, how we sleep, how we pray, even about how we go to the bathroom. Jesus said we must be very careful about traditions. In other words, we are not to value traditions just because they are traditions. He said to do so would be a mistake. **All traditions need to be in harmony with the word of God.**

Jesus continued to explain where defilement comes from in Matthew chapter 15 verses 10 and 11:

*10 And he called the people to him and said to them, "Hear and understand: 11 it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person."*

We began by asking the question,

“What must a person do to avoid damnation?”

In the same passage of scripture Jesus now gets very close to answering that question. Let's continue reading in Matthew chapter 15 verses 12-20:

*12 Then the disciples came and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" 13 He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. 14 Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit." 15 But Peter said to him, "Explain the parable to us." 16 And he said, "Are you also still without understanding? 17 Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? 18 But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts,*

*murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. 20 These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone."*

In light of Jesus' comments, do we need to worry about external defilement keeping us out of heaven? No. In other words, no one will be excluded from paradise because of semen, urine, feces, menstrual flow, or petting a dog. But they will be excluded because of evil thoughts, lying, stealing, adultery, and covetousness.

God wants us clean, starting in the heart. Not like the university student whose parents visited him at the dorm because he was failing. He "cleaned up" for them by piling all his things in the closet. When his parents came he showed them an organized room with neatly made bed, books arranged on the shelf, and sharpened pencils on the desk. When his mother went to open the wardrobe door he let out a shout,

"Don't open that!"

But it was too late. All his dirty clothes, CD's, DVD's, beer bottles, pornographic magazines, and sports equipment came tumbling out. The boy had the appearance of being a well organized, clean, and hard working student. But the pile on the floor told a different story.

Yes, God wants clean people with a clean body and clean house. But **Jesus tells us it begins and ends with a clean heart!** Anything else is hypocrisy. Consider Jesus' strong words to the Pharisees in another conversation recorded in Matthew 23 verses 25-28:

*25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. 26 Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. 27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. 28 Even so ye also outwardly*

*appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.*

Jesus doesn't diminish the fact that something can defile us and make us unfit to enter paradise. He just differs with the Pharisees about what causes that defilement. Jesus made it clear that we shouldn't be concerned about outer purity more than we are on inner purity because the evil that comes from the heart and thoughts of man has a much greater impact on our fate. Too many people are spending their spiritual energy cleaning up the "outside of the cup." Jesus says that a clean heart is the real ticket to paradise. In fact he calls the process being "born again." Do you remember when he talked with Nicodemus about being born again in John chapter 3?<sup>62</sup> Let's read again Matthew chapter 15 verses 19 and 20:

*19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. 20 These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone."*

Let's look back at Zeki's situation in light of Jesus' teaching. What should Zeki be concerned about? That is right, his heart. He needs to figure out how he can change the habits that have made him into an argumentative, shrewd man who has no friends and lost his wife. Will his new habit of washing help him? No. Sorry Zeki, that won't do it. A complete reformation of Zeki's life has very little to do with ritual prayer and washing. But **it has everything to do with repentance and being born again.** After a personal prayer of confession to God, he could apologize to his neighbors, quit having sex outside of marriage, and pay back those electricians and plumbers that he cheated. Zeki has spent his whole life stealing, cheating his employees, cheating on his wife, and thinking evil towards his neighbors. No amount of water can wash those sins away. No, what Zeki needs is to be cleaned on the inside.

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62 Fate Changer Book 4 lesson 7

One day after class, a high school student approached his teacher with a question.

“Teacher, will getting a tattoo make me a sinner.”

The teacher looked at him thoughtfully and said, “You were a sinner before you got the tattoo.”

The boy was surprised so he came up with another question.

“Teacher, will drinking alcohol make me a sinner.”

Once again the teacher responded, "You were a sinner before you drank the alcohol."

The teacher was saying the same thing Jesus said. Our defilement isn't based solely on what we do or don't do. **We are naturally defiled and the only way to be clean is to have a new heart.** God can give us a new heart, which will in turn produce righteous actions. Focusing on outward appearances and behaviors without a real heart change is like building a Ferrari around a Tofaş engine. It's not real righteousness, it is a fake.

