

THE FATE CHANGER

OVERCOMING DEATH

V



5th BOOK

OVERCOMING DEATH



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Kaderi Deęiřtiren 5

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İstiridye Medya
Erzene Mahallesi 51 Sokak No: 14/A
Bornova – İZMİR
www.istiridyemedya.com
istiridyemedya@gmail.com

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!

Index

1. Being Sure You Are Forgiven	7
2. We All Need a Good Shepherd!	19
3. Love Your Neighbor	28
4. Making Peace with the Father	38
5. Death was Overcome!	51
6. Preparing for the End of the World	62
7. The Importance of Humility	77
8. There is no Other Way!	89
9. Finding Peace Amidst Agony	99
10. Fate or Choice?	113
11. The Fate Changer Suffered for You!	127
12. He Overcame Death!	142
13. So That Your Eyes Might be Opened	161
14. Will Your Fate be Changed?	178

1 BEING SURE YOU ARE FORGIVEN

How can a person be free from shame?

How can a person purge the stain of shame that comes from immorality and adultery? There are over 4000 “honor” killings each year in Turkey. A family counsels together and believes that the only way to remove the family shame is to remove the family member by killing him/her. Does a brother stabbing his sister in the chest 40 times for her assumed sin, purge the family of the stain the sister is thought to have brought upon it through immorality?¹ Could the boy with blood on his hands honestly say,

“Now, I feel free”?

Wouldn't the family feel even more shame because they have a murderer living among them? There is no doubt that adultery and having sex before marriage brings shame upon the individual and the family. So how can a person or family, short of murder, be free of that kind of shame? You may be surprised in this lesson, when you hear Jesus' answer to the difficult questions relating to shame and guilt.

In 2010, newspapers across the country reported the horrific events of a girl who had been killed for shaming her family. The story follows:

¹ Such was the crime-committed in February 2011 in Mersin.

“Police have recovered the body of a 16-year-old girl who they say was buried alive by relatives in an "honor" killing carried out as a punishment for talking to boys.

The girl, who has been identified only by the initials MM, was found in a sitting position with her hands tied, in a two-meter hole dug under a chicken pen outside her home in Kahta, in the southeastern province of Adiyaman.

Police made the discovery in December after a tip-off from an informant.

The girl had previously been reported missing.

The informant told the police that she had been killed following a family "council" meeting.

Her father and grandfather are said to have been arrested and held in custody pending trial. It is unclear whether they have been charged. The girl's mother was arrested but was later released.

Media reports said the father had told relatives he was unhappy that his daughter, one of nine children, had male friends. The grandfather is said to have beaten her for the same offense.

A postmortem examination revealed large amounts of soil in her lungs and stomach, indicating that she had been alive and conscious while being buried.”

Sin brings shame, no matter how great or small it may seem. The family was ashamed of the daughter. Now the people of Turkey are ashamed of that family’s brutality and the image they portrayed for all Turkish people in the international press. Did the family’s actions really remove their shame?

Sin ruins communities and individuals whether it is stealing, lying, disobeying your parents, murder, coveting, or adultery. Sexual sins like rape, incest, and adultery shatter the trust of whole communities and destroy the reputation of both the victims and offenders. People

often think they will escape the consequences of immorality. They think that they will only taste its sweetness and avoid its poison. But the person often multiplies their problems by trying to cover their shame with lies, abortions, divorces, or suicide. Eventually the immoral person finds their whole personality and character deformed. Some become hardened to sin, which leads to alcoholism and other vices. Others remain emotionally fragile and immature.

This lesson is important for those of us who secretly carry a burden of guilt and shame. Many have learned to cope with the knowledge that they have sinned, but they have never felt freedom from the wrong they or others do. Jesus told us that there is an answer for dealing with the shame of sin. Let's find that answer by looking at an event in Jesus' life as recorded in John chapter 8 verses 1-4:

1 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 And early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him. And He sat down and taught them. 3 And the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman taken in adultery and when they had set her in the midst, 4 They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.

God said in his Ten Commandments,

"Do not commit adultery."

Is there any wonder why He said this? Adultery has probably ruined more lives than any other. It is a seductive road that leads to divorce, murder, and suicide. But before arriving at those dark destinations, the adulterer has to pass through the towns of guilt, shame and disillusionment. After being caught in adultery, we can be sure that the woman brought to Jesus was feeling guilty, ashamed, and disillusioned. She was a prisoner of adultery's bitterness.

Let's see what the Pharisees said in verse 5 and the first part of verse 6:

5 "Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned. You, then, what do you say?" 6 They said this, tempting

Him so that they might have reason to accuse Him...

Imagine the scene. A crowd is gathered around Jesus in the temple listening to him teach. From the outer edges of the crowd the sounds of commotion and chaos interrupt the holy words dropping from Jesus' lips like the dew from rose petals. A gang of dark willed men push their way through the crowd, seeking the immediate punishment of a woman who broke God's law and brought a stain upon the community. The temple, ordinarily quiet and reverent, is suddenly in confusion. A woman, possibly half dressed, is being dragged along by a group of angry, arrogant religious leaders who Jesus knew were using the woman as a pawn to destroy him. There is no doubt that the woman knew she was guilty and would be stoned according to the law of Moses. But where was the man? Was he not guilty too? Doesn't it take two people to commit adultery? Even though there is no mention of him, he too should have been punished. But, as is often the case, the blame was cast upon the woman. Even in our day men entice women but then cast the blame on them for the misdeed. **This is hypocrisy.**

It seems the woman was doubly used. The probable plot is that the Pharisees had prior knowledge of the bed where she would be found. Perhaps one of them had visited her that night. Their intent was to simply use her in a larger scheme. They wanted to see how Jesus would react. They were hoping that in his compassion he would unwittingly break a law and bring upon himself condemnation.

How could they possibly trap Jesus by bringing an adulterous woman to him? Did you notice they asked their question with "reason to accuse him"?

The Pharisees thought they had created a certain trap for Jesus. You see, the penalty for adultery was stoning. So if Jesus would say,

"Don't stone her."

The Pharisees would find Jesus guilty of setting himself up higher than the laws of Moses and the Jews. On the other hand, if Jesus

had given the order to stone her, he would have broken Roman laws, which the Jews were subject to. Either way, Jesus would end up the loser; just the situation the Pharisees wanted to put Jesus in.

But Jesus saw through their trap and broke their devious hopes in a most surprising way. Let's continue the story in John chapter 8 verses 6-9:

6 ...But bending down, Jesus wrote on the ground with His finger, not appearing to hear. 7 But as they continued to ask Him, He lifted Himself up and said to them, He who is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at her. 8 And again bending down, He wrote on the ground. 9 And hearing, and being convicted by conscience, they went out one by one, beginning at the oldest, until the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

What was Jesus writing in the sand that had such power? He said nothing, and yet these men fled! What did they see there in the sand? Jesus was obviously writing something that made these men terribly nervous. Most likely he was writing dates, names, and places where these men had committed sins. He was showing them that he knew who they really were in their private lives, a gang of hypocrites just as guilty as this woman!

There was a truth hidden in Jesus' words,

"He who is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at her."

The truth is that there was only one person there who was without sin and thus able to judge the woman. Jesus! He was the only one who could have righteously brought judgment upon her, for he alone was sinless. As for the other men, well they were full of sin and had no right to judge the woman.

The religious leaders had brought the woman and were ready and willing to condemn her for breaking the seventh commandment, but

now they squirmed with fear when their own sins were exposed! They were willing to stand in the public square to condemn someone else, but when their own dark deeds were brought to light, they fled. **Jesus was that light.**

People like to hide their own sin by pointing a finger at someone else's. Have you ever seen this in the café or among your own friends? Two people love to gossip and talk about another person's wicked deeds. But when the conversation switches to their own infractions, ohoh boy do their faces turn red!

Let's continue imagining the scene after the crowd leaves. The woman who so recently had brought shame to herself and her community is crying. Except for the sounds of sobbing, she is silent and shivering, perhaps only wrapped in a sheet? She is dirty from being thrown to the ground, and her head is hanging in shame. She is waiting for the first stone to strike her. The voices of the angry men echo over and over in her mind. She is guilty. She feels the shame. She wishes this were all a bad dream; that she would wake up and it would be all over. The men are gone and the only ones left are Jesus, the woman, and a small crowd watching to see what will happen next. Let's see what Jesus does next in John chapter 8 verses 10-12:

*10 And bending back up, and seeing no one but the woman, Jesus said to her, Woman, where are the ones who accused you? Did not one give judgment against you? 11 And she said, No one, Lord. And Jesus said to her, Neither do I give judgment. Go, and sin no more. 12 Then Jesus spoke again to them, saying, **I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.***

What had Jesus done with her shame? In a very real sense he had forgiven her. He had given her a second life with a very clear mandate.

“Go and sin no more.”

Notice in this phrase Jesus clearly described that what the woman had been doing was “sin.” No question. It is from the penalty of this sin that Jesus rescued and ransomed her from shame to walk in a new life.

Moreover, he had put her accusers in their proper place. He, in his perfection, had simply exposed their deeds. In the face of perfection, they were judged by their own consciences. The darkness of their sins was illuminated in the light of Jesus’ Christ’s glory. Thus Jesus concludes with these powerful words,

“I am the Light of the world.”

Two questions arise from this story. First, why did Jesus say,

“Neither do I judge you”?

Second, can Jesus really forgive sin? Let’s consider both.

Jesus makes some astounding claims about how we will be judged in the last days. First we hear Jesus commenting on this subject in John chapter 5 verses 22 and 26-30:

22 For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son. 6 For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; 27 And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. 28 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, 29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. 30 I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father, which hath sent me.

So in the last days, Jesus is the Judge because God has given him the authority to judge.² In that light, when the woman heard the

² Fate Changer Book 4 lessons 10 and 11

words, "Neither do I judge you," it was as if she had received pardon from God. She had truly received something of remarkable value!

The second question we raised is, "Can Jesus forgive sin?" To answer that question we can simply read Jesus' own words. They come as the exclamation point on a very interesting story found in Mark chapter 2 verses 1-5:

1 And when he entered again into Capernaum after some days, it was noised that he was in the house. 2 And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room for them, no, not even about the door: and he spake the word unto them. 3 And they come, bringing unto him a man sick of the palsy, borne of four. 4 And when they could not come nigh unto him for the crowd, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed whereon the sick of the palsy lay. 5 And Jesus seeing their faith saith unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins are forgiven.

Jesus had already healed people. In fact, that was why they brought the man to him in the first place. And yet instead of healing him, Jesus said,

"Your sins are forgiven."

Strange isn't it? Why didn't Jesus just heal him? Why did he address the man's sin problem? Jesus' response has led many to ponder what caused the man's paralysis. Some think that his paralysis was the result of leading a sinful life. We don't know what the man did, but he could have had a shameful, sexually transmitted disease called Syphilis, which attacks the spinal cord and can paralyze. Regardless of what caused the man to be paralyzed, Jesus took care of his greatest need first. He needed to be forgiven to relieve the terrible guilt of committing sin.

But the religious leaders, who always watched him with a critical eye, began to talk. We can read about their conversation in Mark chapter 2 verses 6-12:

6 Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 7 "Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" 8 And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'?" 10 But that you may know that **the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins**"--he said to the paralytic-- 11 "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." 12 And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

Jesus' proved his ability to forgive sin, not with words only but with power! Do you need forgiveness for anything? Would you like to have your shame removed? Forgiveness when it is real, and comes from a true source, has healing power. In fact the forgiveness of Jesus has power to alter your fate as it did for the crippled man and the adulterer.

While his mother and father were at work, Mahir, a 7-year-old boy, stayed with his grandmother after school. The grandmother lived on the sixth floor of an apartment in Hatay. A large photo of her husband looking young and handsome in his military uniform hung in the living room. Sadly he had been killed in an auto accident nearly twenty years before.

The boy loved being with his grandmother for several reasons. The greatest being the tremendous love that he received from her. Of course, she was a great cook, so he never went hungry; and the house was spotless, orderly, and quiet. It was the kind of place that every child wants to be in and Mahir loved to be at his grandmother's.

Sometimes they would sit on the balcony while she would work rolling yufka, or shelling pistachios or other jobs. She would tell

Mahir interesting stories of her memories as a young girl in the village.

One day while his grandmother was ironing some clothes in the bedroom, she called Mahir in and said,

"Mahir, I want to share a secret with you. Look here in the closet."

She pulled a large bag with a hanger from the closet. She unzipped the bag. Mahir's eyes were sparkling with curiosity. The grandmother said,

"This is your Grandfather's military uniform."

Mahir was so impressed to see the emblems on the uniform. He touched it gently. Behind the suit was an ordinary shirt. Mahir asked,

"What is this shirt Grandma?"

She smiled and said, "That is the secret I will share with you."

Then taking it up close to her face, she smelled the shirt. Tears began to trickle down her face.

"This is a shirt your Grandpa wore before he died. Now come close, and smell your Grandpa."

Mahir leaned forward and smelled the shirt.

The Grandma smiled and laughed, "Not too much my boy, leave some scent for another day."

Then she put it away and said, "When I feel lonely or afraid, I sometimes come in and secretly smell that shirt."

Grandma continued her ironing, and Mahir went out to play with some toys. What Grandma hadn't told her grandson was the rest of the secret. She was in deep thought as she ironed. For her, that shirt was not only the smell of her husband it was the smell of forgiveness.

At age 18, Grandma was quite a rebel. She thought she knew everything and resisted her parents' advice to choose her friends wisely. She had followed a road of dangerous flirtation that led to her sleeping with a boy she had become interested in. Unfortunately, she became pregnant, and the boy refused to take ownership. Her parents made life miserable for her. One high school classmate however looked at things differently. It was a young man who had liked her before her "rebellious days."

He came to her one day and said some words she would never forget.

"Let us become a family."

The grandmother shamefully replied, "I am just a whore, you don't want me."

But the young man said, "I forgive you. I love you, and I will always love you. Be mine, and I will be yours forever."

The grandmother rehearsed the words again to herself, as she was now an old woman ironing shirts. Yes, the shirt in the closet was more than the smell of Grandpa; it was the scent of forgiveness and a new life.

Forgiveness is a rare and wonderful gift. Sins cannot be "undone." However, they can be forgiven. Forgiveness, for the one receiving it, is like receiving a second life. **The only honorable way to eliminate shame is to forgive, accept forgiveness, and believe in the power of forgiveness.** Jesus said,

"I have been given authority to forgive sins."

Perhaps that is why he called himself, "the light of the world." Shame thrives in darkness, but where there is light there is joy.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever been so angry for a “just cause” that you felt you could kill someone? How did you handle those feelings? Did you ever forgive that person or does the anger still burn within you?
2. Sin is defined as breaking God’s Ten Commandments. Have you ever done anything that breaks God’s 10 commandments?
3. Why do people justify their own evil deeds and condemn others for theirs?
4. Jesus said, “I have been given authority to judge and forgive sins.” What sins do you privately need to confess? Who should you confess them to? Will you confess your sins and be forgiven?

2 WE ALL NEED A GOOD SHEPHERD!

Who are you following? It matters.

How often do you think about sheep and shepherds? Outside of Kurban Bayramı, probably not often! But there is a lot you can learn from them. Have you ever watched a shepherd with his sheep or goats? Have you ever wondered what it would be like to sit for hours on guard as the animals grazed in the fields? For most of us it would be quite boring. But shepherds have something that many of us don't, lots of time to think. They also have a lot of responsibility. If they leave their animals unattended, a wolf or dog might kill or attack the sheep. If they don't pay attention, some might get lost, stolen, or poisoned from plants they shouldn't eat. They also need to make sure that the animals don't eat too much which also causes complications. If the shepherd slacks off in any of these areas he will lose more than the animals; he will lose his income.

Shepherds are also trustworthy. Did you know that sheep are some of the most vulnerable animals on the planet? They have no way to protect themselves and are easily frightened. Therefore, they depend on the shepherd to take care of them. From the moment they are born, they form an attachment to the shepherd and remain loyal only to him. Let's explore this fact in the following illustration.

Atıl loves to go walking with his father in the mountains. Every Sunday afternoon, they pack a lunch, get into the car, and drive out of the city. Although they have several villages to choose from, Atıl

always wants to go to the same one. He likes it because there is a large cave on the side of the mountain behind the village.

Like most kids, Atıl likes to look inside the large cave and touch its strange shaped rocks. But even more fascinating to him are the sheep in the village. For years, a villager has been using this cave as a shelter for his sheep. Every time they go to the village, he hopes that the sheep will be in their pen because he wants to touch them. But on this particular day, they are once again grazing on the mountainside.

After parking the car, Atıl and his father started walking up the valley behind the village. It was a beautiful spring day. The smell of wildflowers and the sound of rushing water filled the air. There were butterflies, birds, and squirrels. As they came around a bend in the trail, Atıl saw the sheep.

“Well what do you think Atıl? Do you feel lucky today?” his father asked.

“I hope so,” he replied

Atıl slowly walked ahead of his father and got closer to the sheep. He tried not to move too quickly so he wouldn't startle them. But the sheep had known for a while that he was coming. They heard his unfamiliar footsteps and smelled his fresh washed clothes. Before he could get any closer they began to move away. Atıl knew that if he rushed towards them, they would flee. So he decided to talk softly to them,

“Stay calm. I won't hurt you. I am your friend,” he whispered.

But they kept moving away from him. In a last chance effort to catch a sheep, Atıl started to run towards them. But his efforts were fruitless. The sheep fled in an instant.

“Uh, why do they always run away? Why can't I ever pet one?” he complained. “They don't even give me a chance!”

Atil's father just laughed, "Because they don't know you son. Sheep are like that. They are afraid of everything but their owner."

"But I walk slow, I talk calmly, and they see me every time I come here."

"You are right. But they don't know your voice. You don't do anything for them. You don't feed or protect them. They probably think you will hurt them," his dad replied. "Don't give up. There is always next time. Let's see if we can get to the top of the mountain before lunch," he chuckled.

We can learn several important lessons from this story about both the sheep and shepherds. Just like modern day Turkey, sheep and shepherds were common sights in ancient Israel. They served as excellent metaphors for the behavior of humans and their relationship with God. In fact, some of the Bible's greatest men were shepherds: Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and King David were a few.

Jesus, the greatest storyteller of all time, saw a vivid analogy between the vulnerability of sheep and the human condition. Pay close attention as you read Jesus' words. We can start by reading John chapter 10 verses 1-6:

1 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. 6 This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

In his introduction, Jesus mentions four different characters: the sheep, thief, shepherd, and gatekeeper. It is easy to picture what he

is literally saying, but his real point is concealed. If we look at this illustration literally, it summarizes the story we just read. In short, sheep follow the shepherd because they know him. But Jesus, as always, is talking about something deeper. Instead of trying to understand it with our own thoughts, let's see how Jesus unlocked its meaning. We can continue reading in John chapter 10 verses 7-12:

*7 So Jesus again said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, **I am the door** of the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 **I am the door**. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. 11 **I am the good shepherd**. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

Now he is speaking clearly! Jesus said, "*I am the door.*"

But who are the thieves and robbers? Who are the sheep? To really understand what Jesus is saying here, we need to look at what happened in the previous chapter of John. In chapter 9, we can read the story about Jesus healing a blind man. The man was well known because he was a beggar and had been blind since birth. Similar to other times, Jesus performed this miracle on a Sabbath Day.

As we have seen in other lessons, the Sabbath Day was very important for the Jewish people. It reminded them that God was the creator, provided them with a day of rest every week, gave them the opportunity to spend the day with family, and most importantly to contemplate spiritual things. But in Jesus' day, the Pharisees had taken the joy out of the Sabbath Day and replaced it with hundreds of man-made rules. People weren't allowed to walk great distances, carry a mat to sit on, or spit in the dirt because these things were considered work. Of course, plowing and watering your fields is work. But spitting on the ground? We would be hard pressed to call that work!

Although the Pharisees may have thought they were protecting the holiness of the Sabbath Day, their actions showed that they were more concerned with controlling the people. So when they heard that Jesus had healed a blind man on the Sabbath they were enraged. Not only was he working, he was defying their rules.

It is absurd to think that the religious leaders of Jesus' day would be angry because he healed a blind man on the Sabbath. He had just performed a miracle that had never been done in the history of the world. He had literally reversed the "fate" of a man. But they were unable to see the glory of the miracle because they were blinded by jealousy. They were worried that people would listen to Jesus more than them. In short, they were worried that Jesus was undermining their power and positions. It is in this context that we can better understand what Jesus is saying.

In verses 7-12, Jesus said he is both the door of the sheep pen and the good shepherd. The thieves are those who try to influence, take, or lead the sheep without going through the door (i.e., Jesus). In his day, the thieves were the Pharisees and Sadducees who refused to recognize Jesus' miracles, message, and identity. In another place, Jesus said the thief was Satan himself. Who are the sheep? The sheep were God's people.

Did you notice the three functions of the shepherd/door? First, **the door provides a way to salvation.** Second, the shepherd watches over the sheep and **provides them with an abundant life.** The third function shows us how he does that, **he gives his life for the sheep!** It is apparent from our earlier studies that Jesus really wants the people to understand what he is saying. By repetitively saying the same things, he is stressing the importance and validity of their truths. Jesus is the good shepherd and door. **We must go through him if we want to be safe and saved.** Let's read verses 12 and 13:

12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and

flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

It is so amazing how Jesus could use the simplest things in life to teach others. In verse 12, he introduces the hired worker as the fifth character in the story. Unlike the shepherd, the hired worker is more concerned with his own life than with the sheep's. If trouble arises, he is quick to flee. Jesus is saying,

“I am not a hired worker, I will not flee from trouble. I will protect my sheep. I will give my life for them so that they can have an abundant life.”

Just in case the people didn't hear him, Jesus makes the claim again and clarifies whom the sheep are. Let's continue in John chapter 10 verses 14-16:

14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

Jesus is the good shepherd! Notice that Jesus didn't say,

“I am one of many good shepherds.”

He said that he was “The Good Shepherd.” But he said something else that is very important for us. Jesus said that he had “sheep not of this fold.” In other words, he is also the shepherd of those who aren't Jewish.

Sometimes we are led to believe that religions and cultures go hand in hand. If you don't follow the religion of those around you, you aren't Chinese, Indian, Egyptian, Turkish, or Iraqi anymore. In their eyes, you are an outcast or traitor. But Jesus is saying that there is only one flock and one shepherd of that flock. Who is the shepherd? In Jesus' own words, he is! In his own words, he says that if anyone

tries to lead people spiritually without him, they are a thief and liar. How do you think the Pharisees responded? You can be sure they weren't happy! Jesus continued speaking in verses 17 and 18:

*17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 **No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.** I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.*

Jesus closed his short sermon with a powerful statement. Although Jesus was speaking metaphorically in verses 7-16, he lays aside the metaphors and speaks directly in verse 17. In previous lessons, Jesus said that he would suffer and be killed. But in verse 17 he makes it clear that he will not be killed unwillingly. Have you ever heard of someone giving permission for his or her own murder? Well that is essentially what Jesus is saying here. Remember, he isn't a hired worker. He is the good shepherd. Just like a shepherd would give their life to protect the sheep, he is willing to give his own life that we might live.

Some people say that prophets can't be mistreated, harmed, or killed. In their opinion, God wouldn't let anything bad happen to one of his prophets. But in the Old Testament, we see the opposite. It was actually very rare for a prophet to live a secure life of luxury. Daniel was thrown into a lion's den. Joseph was thrown into a pit. Also, John the Baptist was imprisoned and beheaded. The messages that they proclaimed were not words that many leaders and people wanted to hear. In that sense, Jesus' experience was similar to other prophets. But he also showed how he is different than the other prophets. His claims were bold and shocking.

No other prophet claimed to be the Son of God, the Bread of Life, the Word of God, or the Good Shepherd, which were all endorsed by God when He allowed Jesus' miracles to take place. It was these kinds of statements that perplexed and angered the Pharisees, Sadducees, and devout Jews. They had read the prophecies and been

waiting hundreds of years for the Messiah to come. But this wasn't the kind of Messiah they expected. Let's finish by reading John chapter 10 verses 19-21:

19 There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. 20 Many of them said, He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him? 21 Others said, These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?

A father was very concerned about his son's recent activities. He started hanging out with a new group of friends, went out late at night, and sometimes didn't come home until the next day. He seemed more interested in "having fun" than school, and his grades were starting to decline. One day he talked to his son,

"Son, what is happening? You don't hang out with your old friends, your grades are dropping, and you always look tired. Are you okay? Do you need to see a doctor?"

"Everything is fine dad. I don't need to see a doctor," the son replied.

"I am worried son. I don't think your new "friends" are really friends. They never come over and I don't even know them. What do you when you go out?"

"We just walk around, watch movies, and fool around on the computer."

"Son, in life you will meet people who aren't what they seem. They may appear nice, loyal, and honest. But in reality they are something else. They are only concerned about themselves. When there is trouble they will turn on you in an instant and leave you alone. You can't trust them. I think these new friends are like that. They don't seem to be influencing you in a positive way. I think they are wolves in sheep's clothing. Be careful!"

Jesus wasn't a thief masquerading as a shepherd. He wasn't a wolf dressed in sheep's clothing. His life, works, and words testify that he was who he said he was. He is the Good Shepherd who is willing to give his life that we may have life more abundantly. The voice that you have been listening to up until now is his voice. You hear it, recognize it, and have been following it. Don't worry about what other people may think or say. Keep following the Good Shepherd!

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. When Jesus says he is the Good Shepherd, what does it mean to you?
2. Why do you think Jesus keeps referring to his death?
3. Those who follow Jesus are called disciples of Christ. In your opinion, is it okay for a Turk to be a follower of Jesus? Why or why not? Be sure to answer according to the Bible.
4. Did you know that some of the earlier Turkic tribes became followers of Jesus and some are still shamanistic? What implications does that have for us?

3 LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR!

Are the Three Liars: pride, selfishness, and prejudice blocking the flow of love in your life in any way?

Someone once said,

"People were created to be loved. Things were created to be used. The reason the world is in chaos is because things are being loved and people are being used."

Imagine how different the world would be if love for others was its foundational principle! The selfish human heart misses the real point of life while in pursuit of house, car, fashion, and fortune. Whereas the self-sacrificing heart not only revels in its glory, but is also filled with the love that only spouse, child, and family can produce. And yet, as hard as it may be to imagine, there is a special kind of love that transcends even the love of family. It is the altruistic love for a stranger, a love that overcomes prejudice and crosses boundaries of education, race, religion, and culture.

Can you imagine a day when there is no prejudice? Can you imagine a day when instead of using missiles to solve problems nations use love? It's hard to imagine! Think of all the labels that divide and create prejudice and have lead to war. Arab, Jew, Gypsy, Kurd, and American are just a few labels that some would use as an excuse to not love others. Perhaps one of Jesus' most remarkable statements is found in Matthew chapter 5 verses 43-45:

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. 44 But I say to you, **Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you** 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his rain to fall on the just and the unjust."

Although there are thousands of war stories from every culture, country, and continent, the most wonderful stories are of nations who took extraordinary steps toward peace and goodwill. One such moment took place in 1845.

Ireland was experiencing a terrible famine. Blight had destroyed the potato crops, which had become a staple for both man and livestock. Wealthy landowners had given the peasants such small parcels of land that they were forced by circumstance to plant potatoes, which had the highest yield per acre. Unfortunately, massive production of a single crop left very little room for failure. When blight struck, half of the harvest was destroyed and over a one million people died of starvation.

Sultan Abdülmecid heard of the famine. He had made tremendous efforts to forge relationships with European countries during the Crimean war.³ A progressive leader, he declared his intention to send 10,000 sterling to Irish farmers.⁴ However Queen Victoria of England requested that the Sultan send only 1,000 sterling. Why? Because she had sent only 2,000 sterling! She thought she might look stingy if a gift came from Turkey that dwarfed her gift. Wanting to maintain diplomatic relations, the Sultan decided to only send 1,000 sterling. But his heart was sincerely moved by the plight of the Irish, so he also secretly sent food. Three ships were loaded full of the finest food Turkish soil had to offer. According to historical records, the English courts tried to block the ships. But the Ottoman sailors were able to deliver the food to the harbor in Drogheda, Ireland. Even today the people of Drogheda remember the deed and have a great love for Turks.

3 Incidentally Sultan Abdülmecid was the first Sultan to introduce paper money.

4 That would be equivalent to about 2.4 million TL today.

The Sultan's act of love toward the Irish people reminds us that we need to extend our compassion outside the borders of our own families and friends, to those we wouldn't naturally care for.

Jesus told a story about a man who went beyond the call of duty to help another person. The man became known as "the Good Samaritan." The story has become so famous that many clubs and organizations around the world have borrowed the name and practices of "the Good Samaritan" in their work for the downtrodden and poor. But before we look at Jesus' story, let's understand a bit of the context. We can get that by reading Luke chapter 10 verses 25-29:

25 And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tempted Him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? 26 Jesus said to him, What is written in the law? How do you read it? 27 And answering, he said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." 28 And Jesus said to him, "You have answered right; do this and you shall live. 29 But the lawyer, willing to justify himself, said to Jesus, And who is my neighbor?"

This lawyer specialized in complex laws. Jesus' concise answer made the thick subject of the law embarrassingly simple! So many people would rather debate about the finer points of religion than to participate in its central focus and practical application, to love! They would rather argue the virtues of entering a room with their right foot, drinking a glass of water in three gulps, or the correct form of prayer, than to actually show love. This lawyer enjoyed the "philosophy" of religion. But he wasn't prepared for such a quick solution to his riddle when Jesus laid it out very simply by saying,

"Love God and love your neighbor."

Trying to regain his status as a clever man, he tried to create an unanswerable question by asking,

"Who is my neighbor?"

But Jesus had an answer for that too! Let's read Jesus' gentle response in Luke chapter 10 verses 30-33:

30 And answering, Jesus said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among robbers, who stripped him of his clothing and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 And by coincidence a certain priest came down that way and seeing him, he passed by on the opposite side. 32 And in the same way a Levite, also being at the place, coming and seeing him, he passed on the opposite side. 33 But a certain traveling Samaritan came upon him, and seeing him, he was filled with pity.

To get the full impact of what Jesus was saying, we need to remember that the road from Jerusalem to Jericho looked very similar to the valleys of Cappadocia. It was a great place for bandits to hide because there were caves everywhere. Men would hide in the rocks waiting for potential victims, pounce on them when they passed by, steal their money, and quickly escape back into the rocks and holes. The traveler in Jesus' story found himself in this type of situation, trapped in a canyon with no place to run. The gang of robbers not only stole his money but also his clothes, leaving him beaten, bloodied, and half dead.

Because the trail through the canyon was narrow, all the travelers had to pass by this man. The first man to arrive on the scene of the crime was a priest. The priest's job was to help men make sacrifices. Therefore he was use to blood. But when he saw one of God's bloodied creations, a man, lying on the road he was unwilling to help. Did this man have love? No. He was more concerned with keeping himself clean for religious services than helping his fellow man. He was focused on the minute details of the law that governed the ritual holidays, feasts, fasts, and sacrifice, but was missing its real meaning! How do you think God felt about this priest ignoring a dying man?

The second man who wandered down the road and came upon the beaten, bleeding traveler was a Levite. Every priest was a Levite, but not all Levites were priests. This man could boast of a holy bloodline, traceable back to Moses and Aaron. In his mind he may have thought,

“I am someone special.”

But when he saw that man groaning on the side of the road, bleeding, and needing help, he likely reasoned,

"Someone more ordinary than me can help this man. Besides, I don't want to be spoiled by this man's impurities."