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. What religious traditions have been handed down to you?
2. Can you think of any traditions that people keep without knowing why they do it?
3. Why did Jesus call the Pharisees hypocrites?
4. According to Jesus, what really defiles a person?
5. If God told you he could give you a “new heart” would you want it? Consider this text in Ezekiel chapter 36 verse 26:

*36 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.*

# 18 THE FOUNDATION OF SALVATION

*Did Jesus die, or was he taken to heaven without seeing death?*

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Some people say that Jesus never really died. They say that he only appeared to die and was then taken up to heaven. Have you ever heard that? What do you think the truth is? How can you know? What do the scriptures say about this? Is it really that important? To help us understand the answer to these questions let's start with a story about an elderly gentlemen and the inheritance he left behind.

Erol had a silver beard that reached down below his collar. He was seldom seen without his skullcap on. Although he had been injured in the Korean conflict he didn't even walk with a hobble. Over the 82 years of his life he had garnered deep respect in his village for his wisdom and fairness. Everyone could say that he was perfectly upright in all his business arrangements, even with his will.

Erol had three sons and three daughters, but not all from the same wife. He had a son and a daughter from his first wife who died of cancer at an early age. The other children came from his second wife who had passed on just a year earlier. As Erol could see his own time coming, he thought about the transfer of his estate to his children. He knew that the children would never agree on how the estate should be divided up, so he wanted to do the job himself and avoid all the fighting that would ensue. In Turkey there aren't any court cases as long and difficult as an inheritance case.

With this in mind, he wondered how he could divide his properties into equal portions. Some of his land parcels were larger and more valuable than the others. Some were fields and two parcels had houses on them. It wasn't a fortune but it was something. He had inherited some of the land from his father. Erol had 7 siblings and when his father's property was divided among them, it didn't leave very much for farming. Over his lifetime, Erol had acquired other properties, mostly when villagers died and children who had moved to the cities sold off the inheritance.

Erol knew that all the children wanted the biggest and best field. It would be a shame to sell it and have it go out of the family. But there seemed to be no other equitable way to divide the property. Erol decided to have everything sold, and after the taxes were paid each child would get an equal share.

So Erol went to a lawyer and had a will drawn up with all the details about how the properties would be sold and the money distributed. They then went to the notary and had everything recorded legally. In addition, Erol had had a physical and psychological exam to show that he was capable of creating such a will. Then Erol asked the lawyer to do something a little strange.

Erol said to the lawyer,

"I want you to take a video of me explaining how I want the property sold and the money divided between the kids. The will should carry the legal clout necessary to get the job done. But I know my children. They will say that someone coerced me or that the will is a fake. I want them to see me on film, explaining with my mouth how my estates should be liquidated."

The lawyer agreed and he videoed Erol explaining what he wanted to do with the properties.

Time passed, Erol died, and the children came to the village for the burial. But no sooner had the children arrived, they started arguing over who would get the large field. The oldest son Cem said,

"I heard dad say many times in the presence of my wife that he wanted me to have that field."

His wife confirmed what her husband said.

A daughter spoke up, "I know that daddy made a will. We need to find that will. Dad never said anything about giving the big field to Cem."

After the funeral the will was found at the lawyer's office. In spite of it being officially recorded by the municipality, Cem took the issue to court. He insisted that the other children forced his father to change the will and that it was not valid. Cem said to the judge,

"My father wanted me to have the big field. I am the oldest son and it belongs to me. My brothers and sisters must have coerced him when I wasn't around."

The dispute continued until the lawyer produced the video of Erol saying what he wanted done. The judge watched it and said,

"I have a written will in my hand sealed by a notary and witnessed by the lawyer. To claim that it was done under coercion or changed is just a big story (saçmalık). It isn't believable. You yourselves have seen the testimony of Erol Bey himself. What need have we of other evidence? The will stands as written. The properties will be sold and the net income distributed evenly among the children as Erol wanted. Case closed."