Then Jesus introduced a third character, a Samaritan. The lawyer to whom Jesus was speaking was a Jew. For Jewish people the Samaritans were the lowest of the low. They were likened to dogs because they were not pure Jews.⁵ In fact, on one occasion the priests were so angry with Jesus they accused him of “being a demon possessed Samaritan.” In other words, it was the worst insult they could think of!⁶

So when Jesus said that a Samaritan came down the road, got off his donkey, and had compassion on the man, Jesus had everyone's attention. Let's see what Jesus said next in Luke chapter 10 verses 33-35:

33 But a certain traveling Samaritan came upon him, and seeing him, he was filled with pity. 34 And coming near, he bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine, and set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 And going

5 The Samaritans were a mixed race. When the Assyrians invaded the northern kingdom of Israel in 745 B.C. they mixed the bloodlines of the people still living in Palestine and deported many Jews to other lands. When the Babylonian captivity ended for the southern kingdom of Judah they tried to rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem and it was this mixed group of Samaritans that hindered their work. This history combined with a mixed bloodline created prejudice among the people.

6 John 8:48

on the next day, he took out two denarius and gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, Take care of him. And whatever more you spend, when I come again I will repay you.

That was the end of Jesus' story. Then looking directly at the lawyer, Jesus asked him a question. We can read it in verse 36:

36 Then which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to him who fell among the robbers?

In debate, the lawyer was a slick speaker; and in arguments over details of the law, had likely put people on the hot seat many times. Now he felt an unusual warm sensation come over his forehead as he saw that Jesus had turned the tables. How could he respond? He definitely didn't want to look bad. Let's see what he said in verse 37:

37 And he said, "The one doing the deed of mercy to him. And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Go and do likewise. Go and love like a Samaritan! Jesus had summarized his point by saying in essence,

"The one you count as worse than a dog, when he is loving people, is more pleasing to God than the man who has all the ritual and piety of Abraham's offspring."

In God's economy, love is the currency. Here on earth, ambition, fame, and money can take a man or woman into high places. They can get you connections and better jobs. But Jesus taught that if you want to go places with God, love is the ticket. It doesn't matter what is written under religion on your identity card. **What really matters is loving people in practical ways, when they are sick, lonely, or in need.**

You will find as you look back upon your life that the moments you really lived were the moments you did things in a spirit of love. Love is everything it's applauded to be. It really is worth struggling for, being brave for, and risking everything for. Jesus taught that if

you don't risk everything for love, you risk losing even more, your salvation.

We learn through the story of the Good Samaritan that love isn't easy and often costs much. For the Good Samaritan, it cost him time because he had to stop, clean the man, and deliver him to the inn. It cost the Samaritan money because he paid two silver denarius to the hotelkeeper. It also cost him comfort because he had to walk, while the wounded man got to ride on his donkey. Here is the principle of love: if it is true love it will always have costs. Love makes us sacrifice and rearrange our priorities.

What were the priest and Levite unwilling to sacrifice? They didn't want to give their time. They had an attitude that said,

“My appointment is more important than this man. I have a schedule to keep and people are depending on me.”

They also didn't want to give up their money. It is quite possible that they worried,

“If I pause to help this man, surely those bandits will rob me!”

They also didn't want to compromise their comfort! Their thoughts may have been,

“I am not going to touch that dirty naked guy. I will have to wash again before the next time of prayer!”

There are three huge barriers to love: pride, unforgiveness, and selfishness. They are called the "Three Liars" and they work together like this. Pride is the root of prejudice, which in turn creates excuses for unforgiveness. When we don't forgive we make our need to be justified (self gratification) greater than a person's need to be forgiven and loved. It is a vicious cycle that impedes personal and spiritual growth. So how do we break the cycle? We must make a conscious choice to interrupt and break down the patterns of the "Three Liars" by choosing love over pride.

We know that God is love⁷ and the source of all love. But does the principle of love “costing something” apply universally?

This leads us to a very interesting question. If love’s core principle (vital to it’s very existence) is that it always sacrifices or gives up, what has God sacrificed or given that testifies of His love? In other words, what does God’s great love for us cost him? If He is the biggest “lover” shouldn’t he have some great price to show for it? Love cost the Samaritan, time, energy and comfort. There are costs when we give love to our spouse, children, neighbors, and friends. What does love cost God? Similarly, we can ask the same thing about Jesus. Jesus was the teacher of love. What did he sacrifice or give up to show his love?

You have come a long way in these studies. Now as we move toward the climax, watch as an amazing display of God’s love is played out. The next ten studies will build toward a crescendo of God’s tremendous expenditure of love for the world.

A newspaper columnist who was also a doctor wrote about a wife who came into his office full of hatred toward her husband.

"I not only want to get rid of him, I want to get even. Before I divorce him, I want to hurt him as much as he has hurt me."

The doctor suggested an ingenious plan. Whispering as he spoke, he told the wife,

"Here is a plan that will tear him to pieces. Go home and act as if you really love your husband. Tell him how much he means to you. Praise him for every decent trait. Go out of your way to be as kind, considerate, and generous as possible. Spare no efforts to please him, to enjoy him. Make him believe you love him. After you've convinced him of your undying love and that you cannot live without him, then drop the bomb. Tell him that you're getting a divorce. That will really destroy him."

7 1 John 4

With revenge in her eyes, she smiled and exclaimed, "Beautiful, beautiful. He won't know what hit him!"

And she did it with enthusiasm. Every day she acted like she loved him. For two months she showed love. She was kind, listening, giving, reinforcing, and sharing.

However, when she didn't return to the newspaper reporter's office after two months he became curious and decided to call her.

"Are you ready now to go through with the divorce?"

"Divorce?" she exclaimed. "Never! I discovered I really do love him."

Her actions had changed her feelings. Motion resulted in emotion. The ability to love is not established by fervent promise as much as it is by the determination to repetitively engage in acts of love.

Do not waste your time wondering whether you love your neighbor. Act as if you do. Jesus said, "love your enemy." We can't do that sincerely on our own power, but we can treat him with love, just the same. As soon as we do this, we discover one of the greatest secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will start loving him.

On the contrary if you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. However if you treat him well, you will find yourself disliking him less. In a very real sense love for others brings us into participation with God. That is a very safe and healing place to be.

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. Why do people like to debate the finer points about religious subjects rather than its practical application?
2. Who is your “neighbor”? What practical ways can you show love to “your neighbor”?
3. Are the Three Liars (pride, selfishness, and prejudice) blocking the flow of love in your life in any way?
4. What has love “cost” you? Do you think the “cost” of love is worth it?

4 MAKING PEACE WITH THE FATHER

Is God really unknowable? Is that his idea or humans?

There are some questions that just aren't asked. Perhaps it is different in some cultures, but you don't ask a woman who appears to be between thirty and eighty years old how old she is. For some reason women don't like to be asked that question during that part of their lives. Interestingly, after a woman turns eighty it seems like she takes great pride in being old and enjoys telling you her age. Here is another sensitive topic. You don't ask a female over 11 years old how much she weighs. Yes even teen-agers can be really sensitive about that subject. It is better to not ask and not know.

In our culture there is another question that seems to go unasked. It is a lot more serious than the previous ones. The question is,

"What is God like?"

Have you ever wondered what God was like, but you were afraid to ask? Or maybe you did ask and someone told you,

"You don't ask questions like that!"

Or maybe someone said to you forthright,

"God is unknowable."

In this lesson, we will take a look at God's character, personality, and desires. Contrary to what some people say, we can know something about what God is like.

For many, asking questions about God's character is foolish or disrespectful at best and outright rebellious and sinful at worst. Is it wrong to even ask those questions?

To help us wrestle with that issue let us consider a dialogue between two people discussing whether God can be known or understood.

Emre stroked his beard between his thumb and fingers as he looked at the computer screen. He was reading a chat correspondence from his Internet girlfriend. He had never met Şükran personally because she lived in Erzurum and he was in Istanbul. But during their chats on Facebook the last few months, he had become more interested in her. Although they had not mentioned the word "marriage," they were at the point in their relationship where they were making plans for Emre to go to Erzurum and meet her in person. This particular evening while maintaining his "chat" with Şükran he was also talking with his friend Hikmet and his uncle Kerem.

Hikmet lived just two streets over from Emre and his parents. After work, they would often spend time together late into the evening because Emre had a laptop and wireless in his house. They would sit together, the three of them: Emre, Hikmet, and Şükran. One evening while they were hanging out, Emre's blind uncle Kerem came over. He was 47 years old and quite limited in his education, but he could speak and hear well. When he visited he was always by Emre's side. Kerem listened quietly to the conversation taking place between Emre and Hikmet, often waiting patiently during the long periods of silence, as Emre would divide his attention to the latest chat line sent from Şükran. Suddenly Emre looked up from his computer and looked at Hikmet intently.

"Hikmet, why are you so interested in learning about God? God is not knowable. He is so far and high above us we cannot com-

prehend it. He has no similitude so you can't compare Him to anything. You can't study God, so there is no such thing as theology. What you really study is the will of God as He reveals it."

Hikmet answered back, "But you know the names of God that describe His character. Does that not reveal something about God?"

"Yes we have names of God but those adjectives only describe aspects of His will, they do not reflect anything about God's nature," Emre shot back.

"So you think you can't know God at all and that His names don't reveal anything about His personality or character, only His will?"

"That's right," said Emre. "Look, here is my uncle, Kerem. He is the apple of my eye. I love this man. He is like my own father. Because he has been blind since birth he has never seen anything. For example, he doesn't know what the color blue is. There is no way to describe it to him because there is no reference point. You can't tell him it is lighter than black and darker than white because he doesn't know what that is either. He can't know because he doesn't have the capacity to understand it. We don't have the capacity to understand God because we have no reference point for it. God is so different from us, there is no similarity to Him, and we have absolutely no capacity at all to understand him. We can only understand His will as given in His commands. But those commands do not reveal God Himself, they only reveal His will."

Hikmet responded, "What about God's actions, don't they reveal something about His character, His nature?"

"No. God's actions do not reflect God's nature. They only express His will. What gives unity to all God's dealings is that God wills them all. As "The One Who Wills" God may be recognized from time to time by means of the descriptions given. But God does not essentially conform to any of those descriptions," Emre said.

"So you are saying that God can act in one way in a given set of circumstances and at another time with the same given circumstances act another way. According to what you are saying, God could be capricious because you don't know Him, you only know His command for a certain situation with known parameters."

"God is not capricious," Emre said.

"According to what you are saying you cannot know that. You just said you couldn't know God, so you don't know whether He is capricious or not. According to you, you only know God's will as revealed in certain commands under certain circumstances. But because you don't know the reasoning or logic of the command or the character of the Lawgiver, if the parameters change just a little bit you don't know what to do."

"Give me an example of what you are saying," Emre said.

"Okay, we are commanded not to drink wine, but it doesn't say anything about cigarettes because cigarettes were not know then. So according to you, because there is not a specific command against it, we can smoke. According to you, we cannot know anything about the character of God to understand what His will is in this new situation. Our relationship with God is limited to blind obedience to a set of laws."

"No, we are commanded to love God," Emre replied.

"How can you love someone you don't know anything about? Do you love Şükran?"

"Yes."

"But you have never seen her. You love her because you have spent time talking with her and getting to know her. We can only love God whom we can't see if we know about His character. Don't stop your chat line with Şükran, but open a new web page and go into Facebook again."

Emre did so although he was puzzled at why Hikmet would be asking him to do that.

"O.K. let's do a search on the name 'Simay'."

Emre typed in the name "Simay" and did a search. Lot's of people's Facebook pages came up.

"O.K. now pick one."

Emre picked one and the information came up. Simay looked to be a 20 to 21 year old college student in Adana.

Hikmet said, "Do you love her?"

"What are you talking about? Of course I don't love her, I don't even know the woman!"

"That's my point. How can you love someone that you don't know anything about? Now go to the "Start" menu on your computer and select "Run." In the window type 'cmd'."

Emre did what Hikmet said and a window appeared with a black background. There were no pictures, no color, and no graphics. It was just a black background with some white letters written in English.

Hikmet said, "This is the DOS section of your computer. You type in commands and it does certain things like listing your file directory. But let's say that instead of you typing in a command for it, it wrote out a command for you to follow. For example let's say the DOS command told you to sacrifice a sheep. Furthermore, let's say the command is in Arabic. Tell me, Emre, would you love a computer that gave you instructions like that in a language you don't understand? You don't know how the computer works; you don't know anything about it. You don't know why it gives the command to sacrifice a sheep, it just tells you to do it. For each command you have to ask someone to tell you what the

command is because you don't know Arabic. Can you love the computer?"

"Of course I wouldn't love the computer, it isn't a person. It is a machine."

"But the God you describe is just a machine. There is no emotion, there is no knowledge of what He is like, there is nothing but commands in a foreign language. How can you love a God like that? Look here is your uncle Kerem. Does he love you?"

Emre answered, "Of course he loves me."

"How do you know he loves you?"

"He hugs me, he hangs around me, and he even tells me he loves me."

"But he has never seen you," Hikmet emphasized.

"He has never seen me, but he can hear, talk, and feel."

"That's right," said Hikmet. "If he couldn't hear and talk and feel he would have no capacity to have a relationship with us at all. We can't see God, but God did not create us without a capacity to understand Him. Everything God does is great, is that right?"

"Yes," said Emre.

"Which do you think is better: that He created us to blindly obey commands given in a foreign language or that He created us with the ability to know, appreciate, and love His character?"

"But," Emre began to say.

However, his uncle Kerem cut him off and said, "Obeying a god's command is servitude, but love is way above that. Love is sublime."

Love is sublime, and God has chosen to reveal Himself to His creation through actions, verbal expressions, and stories. Let's look at a story told by Jesus that helped to illustrate the divine character that we may know, appreciate, and ultimately love. Let's begin our story by reading Luke chapter 15 verses 11-19:

11 Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. 12 "And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. 13 "And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. 14 "But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. 15 "Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 "And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. 17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 'I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, 19 "and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'"

The Father in the story represents God. We have all received talents and abilities from God. Regardless of how wealthy or happy a person may appear on the outside, every life centered on self is wasted. Anyone attempting to live apart from God is wasting his or her God-given inheritance. Like the son in the parable, those who wish to sin are trying to go far away from God by forgetting him.

In the story, the son left the safety and love of his father to search for something he thought he needed or would make life better. What he didn't know was that it was always there for him. He tried it all: parties, friends, and women. But he was only left with a huge emptiness in his heart that couldn't be filled. It led to his ruin and when he had hit rock bottom he realized how far he had gone. He thought about his father and the life he left behind.

When the son came to himself he decided that he wanted to go home. Why did he think he could go home? Didn't he view his father's rules as restricting and boring when he was younger? What made him think that he would be accepted back into his father's home?

Obviously he had some idea that there was love in his father's house. It was this memory of love that pulled him back to his father. Isn't it the love of God and the knowledge of His mercy that holds an attraction for our own repentance and turning from selfishness?

Let's continue reading the parable in Luke chapter 15 verses 20-24:

20 "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. 21 "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. 23 'And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; 24 'for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.

Jesus is not just revealing that God's will is for sinners to return home. Jesus is also showing the heart of the father, that is the heart of God. Everyday the father stood outside and looked into the distance to see if his son might be coming home. When he saw the son approaching from a distance he got excited and his heart was filled with joy. In the same way **there is yearning in God's heart for the sinner who has spoiled his life apart from God. God is waiting with anticipation for the sinner to return to Him.** In the story, the father has compassion on the son, falls on his neck, and kisses him. Without listening to the son's request to work as a hired servant, the father covers the son's rags with good clothing and puts his signet ring of authority on the young man's finger. He then calls for a feast to celebrate the return of his lost son.

Dear reader, perhaps you have spent your life on selfish pleasures. Just like the loving father waiting at the end of the road for his boy, you can be sure that it is God's will that you return to His embrace. God has a home of "righteousness," and He wants you in it. But there is more than just God's will, much more. **God loves you, and His love is pulling you home.** When you can see God's heart yearning for you to come home, when you can feel the love of God and His desire to cover all your sins, you will understand how happy He will be to call you son and restore to you your lost inheritance of eternal life; it makes coming home easier.