The issue in the court case was settled on the testimony of several witnesses: namely the notary and the lawyer. But the most influential witness was the video that Erol had made. His testimony erased any doubt that he had been coerced into doing something he didn't want or that someone had changed his will. A lot of people have opinions or suspicions about certain aspects of the Bible. One of those is whether Jesus really died. But there really is no room for doubt on this subject because Jesus himself spoke about it on more than one

occasion. Although his statements are recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, let's start by reading Mark chapter 8 verses 31 and 32:

*31 And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 He spoke this word openly.*

Up to this point in Jesus' ministry he had not told his disciples about his suffering and death. You remember that Jesus had told Nicodemus,

*"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."<sup>63</sup>*

Hundreds of years earlier when the Israelites were passing through the desert, snakes attacked them. In the midst of that dilemma, God commanded Moses to put a snake on a wooden pole and lift it up. Whoever looked at it would live. Likewise, the ones who did not look died. Jesus told Nicodemus that the Messiah, that is Jesus, would be lifted up in the same manner. This was actually the first time he hinted at his death. Those who looked to Jesus for healing would find it, even unto eternal life. But the disciples had not heard this conversation. They were still expecting that Jesus would set up a powerful kingdom here on earth and reign as a great king.

When Jesus told the disciples that he would suffer and die, Peter didn't want to accept it. He wanted to protect his beloved teacher from harm. Let's read Peter's words and Jesus' response in Matthew chapter 16 verses 22 and 23:

*22 Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" 23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."*

<sup>63</sup> John 3:14, 15

Peter's words were not in harmony with the kingdom that Jesus had come to establish. **Jesus came to establish a kingdom based on self-sacrifice, which could only be realized through his own personal suffering.**

In the wilderness, Satan tried to discourage Jesus from this mission with enticing words. He tried to convince Jesus that he could establish the kingdom without humiliation and suffering. Satan even offered to give Jesus all the kingdoms of this world. But there was a hitch. Jesus had to bow down and worship him. Of course, Jesus refused.

Once again, Jesus saw Satan's attempt to hinder God's plan. But this time Satan was craftier, he was working through Peter by capitalizing on his emotion and enticing him to speak out loud. Jesus' response was not directed at Peter as much as it was to Satan who had instigated him to speak. Peter's mind was on earthly glory and therefore was easily influenced by Satan's suggestions. Let's continue reading the story in Mark chapter 8 verses 34-38:

*34 When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 35 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? 37 "Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 38 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."*

Jesus used the metaphor of the cross and spoke about losing your life for his sake. The cross was a symbol of Rome's power. It was the most cruel and humiliating death that man could imagine. Criminals were required to carry their own cross to the place of execution. After being tied or nailed to its beams, they were lifted up, and would sometimes hang for days until they slowly died. Therefore,

when the cross was about to be placed on the convicted person's shoulders they would often resist with desperate violence.

But Jesus painted a different picture. **He told the disciples that if they wanted to really follow him they must willingly take up the cross and bear it.** He was calling them to a life of humiliation, even death if necessary, for his sake. A more complete picture of self-renunciation could not have been shown to the disciples.

Self-sacrificing love is the foundation of the kingdom of God. In God's plan, life is all about reciprocity. Everything gives and receives. Trees give us oxygen and recycle our carbon dioxide. We give love and receive trust and respect. But Satan challenged God's great order of the universe. He desired to receive and not give. This world is filled with the results of the outworking of this principle, the principle of the supremacy of self. People are mystified at the horrible crimes they read about in the newspaper.

"How could human beings do such cruel things?" they ask.

Crimes are simply the result of selfishness ruling the human heart. God is trying to reveal to all intelligent creatures His own character in contrast to the character of Satan. In the great controversy between Christ and Satan the question has arisen,

"Is there self-sacrifice with God?"