Have you ever had a party thrown in your honor? Perhaps all your friends and family surprised you for your birthday, or the grand moment of your circumcision, or maybe your wedding. God says that if you will come home to his family, there will be great rejoicing in heaven. A party among angels! You will have thrilled the heart of God. Your steps toward righteousness thrill God, like a parent thrills at their first child's baby steps.

Let's continue with Jesus' parable in Luke chapter 15 verses 25-32:

25 "Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 "So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 "And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.' 28 "But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. 29 "So he answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. 30 'But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.' 31 "And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. 32 'It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.' "

The elder brother was not happy when he realized the feast was made for his younger brother. He looked at his own relationship with his father as one of servant to a master.

“I have been serving you all these years and you never threw a feast for me!”

Dear reader, Jesus is showing us that the servant/master idea of God is wrong. God isn't a master who demands with threats the obedience of His servants. **He is like a loving father hoping that His lost children will come home.** In the parable, God is revealing something about Himself, His character. It is not only God's will that we return home, **He yearns for our return.**

Have you ever heard that "God does not love transgressors," or that "God does not love the ungrateful or wicked?"

Perhaps you grew up believing that "God does not love those who do wrong." But Jesus shows us that God still loves the one who has turned away from Him to a life of sin, and not only wills, but yearns for their return. God is revealing to us who He is.

Actually, God has revealed in scripture not only His will but also His heart, His personality, and His character. Here are a few examples:

*"Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and **He was grieved in His heart.**"⁸*

*"The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: "Yes, **I have loved you with an everlasting love**; Therefore with loving-kindness I have drawn you."⁹*

"Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man

8 Genesis 6:5, 6

9 Jeremiah 31:3

*glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. **For in these I delight,**" says the LORD.*"¹⁰

*"How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim? **My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred.** I will not execute the fierceness of My anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I am God, and not man, The Holy One in your midst; And I will not come with terror."*¹¹

*Job said, "Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?"*¹²

We cannot know God to perfection because He is infinite and we are finite. But the Bible also says,

*"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."*¹³

It is God's will that we keep His law. But He has revealed to man that His heart is love so that we may not only do the law but also do it out of love and in appreciation for who He is, the God of love and self-sacrifice. We cannot love Him unless we understand and know Him.

During a family vacation in Antalya little 6-year-old Oktay was swimming in the sea with his uncle Faruk. They grew tired playing in the water and at last were just sitting on the sand and letting the waves lap onto their feet.

10 Jeremiah 9:23, 24

11 Hosea 11:8, 9

12 Job 11:7

13 Deut. 29:29

As Faruk gazed out upon the water he said to his little nephew Oktay:

"The sea is really amazing. It is sometimes wavy sometimes still. Sometimes quiet, sometimes loud. It is powerful yet calming and soothing. It provides healing. It is really deep. How deep do you think the ocean is?"

"I don't know. It goes deeper than I can go. But I know one thing," Oktay replied.

"What is that?"

"The water down there is wet and salty."

We cannot know everything about God. But just like Oktay knew seawater was wet and salty all the way to the bottom, we too can know something about God. In the Bible there is constant and consistent evidence of who God is through self-revelations of His actions, expressions of what He is like, and by similitudes that he makes about Himself. If the Bible didn't contain passages related to God's feelings, character, and knowledge, there wouldn't be much left in the book!

Stop believing the lies, personal opinions, and ignorance of others. Ask God to show Himself to you in a greater way. Ask God to reveal His character to you so that you can know him better.

"Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good." (Psalm 34:8)

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. Why didn't the younger son try to live a wild life while still at home?
2. Does everyone who forgets God come to poverty? What would make a rich man want to return to God?
3. What makes us understand that the younger son was truly repentant?
4. Do you believe that God is completely unknowable? Why or why not? If your answer is "no", what do you know about God?

5 DEATH WAS OVERCOME!

How can you defeat death? There is an answer, and only one.

For thousands of years people have been fascinated with death. Of course, the biggest reason for their fascination is that they don't want to experience it. If we were to poll everyone we know, they would probably say that death is their biggest fear because it is unpredictable. When we wake up every morning, we have a good idea of what will happen. We go to work, school, or stay home for various reasons. We pay the bills, talk with friends, and eat food. In short, we just do the same thing we did the day before. There are good times and bad times in life, but we are alive and there is always hope that things will get better.

But there is a lot of uncertainty about death. When we die what will it be like? Will we live again? If so, how, when, and where? If we didn't live a righteous life will we burn forever? If we go to heaven, what will it really be like? If we had time we could probably fill up a whole book with questions regarding death. And while we wouldn't be able to answer all the questions, we could answer some of the most basic by simply opening God's Holy Word.

But lots of people don't want to look at the Bible. They continue to search in vain for ways to live forever or to escape the inevitable. The most recent fad, at least among the super wealthy, is to be cryogenically frozen. Essentially, the body is preserved in a frozen state until scientists develop technology that could both bring them

back to life and reverse the aging process. For most of us that not only sounds impossible, it sounds ridiculous. But it is amazing what some people will do out of fear.

So what does the believer do about death? Well, we hold on to the blessed hope that God will do what He promised! Unfortunately, for many people there is no hope. They think it is better to not think or talk about it. Death is what it is, out of our control and inevitable. Or maybe it isn't!

In the eastern town of Adiyaman a husband, four children, sister, and two brothers were huddled near the door with tears streaming down their faces. They hugged each other but no one said a word. They just stared in disbelief as the casket was loaded into the hearse. On this sad day, the family had gathered to pay their respects and remember the woman that they loved so much. Her name was Banu.

The special prayers, shared memories, food, and drink took the sting out of this awful event. But there was nothing that could remove the sadness or wipe away the tears. They had all just lost a very close friend, mother, sister, and wife. Of course they all proclaimed her goodness and had a sliver of hope that they would again see each other. But deep within, they all had their doubts. Not so much because of Banu's character, but because nothing is certain in life or death.

When she was first diagnosed with cancer everyone was shocked. It wasn't something they were expecting. They went to several doctors, got different opinions about treatment, and spent countless hours in the hospital supporting her. When she became weaker they prayed for her and even made pilgrimages to several shrines hoping that God would spare her life. But He didn't. It was a sad fact that they all had to accept. Life without her would be hard, but there was nothing left for them to do. As one mourner said,

“It is what it is. Fate! If it is God's will, we must accept it!”

But maybe Banu's death wasn't God's will. Perhaps there really isn't a reason to be sad or have doubt when our loved ones die. Maybe, just maybe, we can have the assurance that we will see each other one day. Think about it. If God created everything out of nothing and brought to life that which was lifeless, why can't He bring back to life something that once lived? Do you really think that God doesn't care about those who serve Him? Remember that Jesus once said,

“With God all things are possible.”¹⁴

All things would definitely include forgiveness, re-creation, healing, and even resurrection! Let's see what Jesus had to say about death and the resurrection in John chapter 11. We will start at the beginning of the chapter in verses 1-4:

1 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. 3 So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” 4 But when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

Lazarus, Mary, and Martha were very close friends with Jesus and his disciples. When he was in the area, Jesus often stayed at their house, ate with them, and rested from his travels. So it was quite natural for Mary and Martha to send for Jesus when Lazarus got ill. But they didn't just send for him because he was their friend. They knew who he was and believed in his power over sickness. Let's see how Jesus responded in verses 5 and 6:

5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

14 Matthew 19:26

For most of us, Jesus' response may seem a bit odd. Why didn't he rush to Lazarus' side? After all, he had opened up his home, provided food, and given a room to Jesus on countless occasions over the past 3 years. How could Jesus act so unconcerned? How could he know that Lazarus was going to be okay? What did he mean that Lazarus' illness was "for the glory of God"? How could sickness glorify God? Let's continue reading verses 7-10:

7 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." 8 The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. 10 But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."

After hearing about Lazarus' condition, Jesus waited for two days. We don't know what they did during those two days, but we do know that the disciples didn't want to return to Judea. They knew that the people who threatened Jesus were serious. The religious leaders and their followers were blind with rage and jealousy, not to mention extremely confused about who Jesus was and what he was saying. The disciples were sure that if Jesus returned to Judea, it would likely result in all of their deaths. But Jesus wasn't afraid! In fact, his statement was both a reminder and a rebuke.

Essentially, Jesus was saying that while there is still daylight we must work. If there is an opportunity to work or things that need to be done, we should move forward under God's guidance. We can't worry about what might happen. Jesus trusted God and was reminding the disciples that God had given him a work to do and an amount of time to do it in. Now let's read verses 11-15:

11 After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." 12 The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." 13 Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that

he meant taking rest in sleep. 14 Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, 15 and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

Lazarus, the beloved friend of Jesus, had died. His sisters knew that his disease would lead to death without divine intervention. It was for this reason that they immediately sent news to Jesus. They knew that he had calmed the storm, cast out demons, and healed the blind and crippled. They were certain that he would also heal Lazarus. But it didn't happen. Mary and Martha lost their brother.

However, Jesus didn't see Lazarus' death as a loss. He saw it as an opportunity for God to be glorified, for the people to believe what he had been telling them for months, and for his identity to be fully realized. Up until that point, a lot of people still didn't know what to think about this carpenter from Nazareth. They knew he was a good teacher, as knowledgeable as the rabbis, and most likely a prophet. But Jesus' claims about who he was were a little bit hard to believe. Therefore Jesus was about to do something that would take away all of their doubts. He was about to shake the very foundations of human existence by altering the fate of a dead man.

Did you notice that Jesus described death as sleep and that he was going to wake Lazarus up? Let's see what he meant by that in John chapter 11 verses 17-27:

17 Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. 20 So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. 21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."

When Jesus finally arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for four days. There was no way that Lazarus was close to death or even

in a coma. He was dead and buried according to Jewish custom. Shortly after death he had been cleaned, wrapped, and laid in a tomb cut from stone.

But in spite of his death, we get a fascinating glimpse into the faith of Martha. She wasn't angry with Jesus and she didn't complain. She stated the simple truth. If Jesus had been there her brother would not have died. But there is something even greater in her statement. She believed that Jesus' connection with God was so close that God would grant him whatever he wanted. Oh that we would all have the faith of Martha! Let's see how Jesus responds in John chapter 11 verses 23 and 24:

23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

Jesus' words should comfort anyone who has lost a loved one. He didn't say Lazarus would probably rise again or even maybe rise again. He promised that Lazarus would rise again. In other words, **Lazarus' salvation, as well as every other believer, was secure and unalterable.** He would be among those who are raised from the dead at the end of this world. It is clear from Martha's statement that she believed this. But Jesus tested her faith even more with the following statement in verses 25-27:

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

Did Jesus' statement shock you? Jesus didn't wax eloquently about when, how, or why the resurrection would take place. He didn't even describe the events that would lead up to the resurrection. But he did make another profound statement that can't be ignored nor diminished.

In essence, **Jesus said that there is no life now or in the future without him. He is the resurrection!** He is the one who can reverse the greatest fate of all humanity, death. If you are afraid to die, if you want to live again, Jesus says

“Believe in me and I will raise you from death.”

Interestingly, Martha didn't seem shocked by Jesus' statement. She had already witnessed countless miracles, knew the prophecies concerning the coming Messiah, heard his teaching, and experienced his genuine love for her family. Martha had no doubt that what Jesus said was true. Immediately she ran home to tell her sister that Jesus had come. When Mary heard that Jesus had arrived she left the house to meet him.

Let's see what happened next in John chapter 11 verses 32 and 33:

32 Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.

Obviously, Mary had the same reverence for Jesus that her sister Martha had. She also expressed the same belief in Jesus' power over illness. Have you noticed that Jesus never blames God for sickness? In fact we continually see the opposite. Jesus is always healing the sick and reversing the effects of illness. **This is yet more proof that sickness and even death are not God's will.** Perhaps Jesus saw that some people believed Lazarus' death was God's will and this is why he was “deeply moved and greatly troubled”.

But maybe there was another reason he was troubled. If you remember, Jesus had told his disciples on more than one occasion that he would eventually be killed. Is it possible that there were people in that crowd who actually wanted to kill him? Did he see the hypocrisy in their hearts? Could he read it on their faces?

Without wasting anymore time, Jesus asked Mary where Lazarus was buried. Let's continue with verses 34-37:

34 And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus wept. 36 So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"

Jesus wept! The long awaited Messiah shed tears. Amazingly, in these verses we get a glimpse into the humanity of Jesus Christ. Just like us, he felt happiness, sadness, pain, and sorrow.

But there were people in the crowd who mocked the genuineness of his sorrow.

"Why couldn't he heal one of his best friends? Does he only heal strangers?"

We don't need to think very hard to imagine the looks on their faces. They were probably scowling with half closed eyes and furrowed eyebrows. Their voices were filled with mockery and false accusations. But their claims weren't any more valid than someone who says that it is God's will for a loved one to die. Jesus loved Lazarus and was about to perform the second greatest act of love on his behalf. Are you ready for the climax of this story? Let's read verses 38-40:

38 Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. 39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." 40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"

It isn't hard to understand Martha's concern. Everyone there knew that Lazarus was dead. He had already been in the tomb four days. If they removed the stone from the tomb's opening, it would have

smelled terrible. In addition, anyone who got near the dead body would be ceremonially unclean. Did Jesus debate with them? Did he give them a list of reasons why they should obey him? No! He asked a simple question.

“Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”

Do you want to see the glory of God? Are you ready to meet the one who can change your fate? Let’s continue with verses 41-44:

41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.” 43 When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” 44 The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

It has been said that **if Jesus hadn’t called Lazarus by name, all the dead would have come back to life.** There was power in his voice, the very same power that was present when God spoke everything into existence, when He called Abraham out of Ur, and when God spoke to Moses through a burning bush on Mt. Sinai. The changer of fate is God’s own Word in the flesh. Incomprehensible? Yes! Impossible? No!

“With God all things are possible.”¹⁵

How do you think the people reacted? Do you think they were all amazed and happy? Do you think they ran away in fear? Let’s finish our lesson by reading John chapter 11 verses 45-53:

45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, 46 but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. 47 So the chief

15 Matthew 19:26

priests and the Pharisees gathered the Council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." 49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. 50 Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." 51 He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, 52 and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. 53 So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

On a cold winter day, a young mother was laying in bed with her new baby. Her hair wasn't brushed and she didn't have any make up on. But none of that mattered for the baby. He could feel her warm touch and gentle caress. He could hear her soft voice. His little eyes stared intently at his mother as she spoke,

"I love you so much. I will always love you. I will always protect you. No matter what happens I will always be there for you. Before I lived for myself, but now I only live for you. If necessary, I will even die for you."

The baby knew her voice because he had listened to it for 9 months before he was born. He didn't understand all that she said. But it didn't matter. All that mattered was that he felt safe in her embrace. He didn't know what the future would be like, but he knew that he could trust her.

Like the baby, we don't know what will happen in the future. But just like this young mother's voice, there is a voice calling out to us. It is saying,

"Don't worry about the future. Don't stress out about death. I hold the keys of your fate in my hands. I can unlock the chains of death and bring you back to life. Believe in me and even if you

die, you will live again. I am the resurrection and the life!”

The voice is God’s Word in human flesh, the changer of fate; and he has a name, it is Jesus Christ. Do you believe that if you died, he could raise you from the dead? If so, take control of your fate by putting it into his hands and choosing to follow him.

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. What are your personal thoughts about death? Are you afraid of it?
2. We know that God is in control of everything. If someone dies, is it His will? If not, why do people die?
3. Is Jesus’ claim of being “the resurrection and the life” shocking to you?
4. In this lesson we learned that Jesus is the “changer of fate.” In light of this truth, are you starting to understand your fate and how it can be changed?

6

PREPARING FOR THE
END OF THE WORLD

Will the world come to an end in my lifetime?

When you leave your house for work do you lock the door? Certainly. It is a very simple preparation to prevent a thief from entering your home. People spend a lot of effort and money preparing for what they believe is highly probable. We prepare for the thief whom we have never seen nor met. But we believe wholeheartedly that he will likely visit our home someday! We pay to put bars on our windows, double locks on our doors, and make a special hiding place for our things. In some cases we even pay for security guards and electronic security systems. Why go to all this trouble? It is because our neighbors' stories, the news, and the experience of our own lives tell us that there are thieves who want to enter our homes and that we must be ready when they come.

In this lesson we will look closely at an event more devastating and scarier than a thief, the end of the world. Unfortunately, some are not ready for it and will be taken by surprise like a man who returns from a day's work to find his door jarred open and his house robbed. The only difference is that they won't have time to clean up the mess! What can you do spiritually to prepare for the end of the world? Let's find out!

For nearly 30,000 Turks, doomsday came on August 17, 1999 at 3:02 am. In the dark of night the ground heaved, walls cracked, and panic gripped the minds of millions. Some of the residents of

Izmit leaped to their death from balconies. Moments later thousands scrambled in panic looking for their children and loved ones who were buried alive.

Little did we know in 1999 that the next decade would bring a successive wave of giant disasters upon the world. It was the eve of a new millennium, and the beginning of the end of the world.

Gujarat, India became Izmit's sister in heartache when 30,000 people died during a 7.9 earthquake on January 2001. But both tragedies pale in significance to the disaster that struck our planet on December 2004, when a colossal 9.0 earthquake turned the ocean into a huge killing machine leaving nearly 300,000 people dead. The tsunami from the earthquake annihilated the port cities of Thailand, Indonesia, and even struck the shores of Africa. The gates of sorrow had been left open and monsters of immense devastating power entered our age. In the following months a massive earthquake rocked Chile killing 84,000 people. Another earthquake of similar proportion wiped out an entire city in China. Then in January 2010 the world stood shocked when one of the poorest countries of our earth suffered immense loss. In 35 seconds, 212,000 Haitians were crushed under the weight of concrete and steel leaving friends and loved ones to pick up the shattered pieces of both their country and lives. Is this the end of the world?

It's too late to ask that question to the 140,000 who died in a cyclone in the Bay of Bengal in 2008, or the 750,000 who starved to death in Somalia in 2011. Oh, what appalling things the world has seen since 1999.

We watched in horror as the Twin Towers fell, and have been shocked by global political intrigue, local conspiracies, and deep state plots. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, toppled governments in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and rumors of an EU collapse all contribute to the truth that this world is falling apart. What does the future hold? Will the American Industrial War Complex start another war? Will China take over the world?

Some might ask, “Is this really the end of the world? Hasn’t the world always had troubles?”

Yes it has, but not on such a global and catastrophic scale! As the world’s politicians argue about how to solve the world’s economic crisis, and the market’s heave and roll like a boat tossed on the sea, our earth is entering a new phase of its existence. It is called death. Yes, our planet is dying.

Overpopulation and modern industry has left our planet fighting against problems that natural ecosystems cannot solve. Scientists say if pollutants continue to pour into the ocean at the rate they are now, our oceans and all that are in them will die by 2050. Great volumes of plastic and other industrial waste are contaminating our earth’s natural systems. Deforestation is causing the earth’s deserts to increase by 50,000 square kilometers a year. In fact Turkey is losing 500 million tons of nutrient rich land a year to soil erosion.¹⁶ Increased use of pesticides has destroyed bird populations all around the world and robbed us of the beauty of migratory flocks soaring in the sky. Other chemicals introduced into food sources have caused the highest rates of cancer and birth defects that we have ever witnessed. Nutrient and mineral values of plants have decreased by 50% over the last twenty years. Temperatures are changing. Rainfall is unpredictable, creating both flooding and drought. Above and beyond all of this, the threat of nuclear disaster is still as real today as it was during the Cold War.

But is this really the end of the world? Could we be living in the last days? What did Jesus have to say about this subject? Did he give us signs to know when the end was near? Let’s find out.

One day when Jesus was leaving the temple complex in Jerusalem, his disciples were looking at the high marble walls and grand architecture of the temple. They were so awe struck with the buildings that had taken nearly 40 years to build that they asked Jesus,

16 The Cost of Soil Loss by Sugar Beet Harvest, A Study. Mehmet Parlak, Siyami Karaca, and Nilüfer Türkmen.

"Isn't this temple magnificent?"

However, instead of agreeing with them Jesus gave them an unexpected and startling answer. Let's read his response in Matthew chapter 24 verse 2:

2 But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

To get a feel for how surprising Jesus words might have been, consider a man who just bought a new 150 cm, flat screen, 3D plasma TV with a built in blue-ray player. The thing cost him a fortune and is as thin your little finger. It hangs on the wall like a picture. While he and his neighbor are standing there admiring this amazing technology, another neighbor, a retired geology professor, stops by to visit. Both men direct the professor's attention to the new purchase hanging on the wall.

"What do you think?" they ask.

The professor barely glances at it and says, "Don't think too much about it, this too will be crushed in the coming earthquake."

As you can imagine, the two men would probably respond by saying, "Do you know something about a coming earthquake that we don't?"

Jesus' refusal to marvel at what the disciples found so awe inspiring left the disciples perplexed and curious to know why Jesus thought the way he did. Let's read the disciples question and Jesus' response in Matthew chapter 24 verses 3-8:

3 As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" 4 And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. 5 For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they

*will lead many astray. 6 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. 7 **For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.** 8 All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.*

Jesus was looking forward over the centuries and telling his disciples what would take place after he would leave this earth and ascend to heaven. He wanted his friends to know what they could expect. His long explanation, as we will see, climaxes with his glorious return from heaven and the absolute end of the world. Let's continue his description in Matthew chapter 24 verses 9-14:

*9 **"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.** 10 And then many will fall away and **betray one another and hate one another.** 11 And **many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.** 12 And because lawlessness will be increased, **the love of many will grow cold.** 13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

Yes, as we move toward the end of the world even faith communities will fracture. False believers will show their true colors and those who have had a dual allegiance to sin will betray the faithful followers. Jesus said, "the love of many will grow cold." Have you ever noticed how we don't talk to our neighbors anymore? Do you leave your doors open like you did years ago? Don't let the precious flame of God's love be extinguished from your heart. Don't allow it to grow cold.

In the next section of Jesus' description to his disciples, he warns of things that they would see in their lifetime. Let's continue with verses 15-20:

15 "So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17 Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, 18 and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. 19 And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! 20 Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath.

In 70 AD, forty years after Jesus spoke these words, Jerusalem suffered a long siege by Roman armies. The siege culminated in the city's total destruction in which a million Jews were killed because of their obstinate refusal to surrender to the Roman armies. Amazingly the Christians of that time, when they saw the Roman army, remembered Jesus words, obeyed them, and fled to the mountains. Amazingly, not one Christian died in the slaughter of Jerusalem because they heeded Jesus' prophecy. For a graphic description of this history, read the first chapter of the thrilling book, "The Great Controversy."¹⁷

Jesus foretold this event, warned of it, and used it as an illustration for events that would lead up to the end of the world. Although Jesus included this section about Jerusalem, his major focus was the events that would befall the righteous people during the 1st and 2nd millennium leading up to his second coming and the end of the world. Let's continue reading his description in Matthew chapter 24 verses 21-28:

21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. 22 And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. 23 Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. 24 For false christs and false

17 This book also goes into in depth detail about other events relating to the second coming of Christ. It is available from Istiridy Medya and can be ordered at www.istiridyemedy.com.

prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. 25 See, I have told you beforehand. 26 So, if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. 27 For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 28 Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

Jesus made it clear that before he returns to the earth a second time, there will be many false prophets and false christs. We do not want to be deceived, so we ask ourselves,

“How can I know what is a true prophet? How can I know who the true Christ is?”

One way to know if a prophet is real or not is to compare what he says with previous prophets. God never contradicts Himself, and his prophets must bear a consistent testimony. **If his/her prophecy is consistent with the words of the Old Testament prophets and Jesus, we have something worth hanging on to.** If it isn't consistent, we need to run from it as if it were a mad dog, foaming from the mouth eager to bite.

And what about Jesus' warning regarding false christs? Through the centuries self-proclaimed false messiahs have come and gone. One of them right here in Turkey, Sabbatai Zevi, convinced at least a third of the European Jews that he was the messiah in 1666! Beyond psychologically imbalanced cases like Sabbatai Zevi, or charismatic geopolitical figures, the scriptures indicate that there will be a last false messiah who will actually be Satan himself attempting to lead the world astray! How can we know who is true and who is a deceiver? The best preparation to avoid being deceived is to carefully study God's words for yourself, which of course is exactly why you have diligently studied these lessons!

Here is an example of how to study God's word. Did you notice in Jesus' description of his second coming he said,

“For as the lightening comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man”?

In other words, **it will be a global event, lighting up the whole sky.** It will not be secret, a television event, or a media event. It will be in the sky, for the whole world to see. Secondly, did you notice Jesus said,

“Where the corpses are the vultures will gather”?

To get additional information, let’s look at this same conversation Jesus had with his disciples as recorded in the book of Luke. By comparing verses, we can learn exactly what Jesus meant. More precisely, Luke chapter 17 verses 24-37:

*24 For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day. 25 But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. 26 Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. 27 They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and **destroyed them all**. 28 Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot--they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, 29 but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and **destroyed them all**-- 30 so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. 31 On that day, let the one who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away, and likewise let the one who is in the field not turn back. 32 Remember Lot's wife. 33 Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it. 34 I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. 35 There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left." 36 [Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.] 37 And they said to him, "Where, Lord?" He said to them, "Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather."*

Did you notice the words “destroyed them all?” Noah and his family survived because they were inside the boat. Those outside the boat were destroyed. Likewise, Lot survived because he obeyed the angels when they told him to flee and not look back. Even so, when Jesus comes some will keep their lives and the rest will be food for the vultures, a symbol of death and destruction.

From this fact, we have a simple test to determine the difference between the real Christ to come and any lying anti-christ who will appear and deceive billions of people. If someone claims to be Jesus, the big question you can ask yourself is,

“Am I still living on this planet?”

If you are going to work, going shopping, or preparing food, and there isn't utter mayhem all around you, then you know he can't be Jesus. When Jesus comes again, it will be the end of life on this earth, as we know it. It will be as dramatic as Noah's global flood and as final as Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction by fire. Jesus continues his description of the end of the world in Matthew chapter 24 verses 29-31:

29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Jesus will come in the clouds of the air. Did you notice he would not walk on earth? **Yes, the angels will gather the righteous from around the earth and they will meet him in the clouds.**¹⁸ In fact

18 1 Thess. 4

you remember from a previous lesson when Jesus shared these words in John chapter 6 verse 39:

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. 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."

At that time Jesus will not only gather the righteous living from around the earth and take them to heaven, he will also raise the dead who have been qualified by faith for eternal life.

Why does Jesus use the words, "last day?" When we were children we all experienced a "last day at school." What a wonderful day it was when it finally arrived. Summer vacation filled with days of swimming and watermelon picnics awaited us. It was a time to be with friends and family. The earth will also have a last day and we are speeding toward it. But before that last day, just like the last days of school, there will be a time of testing.

God will not tolerate sin in His universe forever. He will destroy it just as He promised. Therefore, we can clearly see that the earth and all of its contents (including it's people) has a "fate." The earth's fate is destruction. Those who cling to sin will be destroyed with the earth. Jesus compared it to the days of Noah. Do you remember reading these verses from the story of Noah in Genesis chapter 6 verses 7, 13, and 17:

7 And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them. 13 And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. 17 And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to

destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die.

Though the earth could not change its fate, the people on the earth could. Noah preached to the people and God provided room on the ark for all who would choose to enter. What kept people from entering the ark? Was it vanity? Were they too busy doing other things? Were they afraid of being scorned by family? Did they procrastinate? Those people had the power to save themselves if they had only listened, obeyed, and acted. The end of the world is coming. What must we do to change our fate?

Jesus said we could know the world is coming to an end if we watch for signs. Jesus said in Matthew chapter 24 verses 32 and 33:

32 "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. 33 So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.

Here are the signs that tell us that the world is closing in on its fate.

Widespread Character Decay.

As in the days of Noah when the imaginations of men were violent all the time, Jesus says, “the love of many will grow cold.” Listen to this description from the book of I Timothy chapter 3 verses 1-4:

1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. 2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, 4 Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God

Increase in Homosexuality and other Sexual Perversion

We know that this was the reason God reigned fire down on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The men there even attempted to rape

the angels who came to visit Lot!¹⁹ Let's read God's words regarding the sin of homosexuality in the last days:

Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.²⁰

Increase in Knowledge

In the book of Daniel, the Bible predicted there would be a sudden burst of knowledge in the last days and that men would be able to travel rapidly around the world. The last hundred years have been like none other since the beginning of time. Listen to the prophet Daniel's closing words of in chapter 12 verse 4:

4 But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.

Is there any doubt that people are on the go these days? The Internet is full of time lapsed photography and videos capturing the daily migration of humans, crowding the streets as they go to work, school, and then back home. We often forget that the car and airplane are relatively new inventions. Can you imagine what Daniel thought 2500 years ago when he saw the common scenes of our day? Streets filled with cars and trucks. The sky filled with airplanes. The seas filled with vessels of trade and war.

The Bible also says, "knowledge will increase." It makes no mention whether this knowledge would be good or bad. Of course, knowledge is useful and can be used for good. There have been scientific advances in communication, healthier living, food production, and fighting disease. Unfortunately, that same knowledge is used for war. Right now, collective human knowledge is doubling every year. As we map everything from space to the human gene code, we

¹⁹ Genesis 18 and 19

²⁰ Jude 1:7

see that the Bible's prophecy is true and as the angel told Daniel, the end of the world is near.

We add to this list other signs of the end that even non-religious people see as imminent signals of doom: the increase in natural disasters, the poisoning of our natural environment on a global scale, the changes in our weather, the introduction of new super viruses and resistant diseases, the threat of nuclear holocaust, overpopulation, and the likelihood of globally interconnected financial disaster.

Yes, the end of the world is near. And the end of all things is the return of Jesus. What happens after that? According to the prophet Isaiah God will make a new heaven and a new earth and all sin will be destroyed.²¹

Do we know when the climax will be? Jesus answers that himself in Matthew chapter 24 verse 36:

36 "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

The big question for us is will we share in the fate of the earth and millions of people who don't care about God or His laws of love? Jesus tells us there will be two groups of people in the last days: those who prepare for it and are ready for his coming, and those who make no preparations and are lost. Here are Jesus words in Matthew chapter 24 verses 42-51:

*42 Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 Therefore **you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.** 45 "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? 46 Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.*

²¹ Isaiah 66:22

47 Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. 48 But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' 49 and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, 50 the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know 51 and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

In describing the earth's destruction, Jesus uses some of the strongest words in his entire ministry. He wants to tell us, "this is a life and death matter." Beware!

On February 13, 2011 a cargo ship named the Beşiktaş crashed with its crew into the coast of Sochi during a wild, level 4 storm. The ship broke in two when it was thrust by huge waves onto the rocky shore. Out of the twelve men onboard, two were never found.

The ship crashed at about seven in the morning. Why? Two sad facts reveal that no one had to die.

Firstly, the agency Turkey Sea News, reports that while the storm raged, "all the crew were asleep." Secondly, according to the Russian Federal Agency for Marine and River Transport, "The captain of the vessel had been warned in advance about the impending storm, but decided to stay on his course."

With winds up to 200 km per hour, why did they not obey the warning? And once the warning had been issued, why did everyone sleep?

Jesus gives us clear warning of an impending storm of geo-political, natural, and supernatural proportions. We see on the horizon seismic waves of earthquakes, disease, war, moral and political unrest. Is there any reason we wouldn't want to stay awake?

Jesus invites us to change our fate by "staying awake." It is an invitation to a different life. A very real and vibrant road that goes against the current of the world's interest. Let us leave behind mate-

rial, carnal, and selfish interests. Let us heed the warnings that have been given to us. Let's put our trust in the Good Shepherd and partake of the Bread of Life so that we can receive the reward of eternal life, which is given to those who wait expectantly to meet Jesus in the air at his second coming.