On the cross Jesus would demonstrate self-sacrificing love to every human being. How would he do that? Well he would not die for his own sin because Jesus was sinless. Do you remember Isaiah's prophecy about the Messiah? It said,

*"Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and **He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.**"<sup>64</sup>*

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64 Isaiah 53:12

He who had no sin would bear other people's sins and intercede on their behalf. If that isn't self-sacrificing love, what is? Where do you think he will do that? That is right, on the cross!

"Then is there no reward for the righteous?" some might ask.

Indeed there is. The righteous can look forward to the resurrection and eternal life. Of course we can't fully understand what that eternal kingdom will be like, but we can imagine. Until then we will have to wait patiently. For now, the principles of the kingdom must be established in the hearts of all who will enter there. The disciples did not understand this and resisted it. The cross was before Jesus. He knew it and was headed that way. He did not want his disciples to lose their faith when it happened because it would be an almost indescribable disappointment.

The disciples, if they had known the scriptures, would have understood these things. But they had been blinded by the false teachings of the religious leaders. Let this be a lesson for us. Just because someone is a teacher does not mean they interpret the scriptures correctly. Just because someone has an opinion, whether traditional or modern, does not mean it is right. We must know the sacred writings for ourselves. In the great judgment, everyone will answer for himself or herself. You will not be able make an excuse for breaking God's law by saying,

"Our teachers told us we were not obligated to keep the law."

Every sheep hangs from its own leg!

In the Bible's opening chapters, we see that the price for sin must be paid. It is a foundational truth upon which the whole Bible rests. Before Adam and Eve ever-sinned God warned them of the punishment for disobedience,

"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."<sup>65</sup>

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65 Genesis 2:17

Sin carries the penalty of death. But interestingly, when Adam and Eve sinned and deserved death, there was also a promise of hope. God said that the seed of the woman (Eve) would crush Satan's head. If you look closely in the same verse, it also says that Satan would bruise the heel of the woman's seed.<sup>66</sup> In other words, **the savior's victory would be at the expense of his suffering.**

Abel offered sacrifice to God, as did Abraham and the other patriarchs. The entire system of worship that was given to the Israelites by God was based on sacrifices. These sacrifices made a direct correlation between sin and death. They taught that the penalty of sin is death and it must be paid. But who could pay it and live again? Only someone who was sinless himself and had no debt to pay. This is the only way he could be raised to life again. The scriptures have always pointed to a redeemer, savior, and sacrifice who would conquer death by coming back to life.

On Mt. Moriah God stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son. Abraham had told his son,

*"My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering."<sup>67</sup>*

And God did provide a substitute. A ram was caught in the thicket. When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming he said,

*"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"<sup>68</sup>*

**Yes, Jesus would be the sacrificial lamb. He was the one all those sacrifices pointed to. He was the only sinless person who could fulfill the law's requirements.** Do you remember what the prophet Daniel said about the Messiah? He said,

*"And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself."<sup>69</sup>*

66 Genesis 3:15

67 Genesis 22:18

68 John 1:29

69 Daniel 9:26

Yes, the Bible says that the Messiah would be "cut off".

The same words were used to describe the Messiah in Isaiah chapter 53 verses 8-10:

*8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For **He was cut off from the land of the living**; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. 9 And they made His grave with the wicked -- But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth. 10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make **His soul an offering for sin**, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.*

We read the predictions in the Old Testament that a savior would come, suffer, and die for the sins that we have committed. He would be cut off from the land of the living and they would make his grave with the rich at his death. What could be plainer? The Messiah would offer his life as a sin offering.

Some people would like to doubt the testimony of so many witnesses just as Erol's children wanted to doubt the testimony of the lawyer and the notary. People think that the scriptures were changed. How does someone make changes to the prophet's writings when thousands of copies were in existence in at least three languages that we know of: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek? These copies were spread out from India to Northern Africa and to Ireland. All of which agree 100% that Jesus would die and be raised up. Could someone change their copy of the scriptures and convince all the people who had copies of that scripture to go along with their ideas and change their documents as well? Not to mention that they would have to change the eyewitness accounts of everyone who witnessed Jesus' death. Like the judge in Erol's inheritance case said in regard to his will being changed:

"It is just a story. It isn't believable."

It also isn't believable that all those copies of the scriptures were changed to suit the doctrinal ideas of a few and that they were able to deceive all the people into thinking that theirs were the originals. It just isn't possible. When the children in our story doubted the authenticity of the witnesses, the judge allowed Erol himself to speak. After his testimony there was no doubt. Jesus said very plainly to his disciples,

*"The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day."<sup>70</sup>*

Could he have spoken more clearly? Jesus did not say that he would appear to be killed. He said he would be killed. He said it himself. What need do we have for other witnesses?

Dilara was 17 years old, always on the honor roll at school, and a lover of animals. When it was time for her to go to college, her father Necat wanted to offer a sacrifice to protect his daughter from any potential evil and to secure her success.

Dilara's father brought the animal home and tied it up to a fence in the yard. When Dilara looked at the sheep, her heart melted at the thought of killing it. Throughout her whole life when sacrifices were made she tried to stay a good distance away from the actual killing. But this time she was expected to be there.

The time came and they went to Dilara's uncle's house where there was a pen, drain, and water hose.

"Daddy, why don't we just give it away as a gift instead of killing it?" asked Dilara.

Her father looked at her questioningly.

"Dilara, how can you have a sacrifice without killing the animal? That is the whole purpose of the sacrifice. It is to kill the animal."

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<sup>70</sup> Mark 9:31

Dilara looked at her father with sad eyes. Necat said,

"Is there a marriage without the engagement? Is there a circumcision party without the circumcision?"

Is there salvation without the payment of the sin penalty? Can there be a savior without sacrifice? The whole purpose was for Jesus to come and die. Otherwise it defeats the meaning and foreshadowing of all the sacrifices beforehand. We can know that Jesus died because the Old Testament prophets predicted it. Then Jesus himself said it would happen. Is it important? If Jesus didn't die on that cross then the sin penalty was not paid and every human has to suffer his/her natural fate and pay the penalty for his/her own sin, **death without resurrection**. But there is great news. Jesus didn't just say he would die. He said he would rise from the dead. He would overcome death and the grave, so that when we die there can be a resurrection. What could be better news?

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Why did Erol go to a lawyer to establish a written and legal will? Why didn't he just tell the children what he wanted and leave the matter in their hands?
2. Why did Erol's oldest son deny the validity of the will?
3. Why do you think someone would want to deny the witnesses concerning Jesus' dying on a cross?
4. When Jesus said that those who would save their life would lose it, what do you think he meant?
5. Are you ready to lose your life for Jesus' sake?

## 19

## NOT DOUBTING

*God affirmed Jesus' identity on the mountain and said that we should listen to him.*

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Would it surprise you to learn that the source of some of your greatest fears is doubt? We all want to know that someone loves us, what happens after death, what will happen in the future, and who we really are. It is because we have doubts about these things that we search for answers to life's biggest questions.

In this lesson, we will look more closely at the inner struggle of human doubt and see that God has gone to great lengths to remove all doubt from our minds. He wants us to be clear about who He is, what He loves and hates, how He has helped mankind, and what will happen in the future. God's main purpose in removing doubt is to remove fear, which happens to be the greatest obstacle to love. In previous lessons, we have seen that He removes fear through prophecy, acts of nature, miracles, angels, and even speaking. Before we read the Biblical account, let's look at how our country's founder tried to remove the doubts of a new country's citizens.

In 1923, Mustafa Kemal had the weight of the world on his shoulders. He had just pulled the Turkish people out of the ashes of destruction and placed in their laps a new country and identity. To some, the fight was over and the work was finished. But Atatürk knew it had just begun. To him it was painfully obvious that the bright future of this new Republic, and most importantly its people, could only be secured through sound principles of government in

the areas of peace, diplomacy, education, and equality; all of which he wanted the Turkish people to be sure of. So he toured the country giving speeches, wrote letters, and recorded his personal thoughts in memoirs. His life work was to remove doubt from the Turkish people's minds about their place in the world's history and future. Let's review some of his most famous quotes by starting with a comment about war:

Unless a nation's life faces peril, war is murder.