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. What things do you see in the news which help you believe the world is coming to an end?
2. Noah preached of a coming global destruction for 120 years. Why do you think that people chose to drown instead of entering the ark with Noah and his family?
3. Did you notice Jesus did not invite us to prepare for the end of the world, but rather to prepare for his coming? Why do you think this is?
4. In what ways can you prepare for this moment?

7 THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMILITY

What trait most reveals if you are ready to enter the kingdom of God?

Have you ever known someone who was humble and polite but completely changed after they gained some position or office? Did you notice them becoming proud and acting as if they knew everything? Did they start thinking that nothing could be done without their authorization? What is it about being elevated to a position of authority that can change someone's attitudes and behavior? In your opinion does the statement, "Power always corrupts," seem true?

Our culture places a lot of importance on a person's position and status. People address officeholders as, "Honorable" (Sayın) and give them prominent seats at gatherings. Protocol demands they be served first. Sometimes they even have special cars and escorts. Officeholders have cultural prestige and status. They have power to give orders and expect others to carry them out. Let's face it, position is very important in our culture and people desire to have it. Unfortunately, power and prestige can seduce people to use the office for their own gain as well. In this lesson we will look at Jesus' surprising solution to the problem of power.

Have you ever seen the Kemal Sunal film called "The Trouble of Position" (Koltuk Belasi)? It serves as a fitting introduction to discussing the problems relating to power.

In the opening scene of the film, police officials and an ambulance from the insane asylum arrive at the municipality building with si-

rens wailing. They are met by the mayor's secretary who informs the officials that the mayor has gone crazy and turned the municipality into an amusement park (luna parkı). They approach the mayor who is so confused he doesn't even know what is happening. They take him away and the camera focuses on the mayor's armchair. Then the armchair speaks,

"This is the seventh mayor who has gone crazy. I wonder if I am the problem."

Kemal Sunal plays Zühtü Bey, a perfectly just man who works in the development department of the municipality. He turns down hundreds of thousands of lira in bribes from a contractor. His reputation as an honest man is mistaken for naivety, and the regional representative in the parliament and other party officials see him as someone they can control. They invite Zühtü Bey to become a candidate for mayor. Zühtü Bey's family is very eager for him to be mayor because they think it will bring them advantages in life. But they aren't the only ones. A jobless man who likes Zühtü Bey's daughter is confident that if they can get married his relationship with the mayor will provide lots of job opportunities.

Zühtü Bey accepts their request on the condition that he will not be asked to do anything illegal. Likewise, the parliament representative agrees as long as Zühtü Bey agrees to take instructions from him. Of course, Zühtü Bey wins the election.

As always, he shuns all gifts, praises, and special privileges. But, the people are shocked and upset. They have never seen a mayor who didn't accept accolades and special treatment. How could the life they are accustomed to living continue if the mayor won't accept bribes and gifts? Zühtü Bey goes about his business with strict integrity, shutting down illegal construction, hotels with health violations, ovens with light bread, and a gas station that is watering down the fuel. Naturally, the people are in an uproar.

The armchair is very proud of the new mayor because he is honest, doesn't accept favors or influence, and does his job according to the law. The armchair is hoping that Zühtü Bey will continue being just so people won't think he is the root of the problem.

The parliament representative hears the complaints and comes to visit Zühtü Bey. He says to him,

"What kind of a mayor are you that you are coming against the system? Do you know what party you belong to?"

"Yes," says Zühtü Bey. "It is DMDYP."

"Do you know what that stands for?"

"It is the "State, People, and High Organization Party." (Devlet, Millet Düzen Yüksek Partisi)

"No. It is 'The state is rich, the one who doesn't take from it is a pig party.' Every mayor has benefited from it. Get on the gravy train!"

"I have no desire to do so."

"You have to! The one who holds the honey licks his finger. Forget the law! Behave in such a way that neither the şış nor the kebab burns. I am ordering you to do so. You are the Sultan!"

Buckling under pressure, Zühtü Bey reverses his previous business-closures and the people are encouraged to go even further in their violations of the law.

Later, Zühtü Bey learns that the contractor he had previously shut-down and then reinstated gave his son-in-law a luxurious home and a summerhouse. As a perk of being the mayor's son, Zühtü Bey's son is allowed to live in a hotel for free. Do you think his wife was complaining? Not in the slightest, she was enjoying all the gifts they were receiving because of the favors Zühtü Bey did for others. In

the end, the city erects a statue for Zühtü Bey, he goes crazy, and tries to burn the armchair.

In the story, bribery, favoritism, pride, cheating, and lawlessness were all part of the current and desired system. Is it any different today? The love of position and its benefits is not unique to our culture. In Jesus' day, among his own disciples, this issue came up. In this lesson we will look at what Jesus said about power and leadership in the kingdom of God. Jesus will offer a solution that goes right to the heart of the matter. To keep that solution fresh in the minds of his followers for all time he began two new rites. Those two services illustrate the message of the gospel. We will begin reading about it in Luke chapter 22 verses 7-13:

7 Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed. 8 And He sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat." 9 So they said to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare?" 10 And He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters. 11 "Then you shall say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, "Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?" ' 12 "Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; there make ready." 13 So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover.

The Jewish people loved and honored the sacred Passover holiday. It was a time of family, fellowship, and national solidarity. Passover is a celebration of the Israelites' freedom from slavery and bondage in Egypt. Right before they left Egypt, God said He would kill all the first-born in Egypt, both of man and beast, and that He would execute judgment on the all the gods of Egypt. But God promised that He would pass over the houses of those who obeyed Him. As ordered, those who believed in God had to kill a lamb and spread its blood on the doorposts of the house. On that night the Israelites ate the lamb with unleavened bread. Why unleavened bread? The

Israelites were to leave Egypt so quickly they would not have time to let the bread rise. God commanded that the Passover be remembered and kept annually by eating lamb and unleavened bread as a memorial of their deliverance. It was this memorial meal that Jesus was eating with his disciples.

Jesus knew that he had very little time left to be with his disciples. He also knew there was a problem among the disciples that needed to be addressed. It was the problem of position (koltuk). Let's read about it in Luke chapter 22 verse 24:

24 Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest.

What would Jesus do to help solve this problem? Would he just ignore it? Of course not! The disciple's fight over who was the greatest showed that they weren't understanding one of the most basic principles of the kingdom of God: humility. Jesus had to correct this while there was still time. Let's read Jesus' response in John chapter 13 verses 1-8:

1 Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. 2 And supper being ended [KJV says ended but Turkish has the translation correct as "during supper"], the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, 4 rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. 5 After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. 6 Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?" 7 Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this." 8 Peter

said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."

The meal had begun. At that time, it was custom during feasts for a servant to wash the feet of the guests before supper. Because there was no servant there, the job fell to one of the disciples. However, none of the disciples took it upon themselves to do such a low and menial task. Perhaps they didn't want to appear less important than the others. When Jesus saw that none of the disciples were going to do it, He himself got up and silently began to wash their feet.

Peter was horrified at the thought of the Messiah stooping to wash someone's feet, even his own! What would you do if the President or Prime Minister stooped to wash your feet? Would you be a little bit uncomfortable? Would you think it was wrong for a leader to do such a thing? Would you try to stop him? For Peter, it was incomprehensible that a leader would serve others. Serving was for the "lower class." But then again, Peter wasn't about to leave Jesus' side. If his being a part of Jesus' life meant allowing Jesus to wash his feet, well then so be it! Let's see what happened next in John chapter 13 verses 9-11:

9 Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" 10 Jesus said to him, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." 11 For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You are not all clean."

It was customary for a person to completely bathe before attending the feast dinner. After taking a complete bath the disciple's whole body would not get dirty walking to the feast, only his feet. The disciples understood that. But Jesus was talking about more than physical washing and dirty feet. He used the symbol of washing to illustrate a spiritual lesson.

When Jesus said that one of them was not clean he was talking about spiritual defilement. He was talking about a disciple whose

heart was filled with sin and betrayal. The disciples had received spiritual cleansing through repentance and faith. They had already been baptized. But they had also listened to the suggestions of Satan from time to time. Do you remember when Peter came against Jesus when he learned of Jesus' impending death? Even now the disciples were arguing over who would be the greatest God's kingdom. They didn't need a complete spiritual regeneration. But they did need to be cleansed from wrong thinking and actions. Let's continue reading in John chapter 13 verses 12-17:

12 So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13 "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. 14 "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. 16 "Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. 17 "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

When Jesus created the new rite of foot washing, he gave a compelling example of what true leadership is all about. **The ordinance of foot washing is a reminder and symbol that humility is the core of God's kingdom.** But let us not forget that humble service is not just the bottom rung of a ladder to leadership. **It is the foundation upon which a godly house of leadership is built.** According to Jesus, if we want to be good leaders we better be ready to wash one another's feet, both physically and spiritually.

When we literally wash each other's feet, it displays the truth that none of us are greater than the other and that we have taken on the humble nature of Jesus Christ. How do we cleanse each other's feet spiritually? Quite simply, we forgive the transgressions they have made against us. **Only a humble person can admit they need to be saved and forgiven; and only a humble person can forgive!**

Does the idea of washing feet seem repugnant to you? Do you squirm when you think about washing someone else's feet? Well guess what. It is this type of activity that shows we are ready to enter the kingdom of heaven. If Jesus, who acknowledged that he is "Teacher and Lord," stooped to wash someone else's feet, who are we to say that we are above such a thing? Jesus confirmed the lesson with even more words in Luke chapter 22 verses 25-27:

25 And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' 26 "But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. 27 "For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.

In our culture leaders don't serve. Leaders command and others do the work. That is exactly what Jesus said the Gentiles do and exactly what we should not do. **If we are to enter the kingdom of God, we have to have a completely new way of thinking and acting.** But how can we do it? We are told our whole lives, "position, position, position" (koltuk, koltuk, koltuk). To do, or believe contrary, means going against our culture and everything we have been taught about leadership. It is ingrained in our very thinking, no, in our very being. What can we do to change this? Fortunately, Jesus has a cure for this and it doesn't just consist of an outward ceremony of humility. It requires a change, from the inside out. We need to have new motivations that stem from a new spiritual life within. Jesus talks about that next in Luke chapter 22 verses 15-23:

15 Then He said to them, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 "for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; 18 "for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." 19 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to

them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 20 Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you. 21 "But behold, the hand of My betrayer is with Me on the table. 22 "And truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" 23 Then they began to question among themselves, which of them it was who would do this thing.

Jesus was creating yet another rite (or ordinance). It was the service of the Lord's Supper. This ordinance would symbolize how we can have a new spiritual life within. The Lord's Supper showed how we could have new motivations that spring from humility and not the desire for being first or in the best position. Perhaps you say,

"How can eating a piece of bread and drinking some grape juice change my motivations and desires?"

Of course, eating those symbols doesn't change us. They are only symbols. But the symbols have a deeper spiritual meaning.

Do you remember the lesson entitled "Bread that Doesn't Spoil" where Jesus spoke at the synagogue of Capernaum and said some strange words that were hard to understand?²² The crowd wanted Jesus to do a miracle to prove that he was greater than Moses. They said that their forefathers had eaten the manna in the wilderness for 40 years, insinuating that Jesus needed to perform an even greater miracle if he wanted them to believe him.

Jesus replied in this way,

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead."²³

22 Fate Changer Book 4 lesson 16

23 John 6:47-49

The bread the Israelites ate in the desert gave them physical nourishment, but it did not give them eternal life. Jesus was promising eternal life to those who believed in him. And he added a statement that indicated that he would have to die to provide this salvation from eternal death. He said,

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."²⁴

Jesus was not talking about eating his literal flesh. He made this point clear when he said,

"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."²⁵

At the last supper, when Jesus told the disciples to eat the bread, which was his body, he was using the same symbolic language. Jesus had said he would give his body for the life of the world and the Spirit provides the life. Jesus also said that the words he spoke are spirit and life. Putting those two ideas together we see that living by the words of Jesus provides life through the Spirit. This is the power that overcomes the desire to be first in everything.

Jesus said that the grape juice would be, "the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you." The word "blood" also points to Jesus' death for us. Let's consider a blood covenant in the following story.

Seven year-old Melek and her best friend Nur were sitting in the park one day.

"You are my best friend ever," Melek said looking intently at her friend.

24 John 6:51

25 John 6:63

"And you are my friend forever," said Nur. "Why don't we become blood-sisters?"

"O.K." said Melek. "How do we do it?"

"To be blood-sisters we have to mix our blood as a pledge to each other forever."

"Do we have to cut ourselves?"

"That's right."

So the girls found a sharp knife in the kitchen of Nur's mother and snuck out to the park again. Nur nervously put the blade to her lower arm and pressed till she saw the first drop of blood. Melek looked horrified knowing that she was next. But the desire to be blood-sisters with Nur was strong enough that she went through with the rite. After Melek cut her arm, they put their bleeding arms together.

"I swear to be your best friend forever," said Nur.

"And I swear to be your best friend forever," answered Melek.

Jesus made a covenant to be our savior and give us eternal life. He gave his body, that is, his life for it. He invites everyone to enter that covenant by baptism. When you share in the bread and grape juice of the Lord's Supper you are renewing your commitment, a pledge of solidarity forever. You are blood brothers with Christ.

We can go to Çanakkale to pay respects to the people who died to make our country free. By remembering the price they paid we carry an even deeper appreciation to preserve our homeland. Jesus set up a new memorial at his last supper. It wasn't the memorial of Passover. It was the Lord's Supper. By contemplating Jesus' death for us, we remember and appreciate the cost that he paid for our salvation. Thus deepening our commitment to him.

The solution for pride that corrupts leadership is Jesus' call for leaders in his kingdom to become servants like him. But this cannot be done with the natural heart. **We need to have the heart of Jesus living in us to make it happen.** How can we have the power of the humble Jesus living inside of us? It cannot be done naturally. It is a miracle. Just as physical food sustains our physical life, so spiritual food sustains our spiritual life. The piece of bread and grape juice are only symbols of taking Jesus into us. The real way that Jesus comes into us is by having faith in his word. We feed on God's word and call on God to give us the Spirit of Christ. It is the work of His Spirit in us that makes us humble enough to serve others with a clean heart.

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Why did Zühtü Bey fail at being honest and true when he became the mayor? Do you think a position (koltuk) can make someone behave differently?
2. The service of foot washing is certainly a humbling event. Do you think the service of foot washing is sufficient to make a proud person humble? If not, what do you think can make us truly humble?
3. Did the blood of Nur and Melek have any special power in it to make their pledges secure? If not, what was the basis of their commitment?
4. What is the greatest pledge a person can make toward a covenant? What did Jesus pledge for the covenant of salvation? What would your pledge be in the covenant of salvation?

8

THERE IS NO OTHER
WAY!

What did Jesus mean by saying, "I am the Way"?

Have you ever been driving in the city or the country side and gotten lost? What did you do? Did you look at a map? Did you ask someone for directions? Hopefully you weren't stubborn and just kept driving! Usually the easiest thing to do is to ask for someone's help. Unfortunately, sometimes their advice or directions aren't good and get you more lost.

The same thing can happen in the search for spiritual truth. If you are really seeking God and wanting to know His truth, you need to make sure that the directions you receive are correct. Moreover, you need to be sure that you are on the right road. In this study, we will learn what Jesus said about the path to God. As you read the following story, think about how it parallels the search for spiritual truth.

One day at work, Volkan decided to spend his lunch-break looking for a store so he could buy a new part for his broken oven. He knew the heating element was bad and because the warranty had expired he decided to fix it himself. He pulled the oven away from the wall, unscrewed several bolts, and took the back cover off. He removed the cover on the inside of the oven and took out the heating element. Now all he had to do was get the new part. The only problem was that the store was in a part of the city he didn't know well.

He knew that he only had one hour to get there and back. So with address in hand, he ran to his car and made his way across town.