Ataturk was speaking to farmers in Adana when he made this statement. It was very important because it reflected his belief that war was to be avoided at all costs. A philosophy that kept Turkey out of World War II and can easily be seen in his famous quote about world peace:

Peace at home, peace in the world.

After World War II, the Cold War was just another example of how cold the human heart really was. But a lot has changed in the last 20 years. We now live at a time when all countries depend upon each other. A byproduct of this symbiosis is the renewed hope for world peace. Our world has literally become a "global village". We eat food, wear clothes, and use equipment produced all over the world. We can watch live programs from around the world with a single push of a button. We can take a trip on the "information highway" and use a computer made of resources from several different countries to read about a university student's life in Venezuela. We literally depend on one another. Ataturk left no doubt that if Turkey worked to solve inner problems through peaceful, democratic means it would be able to help other countries do the same. Ataturk said,

Mankind is a single body and each nation a part of that body. We must never say "What does it matter to me if some part of the world is ailing?" If there is such an illness, we must concern ourselves with it as though we were having that illness.

In Ataturk's mind, the nations of the earth had a responsibility to work together and Turkey would not be excluded. For this reason, Turkey was a founding member of the United Nations and has been in NATO since 1952. Yes, Ataturk left no doubt that Turkey would be a part of the global family; a family concerned about both sexes, male and female.

Human kind is made up of two sexes, women and men. Is it possible that a mass is improved by the improvement of only one part and the other part is ignored? Is it possible that half of a mass can be tied to earth with chains while the other half is soaring into the skies?<sup>71</sup>

There is no doubt that Ataturk believed in gender equality. A person should have a right to education, employment, and personal choice regardless of sex. This was a principle that he would not compromise on. A principle that can best be seen in all of our educational, government, and business institutions.

Perhaps you have never thought about it in this way, but simple observation and research shows that Ataturk wanted to help eliminate doubt in Turkish people's minds. His many quotes about the greatness of Turkey's history and people left no doubt about their importance in world events. His ideas about war, peace, and global unity left no doubts as to Turkey's responsibility as a nation of many. Finally, his ideas and reforms to bring about gender equality left no doubt that Turkey had become a modern nation through the contributions of both its male and female citizens. If you have ever had any doubts about our place and value in the world, remember that it was Ataturk's goal to eradicate those doubts and build up our self-esteem as a people.

Now, let's turn to the Bible and see how God removed doubt from the minds of three men.

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71 [http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Mustafa\\_Kemal\\_Ataturk](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Mustafa_Kemal_Ataturk)

Ever since Jesus had first preached in the temple at 12 years of age, people had been wondering who he was. It wasn't until his baptism in the Jordan River that many people began to think that he was the Messiah. But in spite of the many miracles he performed, the authority with which he taught, and the fulfillment of multiple prophecies the doubts still remained!

“Could anything good come out of Nazareth?” they reasoned.

“He is a carpenter the son of Mary and Joseph. He didn't even go to the rabbinical schools!”

“Some people say God spoke on the day he was baptized in the Jordan River. But I only heard thunder.”

One might reason that these doubts were legitimate. After all, Jesus had been making some outstanding claims that he was the Messiah/the Son of Man/the Son of God. But Jesus wasn't saying these things to draw attention to himself. Just as we saw in an earlier lesson, he was only doing what God had told him to do. He was simply repeating what God had already said.

It was in this context that Jesus handpicked three of his disciples to witness one of the most glorious moments in Bible history. Let's start in Matthew chapter 17 verse 1:

*1 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.*

Just six days earlier, Jesus had given the disciples the most solemn news. In the clearest words, he told them that he would go to Jerusalem, suffer, and be killed. The disciples were so shocked that they didn't know how to react. They had never opposed Jesus or disbelieved what he had said. But Peter couldn't stand to think that his teacher, master, and mentor would die, much less be murdered. So he spoke up,

“This can never happen to you!”

Jesus' stern reply sent shivers down Peter's spine. The man who Jesus had just recently praised was now being rebuked.

"Get behind me Satan! You are an offense to me."<sup>72</sup>

Although Jesus' answer seems harsh, we need to remember that his remark wasn't aimed at Peter. Rather it was aimed at the one who had inspired Peter's words. Jesus was already familiar with Satan's tactics from his time in the desert and he knew Peter was being used by the devil. In spite of Peter being one of his best friends, he wasn't about to succumb to any influence that would cause him to quit or turn back from what God had sent him to do.

As they climbed that mountain, Peter, James, and John thought about the words that Jesus had just spoken to them. They couldn't understand how a man like Jesus, a prophet who worked miracles, could die in such a way. It just didn't make sense. In their confusion, their minds were filled with doubt and they just continued walking without saying a word.

But Jesus didn't intend to leave the disciples in doubt. He wanted them to have a greater understanding of who he was and what he needed to do. He knew that the months ahead would become more dangerous and that the disciples' faith would need to be strengthened. So Jesus prayed that God would open their eyes and reveal to them in a greater way that what he was saying was true. Let's read what happened next in verse 2:

*2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.*

As the disciples looked at Jesus he began to shine like the sun and his road-worn clothes became as white as snow. Just as Jesus had said in Matthew 16 verse 28,

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72 Matthew 16:23

*28 Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.*

Peter, James, and John saw Jesus in all his glory. For a brief moment, the garb of humanity was lifted and Jesus the Messiah, the Son of man, was seen for who he really was! What was he? **The Son of God who came down from heaven.** But that wasn't all they saw. Let's continue with verses 3 and 4:

*3 And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 4 And Peter said to Jesus, Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.*

Moses and Elijah were two of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament. Moses had spoken with God on Mt. Sinai and received the 10 commandments. Elijah witnessed God's power on Mt. Carmel, fought against the idolatry of Israel's kings, and went to heaven without dying. These two men, who had powerful encounters with God on mountaintops, were now standing on another mountaintop as witnesses. Their appearance with Jesus was miraculous and significant because it showed the continuity in God's plan. In essence, God was saying to the disciples,

“You are witnessing something that I have revealed on several occasions through the prophets. The “prophet from among you”<sup>73</sup> has come, the seed who “will crush the head of the serpent”<sup>74</sup> has appeared. The “wonderful counselor” and “prince of peace”<sup>75</sup> is among you.”

The disciples were astonished at what they were seeing. The Bible account leaves no doubt that it was real. So real, that Peter wanted to set up tents for all three men to stay there. Just imagine the questions they could have asked! But God wasn't finished. He wanted to remove

<sup>73</sup> Deut. 18:15, 18

<sup>74</sup> Genesis 3:15

<sup>75</sup> Isaiah 9:6

all their doubts. He wanted to reassure them that what Jesus had said was true. Let's see what happened in Matthew chapter 17 verses 5-6:

*5 He (Peter) was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him. 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified.*

As if the whole event wasn't mysterious enough, Jesus and the disciples were enveloped with a bright cloud. The area would have been just like the Most Holy Place when the High Priest entered into God's presence on the Day of Atonement. Then a loud, clear voice spoke,

*"This is my beloved Son with whom I well pleased; listen to him."*

The disciples obviously knew they were in the presence of God. They didn't even have time to think. Before God had finished speaking one word, the sound of His voice had driven them to their knees. Do you think you would have reacted differently?

When God said, "listen to him", He was endorsing all that Jesus had said and would say. In essence, God was saying,

**"Don't have any doubts about what Jesus says. His words are truth and directly from me! If it were not so, I wouldn't have allowed it. I am pleased with who he is and what he says. You should be too!"**

As soon as God was done speaking, the scene returned to normal. But the disciples didn't notice because they were still on the ground with their heads between their arms, shaking in fear. Let's continue reading in Matthew chapter 17 verses 7 and 8:

*7 But Jesus came and touched them, saying, Rise, and have no fear. 8 And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.*

Whatever doubts the disciples had going up the mountain were now gone. They knew who Jesus was and with whose authority he spoke. But there was one more surprise. Let's finish with verses 9-13:

*9 And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead. 10 And the disciples asked him, Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come? 11 He answered, Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. 12 But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands. 13 Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.*

Jesus didn't want them to tell anyone what they had witnessed. It was a secret that would remain between them. They most certainly didn't understand how, why, or when all these things would take place. But after hearing God speak, they knew not to doubt!