Everything was going as planned and within 15 minutes he was in the general vicinity of the store. However, there weren't any street signs and the back alleyways were like a maze. He decided to park the car and walk.

As he was walking he saw a man carrying leather jackets who looked like he knew the area, so he asked him where the store was.

“Go straight for 200 meters, take a left at the key seller, and then a right after the electrician's shop. You will see it on the left,” he said.

“Thanks,” Volkan replied with confidence that this adventure was about over.

He walked for 200 meters, saw a key seller, and turned left. He continued walking but after a few minutes he started to have doubts.

“I hope the electrician isn't much farther. I can't be late for work. What if the man didn't really know?”

Volkan didn't walk much further when his doubt turned into shock. There wasn't just one electrician. There was a whole street full of electricians and between each shop were side streets!

“Of ya! I can't believe this. How am I supposed to know which street is the right one? Why do all these electricians need to be in the same place? I guess I have to ask someone else.”

Volkan went to one of the electricians and asked about the store, but he didn't know.

“At least he told me the truth,” Volkan murmured to himself.

He asked another man who told him it was the fourth street on the right. At this point, Volkan wasn't sure if he should believe the man or ask more people. He decided to ask a few more just in case he was wrong. Out of three people, one said that the store was on the left side of the street, one said the fourth street on the right was cor-

rect, and the third man said that the store was on the other side of the main road. As the minutes ticked away, Volkan began to lose hope.

“I am never going to find this store and I will certainly be late for work.”

He looked around, sent up a silent prayer, and just started walking. He looked at the address, picked a street, and turned into it. After 100 meters, he turned right, and started walking faster. After another 100 meters he stopped.

“This is crazy. I need to go back now or I will be late.” He thought to himself. “Why didn’t I just call service? Why did I trust that man? Not only am I lost I don’t have a new heating element. I better get back to work.”

Volkan turned around and started walking back the way he came. He was extremely disappointed and stressed that he would get in trouble at work. As he was walking by one of the side streets something grabbed his attention. He turned to get a better look and guess what he saw. The sign for the parts store!

Volkan eventually got his part and went back to work, albeit a little bit late. But just imagine how much easier it would have been if the man carrying the leather jackets had given him better directions. Or better yet, what if he had used Google Maps?

Volkan’s search for the parts store is similar in many ways to the search for truth. Sometimes we have a general idea of where to begin looking, sometimes we don’t. Sometimes we get good directions and instructions along the way, sometimes we don’t. Sometimes we meet people who can really help us. But it is also possible to meet people who act like they can help us and only end up leading us astray. In short, many people have found themselves lost and disappointed because they believed in something that turned out to be wrong.

Since we first started studying, we have learned many truths about God, the prophets, God's law, sin, the origin of evil, who Jesus really is, and what "messiah" really means. Hopefully the picture of God's plan in your life and this world is becoming clearer. Of course, there will always be questions and you may not always know what the next day will bring. But Jesus shared with his disciples a very special message about the path to truth that is still pertinent for us. Let's start reading about it in John chapter 14 verses 1-4:

1 "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. 4 And you know the way to where I am going."

The beginning of Jesus' message is very simple. Don't worry! Like Abraham, believe and trust God. Jesus knew the disciples were scared about what he had been telling them for months. He knew that the religious leaders who hated and wanted to kill him also hated them. He knew that his death was inevitable and his time was running out. Therefore, it was quite natural for his disciples to be afraid and for Jesus to comfort them.

But more importantly, Jesus wanted them to be ready for what would come next. He was reassuring them that even after he died, he would return. From where?

It is obvious that Jesus is talking about heaven in these verses because that is where the Father, God, dwells. Jesus was telling the disciples that he would go to heaven and before he returned to get them, he would prepare a place for them.

But it is Jesus' last statement that is really intriguing. Jesus said they already knew the way to heaven. Do you know the way to heaven? Can you get there by car or plane? Can you use Google Maps to get

directions? No, of course not! You can probably imagine how confused the disciples were. Let's see what one of them said in verse 5:

5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

How can we know the way? Let's see how Jesus responded in verse 6:

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

There is only one way to heaven, through Jesus! **He is the only one who truly knows God because he is God's Word in human flesh.²⁶ He is truth because he never sinned and everything he says is true. He is life as evidenced by his ability to overcome sin and death and by God's own words.** Jesus the Messiah is the road map to heaven. If you follow his instructions you will arrive safely to your destination. Better yet, he is the road and if you stay on his path you will never get lost.

Jesus is not saying that he is one way among many or that he, like others, has a truth that can take you to eternal life. No! He says that **he alone is the way**. There is no other way, no one else! He is saying that every other religion, except the one he teaches, cannot lead you to eternal life. If someone claims otherwise, he is a false guide with a false map!

Jesus continued speaking in verse 7:

7 "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Jesus told the disciples that they had already seen a picture of their destination in him! During all their years together, the disciples were seeing God at work in Jesus Christ. In essence, Jesus was saying:

"In every one of my miracles, teachings, and actions you have seen the compassion, justice, and character of our Heavenly Fa-

²⁶ John 1:14

ther. Everything I have done comes from Him. If you follow my instructions, my words, you will not be lost anymore. You will reach heaven and see the Father.”

As the disciples listened to Jesus, they became excited that they too could be in control of their fate. Jesus painted for them a road to heaven, with a gate that was as knowable and approachable as the friend that was sitting in front of them. The conversation tantalized the disciples, who were eager to understand the intricacies of heaven and the way to God's throne. Even Phillip, one of Jesus' disciples, asked Jesus to be more specific. Let's see how Jesus responded in John chapter 14 verses 8-11:

8 Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. 9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. 11 Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

Let's look at Jesus' claim on the most basic level. What does Jesus have the power to do? He can control weather. He can cast out and destroy demons. He can give life back to the dead and heal diseases. He can predict the future and forgive sins. He can reverse a genetic disorder like blindness. He can feed thousands with a few fish and loaves of bread. Who else has the power to do all of these things? No one! **So when we put Jesus in a category with all the other prophets we are belittling him.** Unlike the prophets, he doesn't show the way to God because **he is the way to God!** If it weren't true, God wouldn't have endorsed all of his miracles and claims.

But there is more. Jesus said that if we stay on the right path (i.e., him), we too would do the things he did. Just as Jesus' miracles in God's name were evidence of his claims, our works in Jesus Christ

will be evidence that we are on the path to God. Let's continue by reading verses 12-14:

12 "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. 13 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

Jesus will empower you, he will guide you, and he will fulfill your desires. There is power in his name because of who he is. He is the Messiah, the promised seed of Eve. He is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham to bless the whole world, and he wants to bless us!

Is there additional evidence that we are on the right path, that is, following the teachings of Jesus? Let's read what he said in verse 15:

15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

If you are on the one and only path to God and heaven, you will follow Jesus' commandments like a child carrying out a parent's requests without arguing, complaining, or forgetting. Your obedience to him and his teachings will prove that you are on the right path and show your deep-seated love for God and what He teaches us through Jesus Christ.

So how do we keep his commandments? Is it through our own ability, strength, or will power? On the contrary, it will be through the power of Jesus Christ. Let's read Jesus' promise of empowerment in verses 16 and 17:

16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, 17 even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

Jesus said that he would send another helper or comforter. This helper is called the spirit of truth. If Jesus is the truth, then we could deduce that it is his spirit, also called the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that the spirit of truth would dwell with us and in us. The only way to have his spirit dwelling in us is if we know him. The only way we can truly know him is if we accept as truth the things that he says. So what would the Holy Spirit do? Let's read about it in John chapter 16 verses 8-13:

8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: 9 Of sin, because they believe not on me; 10 Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; 11 Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. 12 I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. 13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

In short, **the Holy Spirit will keep us on God's path.** He will remind us of Jesus' teachings and righteousness. He will convict us of sin and tell us when we are not following God's commandments. When times are hard, he will remind us that hardship, tribulations, death, and sickness will be destroyed, and that Satan has no power over us. Like an expensive GPS system, he will show us how to stay on the road of Jesus Christ so we can get to heaven and be with the father.

Let's finish by reading John chapter 14 verses 18-21:

18 "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. 20 In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 21 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

If you want to go to heaven, you have to be on the only road that goes there. Jesus said he is the way, truth, and life. **If Jesus is the way, there cannot be any others.**

Years ago, when the caravans were still transporting goods across Asia along the Silk Road, the travelers had to deal with many hardships. Of course, there were the logistical difficulties of having enough food, water, animal feed, and good weather. But they also had to deal with the constant threat of robbery by bandits and mercenaries. When they entered a gorge, crossed over a high mountain pass, or waded across rivers they were always on the lookout for bad men who had every intention to kill them and take their goods.

On one such journey, a caravan of several teams had made it into the Himalayan mountains. The road was rocky, steep, and dangerous. The weather was cold, and the wind blew strong. They had already come a long way and they knew the obstacles ahead. One of the hardest was an unavoidable canyon crossing.

"I don't want to go into that canyon. There might be bandits. What if the bridge isn't there?" one of the men asked.

"We don't have any choice. There is no other way to the other side. Other people have tried to cross-farther north and south, but high, snow-covered mountains block both ways. This is the only way, we need to get moving," the caravan leader yelled over the howling wind.

Under his lead, the caravan descended so far into the canyon that there was no sunshine. Eeriness enveloped the men and they couldn't wait to get out of there. After a few hours, they rounded a curve in the path and could see the raging river below filled with ice-cold glacier melt. The only thing across that river was a thin, swinging, rope bridge. It wasn't the type of crossing that any man would want to take thousands of kilos across. But there was no other choice. It was a reality that they all had to face. If they wanted to get where they were going, they had to cross the river using the bridge.

It isn't any different for us. If we want to be in heaven, we need to be on the right road and overcome all the obstacles in our way with what God has provided. There will be those along the way who want to steal our faith or trick us into going another way. They may attempt to put thoughts of doubt in our minds. But we must move forward in faith, trusting God and Jesus. God's endorsement of Jesus' miracles and claims proved that he was who he said he was. He is the only way to heaven and eternal life. **He is the only thing that can get you across that chasm called death and judgment. He is the only one who can guarantee you life. If you want to be in heaven, you need to be on the right road.** Trust in Jesus that you may have a place prepared for you in heaven!

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. When was the last time you got lost? What did you do? What did you do when you finally found your way?
2. Share some of the truths you have learned and how they have affected your life.
3. Why doesn't Jesus say, "I am one of several ways to heaven"?
4. Is God's promise to Abraham becoming clearer to you? How do you think God will bless the whole world?
5. Is there anything keeping you from believing everything that Jesus has said? Why?

9 FINDING PEACE AMIDST AGONY

How can you have peace?

Have you ever found yourself faced with a serious choice? Have you ever been stuck between two options with no clear way forward? Or even worse, have you been in a situation where the logical option seems to be the hardest and least desirable? It is times like these that our mind seems like a battlefield, with competing thoughts as the opponents. In this lesson we consider just such a moment in the life of Jesus. It was a battle between Jesus' desire to live, or die and fulfill God's will. Some of the strongest bonds we can conceive of on earth are love for country, love for family, and self-preservation. In a unique way, Jesus met all of these mighty forces at once. Would he win? What can we learn from his battle?

Ayşe despised the life she was living. After working all night, she boarded a bus. Although she had never ridden it before, she knew exactly where it was headed and she had a plan. It was 6:15 in the morning. She peered out across the Bosphorus. It was rainy and cold. The bus' foggy windows obscured her view and reminded her of the dull, gray reality that she wished was just a dream she could wake from. She had two small children, which she had not seen for over a month. It was no life for a mother, and certainly not the life she hoped for her children.

The children stayed with a hired “aunt” nearly 80 kilometers away. It was the only arrangement she could find in which the children

would receive proper care and nourishment. Ayşe earned enough money. Money wasn't her problem. It was that Ayşe was a night maid at a bar. From this work she earned over four times what a normal factory worker could earn on a day shift. But money wasn't everything; the job was taking its toll on her body and spirit. Her life hadn't begun this way, and now she was tempted to end it all. She dreamed of a different life where she could kiss her children every day and live without shame. But year after year that life hadn't come.

Ayşe's husband had died almost five years earlier in a freak accident when he fell to his death while building an apartment complex. He didn't die instantly, and medical attempts to save his life quickly consumed their small savings and wedding gold. They had begun to buy an apartment together on credit, and it was the only thing that gave her hope. She decided that she had to hang on to it at any cost. In another six years of working at the bar, she could have the house paid for. But, could she survive six more years? Why not get another job? Why not clean houses? Why not work in a cafe? The answer was simple; an ordinary job would provide her with barely enough to live on, and certainly no money to put toward a house. And then what would become of her children while she worked? If they went to daycare, she wouldn't have any money left after paying the bills to even live.

The city bus stopped and Ayşe got off. She spoke to herself as she walked,

“God forgive me for this work! And forgive me for killing myself. I have to do it.”

She didn't want to live such a shameful life anymore. Men would often squeeze her and touch her in ways that at first she didn't like. Now after five years of being without a husband, she found herself actually desiring their touch. This is why she wanted to commit suicide. She despised the woman she had become. For this reason

she thought, God would forgive her – she would die for an honest motive.

She walked sleepily, tearfully, but steadily toward the bridge. It was fitting that she should die on a bridge, at the midway point between two locations. She was neither here or there, living in suspended animation, a fitting symbol of her life, which was interrupted by her husband's tragedy. She would join her husband who had only lived half a life.

The rush of morning traffic had begun. Her plan was to leap off the bridge in front of a passing truck and end her life. As she looked down and watched the passing cars, her dark thoughts of death were soon flooded with memories of her beloved children. She remembered their births, their touch on her breast, their trust, their first steps, and their embrace. She watched the trucks pass by and prepared to leap in front of the right one. She shuffled her feet and loosened her grip on the rail. Death was only a step away.

As she closed her eyes to make the leap, suddenly a wave of determination swept over her.

“I must work to save my children! I must go on.”

Like a flash of lightning, an image of her children receiving the news of her suicide flashed across her mind.

“No!” she shouted.

Arriving home, she laid down on the floor. A stream of tears ran down the side of her face and filled her ears. She lay in silence. The tears wouldn't stop. She was hurting inside. She could almost feel her boys' soft cheeks and feel their tiny fingers in hers. It had been five weeks since she had seen them.

“Oh, God, help me!” she prayed. “Help me, what should I do?”

Ayşe's love for her children made her willing to do anything for them. She found herself at a crossroads between her values to be a

woman of dignity and to be a mother who provided for her children. She was carrying a load of guilt and a burden of sinfulness.

In this lesson, we will see that Jesus also suffered tremendous emotional stress. He had been telling his disciples for nearly a year that he would be tortured and hung on a cross. He predicted that one of them would betray him. Now, the hour had come. Judas had left the upper room where they were eating and gone to the high priests. For a bag full of silver coins, he would betray the master he had followed for nearly three years by taking them to Jesus. Jesus knew that only a few hours remained until they would come and arrest him like a criminal. With foreknowledge of impending danger, Jesus knew he was in desperate need for prayer.

With his dearest students, Jesus stepped out into the night air and walked to his secret place of prayer in a nearby olive grove. Although both Matthew and Luke give us a description of the event, they each provide unique details that give us further insight as to what Jesus experienced. Let's start by reading Matthew chapter 26 verses 30-39:

30 "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 31 Then Jesus said to them, All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. 32 But after I have been raised, I will go before you into Galilee. 33 Peter answered and said to Him, Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble. 34 Jesus said to him, Truly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times. 35 Peter said to Him, Even if I have to die with You, I will not at all deny You! And so said all the disciples. 36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, Sit here while I go and pray over there. 37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and in extreme anguish. 38 And He said to them, My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. Stay here and watch with Me. 39 And He went a little

farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.

Why was Jesus in “extreme anguish”? It is helpful for us to notice what he does not say. He doesn’t say that he is exceedingly afraid, nor does he say he is exceedingly worried. **Rather, he says he is exceedingly sorrowful.** In spite of being just a few hours away, Jesus wasn’t afraid of death or torture. He knew his mission and purpose. He was sad! What could make Jesus so sad?