On December 26, 1944 a Japanese intelligence officer named Hiroo Onoda was sent to the Philippine island of Lubang. He was ordered to do all that he could to hamper enemy attacks on the island, including destroying the airstrip and the pier at the harbor. His orders also stated that under no circumstances was he to surrender or take his own life.

Shortly after arriving, on February 28, 1945, Allied forces overtook the island. Everyone except Onoda and three other soldiers had either died or surrendered. Onoda, wanting to follow his orders unto death, ordered the other men to hide in the mountains.

On three different occasions, leaflets were dropped from the sky or left behind so that Onoda and his men would surrender. They read the first leaflet in October 1945:

"The war ended on August 15. Come down from the mountains!"

But Onada and his men didn't believe the leaflet and thought it was just Allied propaganda.

The second leaflet was dropped at the end of 1945. They had been hiding for over one year at this time. Although General Tomoyuki Yamashita of the Fourteenth Area Army wrote the leaflet and ordered Onada and his men to surrender, Onada, after thoroughly examining it, decided that it too was a hoax.

Seven years later, Onada found letters and family pictures scattered throughout the forest. Apparently they had been dropped from the sky, urging him to surrender and come home. But Onada still had his doubts. He was told to never surrender and all of these leaflets had to be fake. So he decided to stay. By 1972, Onada was the only soldier left out of the original four.

Two years later, a Japanese man named Norio Suzuki made contact with Onada. In spite of becoming friends and Suzuki's request for him to go home, Onada refused to leave the island unless a superior officer personally ordered him to do so.

Suzuki returned to Japan with photographs of himself and Onada as proof of their encounter. After hearing his story, the Japanese government located Onoda's commanding officer, Major Taniguchi, who had become a bookseller. On March 9, 1974, he flew to Lubang, met with Onoda, and fulfilled the promise made in 1944:

"Whatever happens, we'll come back for you."

His orders were as follows:

- In accordance with the Imperial command, the Fourteenth Area Army has ceased all combat activity.
- In accordance with military Headquarters Command No. A-2003, the Special Squadron of Staff's Headquarters is relieved of all military duties.

- Units and individuals under the command of Special Squadron are to cease military activities and operations immediately and place themselves under the command of the nearest superior officer. When no officer can be found, they are to communicate with the American or Philippine forces and follow their directives.

Thus, Onoda was relieved from duty without ever surrendering. He turned over his sword, Arisaka Type 99 rifle still in operating condition, 500 rounds of ammunition, and several hand grenades, as well as the dagger his mother gave him in 1944 for protection.<sup>76</sup>

For almost 30 years, he hid in the mountains because he doubted that the war was over. He had read all the leaflets, seen the Allied forces, and heard all the rumors. And yet his doubt remained. It wasn't until he received the order from his commander that he finally believed that the war had ended.

You reader have also received a command. Just as God told the disciples to listen to Jesus, He is telling you to also listen. But you have a choice. Will you continue to doubt even though all the signs, witnesses, and holy writings proclaim the truth of Jesus' identity? Or will you obey God's command to step out of the jungle of confusion, to listen to Jesus and obey his words, and to follow him all the days of your life? Don't let doubt control you. **Take control of your fate and be changed!**

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76 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hiroo\\_Onoda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hiroo_Onoda)

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. What are your biggest fears? Does doubt play a role in any of those fears?
2. How can you encourage someone who has doubts about the truth of the Bible?
3. Do you have any doubts about who Jesus is?
4. Do you have to understand every detail to believe something?
5. What is the role of faith in moments of doubt?