Jesus gives us a clue to the root of his anguish when he prayed,

“Let this cup pass from me.”

What “cup” was he referring to? It was none other than the Messiah’s cup of fate. Jesus knew his fate was changeable and that he had a choice. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have brought his request to God. This begs the question: what was the Messiah going to do that would cause Jesus to be sorrowful? Let us review what the prophets wrote regarding the Messiah.

Do you remember reading about Abraham taking his son Isaac, to the mountain as a sacrifice? The boy did not feel the sting of the blade, but he was willing to. Ultimately, they sacrificed a ram in his place, a substitute for the boy. However, even after God provided a ram, Abraham had named the place, "God will provide." This was Abraham foretelling the arrival of a future substitute. God promised Abraham that in his seed the entire world would be blessed. **The sacrifice of Abraham’s son was not only a test of obedience, it was an acted out prophecy pointing to the mission of the Messiah.**

Almost 700 years before Jesus, the prophet Isaiah described what would happen to the Messiah. Let’s read his words in Isaiah chapter 53 verse 7:

7 “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”

Then, almost 100 years later, the prophet Daniel gave additional information about the Messiah. Let’s read what he wrote in Daniel chapter 9 verse 26:

26 And the anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing.

Between Abraham and Jesus, there is a bridge of time stretching for 2000 years. In that span of time, literally millions of sheep were slaughtered in faith as symbols of the coming Messiah. After 2000 years, the day finally came for the promised seed of Abraham to fulfill his mission and bless the whole world. The promised Messiah, **Jesus, would be a substitute sacrifice** just as the ram was a substitute for Abraham’s son. Do you remember what John the Baptist said about Jesus? While John was in the Jordan River baptizing repentant sinners, he saw Jesus approaching the riverbank. Immediately, he pointed at Jesus and cried out to the people,

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.”²⁷

Jesus was deeply grieved because his destiny as the Lamb to be slaughtered was about to become a reality. But let us not forget that it wasn’t a fear of death that made him sorrowful. There was something else that made him sorrowful.

The purpose of the lamb sacrifice in Jesus’ day was slightly different than the cutting of our holiday sacrifices or special gift sacrifices that we make today. Similar to us, they would always choose a perfect lamb, without spot or blemish. Surely Jesus fit this symbol as a sinless man, unlike the other prophets who were sinful and unsuitable for this mission. However there is a major difference between the sacrifices of today and those of biblical times; specifically, in regard to what happens before the animal is actually cut. The bibli-

²⁷ John 1:29

cal model of sacrifice requires the person making the sacrifice to lay their hands on the head of the lamb and confess their sins. It was a transfer of sin through confession. Symbolically, the lamb paid the penalty of death for the sinner's sin.

That night as Jesus was approaching the climax of his role as the Lamb of God, sin was being laid on him. Whose sins? Do you remember what John the Baptist said in John chapter 1 verse 29:

“Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”

Jesus was taking upon himself the whole world's sin. That means the sin of every human being, including ours!

The angel Gabriel also said that Jesus would rescue the whole world; it was his purpose. Prior to Jesus' birth he said,

*“His name will be Jesus for he will save men from their sins.”*²⁸

Now, after hundreds of years, the moment that all the prophets had spoken of and waited for was about to begin in the olive garden called Gethsemane. Can you begin to see why Jesus was in extreme anguish? He was the Lamb of God, and the sins of the whole world were being transferred to him. No it wasn't a fear of death that made him sorrowful, but the immense sadness of a holy man accepting his duty on behalf of a sinful world! In fact, taking on humanity's sin would separate Jesus from God and require God the Father to turn His holy face away from Jesus. That had to be sad!

Let's see what happened next in Matthew chapter 26 verses 42-45:

42 He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. 43 And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. 44 And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. 45 Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on

28 Matthew 1:21

now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

To help us better understand the harshness of this cup at the center of Jesus' prayer, let's read a verse from the New Testament book of Revelation which describes the judgment of the wicked in the last day. Revelation chapter 14 verse 10:

10 The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:

No wonder Jesus was in anguish. He was to drink the punishment of the wicked! **Jesus was receiving the sins of the whole world, and taking their judgment upon himself.** Just as the ram took the death that Abraham's son should have gotten, now Jesus was going to die and pay the penalty for the sins that we committed.

The prophet Isaiah proclaimed this very truth in chapter 53 verses 10 and 11:

10 "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin.... 11 He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

How could it please the LORD to bruise the Messiah and put him to grief? Because God wanted to put an end to sin, thereby ensuring the salvation of those who believed in the provision that He set forth. It was His will that Jesus' death pay the penalty for humanity's sin. Therefore, fulfilling the righteous requirements of God's law.

Did you notice the word "travail" in verse 11? Oh! Dear friends, when the spotless Lamb of God found himself in the place of the guilty, a place he had voluntarily accepted in order to save the world,

what must his soul have felt? How shocked his perfect nature must have been when in such close association with iniquity?

The transfer of sin had begun. Jesus felt its poison and was in anguish. He begged God,

"If there be a different way, let it be."

Yet he submitted to the will of God. The cup of God's wrath was about to spillover. The events of the next day fulfilled the prophet Isaiah's words:

*"The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."*²⁹

Now Jesus stood as the sin-bearer, the substitute accepted by Divine justice to bear the wrath we should receive. At that hour, heaven looked on him as standing in the sinner's stead and treated him, as sinful mankind had fully deserved to be treated.

Now let's read the description of the same event in Luke chapter 22 verses 39-44:

39 And going out, according to His custom, He went to the Mount of Olives. And His disciples also followed Him. 40 And when He was at the place, He said to them, Pray that you do not enter into temptation. 41 And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw. And He knelt down and prayed, 42 saying, Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me. Yet not My will, but Yours be done. 43 And an angel appeared to Him from Heaven, strengthening Him. 44 And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly. And His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Jesus didn't have the normal comforts of life to cheer him. The night was cold. His best friends were sleeping. But our compassionate God saw Jesus' need and faithfully sent an angel to strengthen him. The angel did not remove him from the fighters ring, but only gave

29 Isaiah 53:6

him encouragement. This was the frontline in the great war between God and Satan. God had appointed but one Messiah, born of a virgin, the seed of Abraham. He was to champion the mission to “take away the sins of the world.” It was Jesus who had fought demons and won, and who had brought the dead from the grave. It was Jesus who had combated Satan’s dirty work of disease by healing the sick and restoring joy. Satan had lost every battle. But now Satan saw these hours as his final chance in the war. It was one critical moment in which all would either be lost or won in the struggle for the soul of humanity. And so Satan assaulted the Messiah with every devilish weapon of discouragement his army of demons could muster.

Satan, the serpent of Eden, tempted Jesus with strong lies and delusions. He stood against Jesus, working to discourage him and tempt him to abandon his mission of dying as the Lamb of God. Again Jesus asked God if there was another way, but there was no other solution. The agony Jesus felt was beyond our comprehension as he was molested by the powers of evil who attempted to confuse his sense of duty. Perhaps Satan spoke to Jesus in this way,

“Art thou really called to bear the sin of man? Look at thy weakness! You are sweating, even now, great drops of blood; surely you are not he whom the Father hath ordained to be mighty to save; or if you are, what will you win by it? See what poor dirty ungrateful people you are giving your life for? Your best friends are asleep around you even now. Judas has sold you for the price of a common slave.”

Over thousands of years, the devil had mastered the art of tempting others. He succeeded in Eden and was now trying to tempt the world's Savior with thoughts as dangerous as hot coals. Jesus prayed more earnestly.

While Jesus was in prayer in that place of the olive press, the emotional weight he experienced was as if he were being crushed between two great millstones, the upper millstone of God’s wrath against human sinfulness and the lower millstone of hellish malice.

Surely the most terrible bitterness was this: soon his Heavenly Father would begin to withdraw His presence from him. That divine eclipse of the soul would continue until it was completed at the end of the next day.

Why must God's wrath come on him? Why did God punish Jesus so? Jesus had done no wrong. He had done nothing to deserve God's judgment. This is true. But **it is essential to understand that his perfect innocence is what gave his voluntary substitution the power to justify us!**

You see, no one can enter heaven because of his own good deeds. Unfortunately goodness doesn't cancel badness, no more than insurance money can buy back the life of a loved one killed in an accident. If it would, Ayşe would have bought back her husband after he fell from the building.

Insurance money doesn't buy life and good deeds don't buy eternal life. To do so would be bribing God to break his own law. The Law of God demands retribution for sin. Even God keeps His own laws. If He didn't, God would be a lawbreaker. The "mercy" many are hoping for, is really asking God to become a lawbreaker. God doesn't bend rules. However, in his infinite wisdom he created a solution for sin through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the only perfect human to have ever walked on this earth.

There is just one penalty for violating God's law: eternal death. It doesn't matter how big a sin you commit. The penalty for lying is the same as the penalty for murder. The price of all lawbreaking in the Kingdom of Heaven is reasonable because it is the only way heaven can remain pure and our universe can finally become pure. In a very real sense Jesus was buying our entrance into heaven. In the Garden of Gethsemane, it was as if he were becoming all the sinners in the world, and as if He had committed our sins. The entirety of sin was laid on him, and thus so too was its penalty. Therefore, he was about to experience its wrath by taking upon himself guilt that rightfully belonged to us.

Jesus, heavy with grief, returned three times to check on his friends only to find them sleeping each time. But Jesus still loved them. Each time Jesus returned to his prayer and asked God in heaven to,

“Let this cup be taken from me.”

Three times the “cup” was put back to his lips. But Jesus still loved God. He had endured the bitter taunt of Satan and the sarcastic mockery of demons. Yet, his love for all of us drove him to press through this dark night. Finally, he stood up strong, prepared to accept the will of God. The man who had calmed the sea would march through the coming hours of vicious cruelty and torture with an unbelievable calm. Let’s see how Jesus entered those gates of trial as recorded in Luke chapter 22 verses 45-53:

45 And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow, 46 And said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. 47 And while he yet spoke, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him. 48 But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss? When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? 50 And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. 51 And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him. 52 Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves? 53 When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness.

Ayşe turned from the bridge and rejected suicide because of overwhelming love for her children. It wasn’t the easy road. Should Ayşe lose her home and be poor so that she can be with her children, or should she keep her home, live a life she hated, and be apart from her children? She wrestled with her options and knew that she

couldn't keep the house and be with her kids. After hours of crying she made a determination in her mind. She would try to sell her house. She would take back her children and raise them herself. She would move to Erzurum for a more affordable life, even if she had to work for a fraction of her salary. Harder times still lay ahead for Ayşe, but she had done what was right. She would be a woman of dignity.

She got up from the floor where her depression had thrown her and laid down on her bed to catch a moment's sleep. Sleep? Yes, the thought surprised her. A glimmer of a smile spread across her face. She realized she had peace! She could even think of sleep! She gazed longingly upon her children's pictures on the wall.

“How are you my children?” she whispered. “I will be with you soon. We will live together. You will be mine, and I will be yours. I will love you forever.”

Jesus wanted to avoid the agony of complete separation from God. He also wanted to please God in heaven and save the world. He could not do both. As Ayşe chose to suffer the loss of her home and a large salary in order to be with her children, Jesus chose to bear the sins of the world to save us. He entered the garden dreading separation from God, but He walked out of the garden with a calm power. He had struggled mentally and emotionally at a level we cannot imagine, but emerged with his determination sharpened and ready for the gruesome road ahead.

Still a man of peace, he healed the man's ear and told Peter to put back his sword because the battle Jesus would win would be won by love and gentleness to the very end.

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”³⁰

30 John 15:13

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. When doing the right thing involves personal suffering, how can we find strength to face it? How did Jesus find strength?
2. How was a lamb sacrifice related to the forgiveness of sins?
3. What was the “cup” that Jesus was to drink? What compelled him to "drink" it?
4. What hope do you find from this lesson?

10 FATE OR FREE WILL?

Does God write some peoples fate to be doomed before they are born?

Have you ever missed an opportunity? Maybe you said, "I wish I had known about that campaign, I could have gotten a better phone plan!"

Have you ever wasted an opportunity? Perhaps you have never thought about it, but there is a difference between missing and wasting an opportunity. When you wasted that opportunity, did you wish afterwards that you could have another chance? For example,

"I wish I had switched my phone plan during that campaign. My bill would be a lot cheaper right now. Why did I procrastinate?"

When you see good or bad events in your own life, or other's, do you think that the events were written down and sealed by God as your foreordained fate? If you view things this way, then all wasted opportunities are a part of your fate as dictated by God. There would be no choice in the matter. But is that really the truth? Can we choose our destiny or does God decide everything beforehand? Did God choose beforehand who will be saved and who will be lost?

In this lesson we will look at how two disciples of Jesus, Judas and Peter, made grave mistakes. We might say that they wasted an opportunity by making bad choices. In the end however, one of them turned from his wrong choice and was given another chance. The other did not turn from his wrong choice. These lives and the choic-

es of these two men become an object lesson to us about fate and how it works. To help us with this difficult issue, let's consider the following story.

Derya and Ceyda are sisters. Their father is a doctor, and their mother is a teacher. Both girls went to college prep high schools (Anadolu Liseleri). Derya always worked hard and got good grades. Instead of watching T.V. or hanging out with friends at the mall, she did her homework and studied for tests. She also went to tutoring schools (dershane) to prepare for the college entrance exams. Her hard work paid off, and she scored well enough on the ÖSS to attend her first choice, which was to study business at Boğaziçi University.

Ceyda, the younger of the two girls was actually much brighter. She scored well on placement exams for middle school and high school, but she didn't make good grades at all. In fact her grades were just above passing most of the time. She was constantly in trouble and arguing with her parents because of her grades. It wasn't that she couldn't do the work. She was smart. When her mother and father talked to her teachers, the story was always the same: she hadn't turned in her assignments.

She would get good scores on homework when she did it. But for every homework she turned in there were two that she just didn't do at all. So she got zeros. Her test scores also showed a lack of preparation. She constantly made excuses to her mother and father:

"I didn't know there was a test that day so I didn't study."

"I didn't know those subjects would be on the test. I didn't read those chapters."

Her parents tried everything to help her focus and work harder, from talking with Ceyda to restricting her television privileges. But nothing worked. Ceyda just wouldn't do her work, no matter what the punishment. She was also missing a lot of classes.

One day Ceyda's father and mother drove her to school and watched their daughter go into the building. Her mother suddenly remembered that she wanted to speak to the principal about something. So, she followed Ceyda into the building. She watched Ceyda go into the bathroom. The bell rang, and Ceyda didn't come out to go to class. Her mother said to herself:

"Let me just wait and see what she does."

After five minutes passed, Ceyda still hadn't come out. Her mom went in to see what was going on. When she returned to the car, her husband noticed the shocked look on her face.

"What happened," he asked.

"Ceyda went to the restroom and when the bell rang she didn't come out to go to class. I waited to see what she would do. I waited a full five minutes. She didn't come out. I thought maybe she was sick. I went in to see her."

"Is she okay? Is she sick?"

"No," her mother said staring blankly out the front window of the car. "She wasn't sick."

"What was she doing? Smoking or putting on make-up?"

"No. She wasn't smoking. She wasn't doing anything. She wasn't doing anything," she repeated. "She was just standing there. I asked her why she wasn't going to class. She just had an empty look on her face and she left."

Ceyda didn't pass the college entrance exams so her father and mother put her in a private college. But the story was still the same. Ceyda knew every program on television but didn't do her homework. She soon flunked out of school. At home her mother and father were always after her to help clean the house or prepare meals, but she would complain and find excuses for not helping. She was

either engrossed in some movie or listening to music. Ceyda's social environment shrank to just a few people and she never married.

Her mother and father spent a lot of time trying to understand why Ceyda was lazy and why Derya was so hard working.

"We gave both our children love and attention equally. The two girls have the same genetic input. They had the same opportunity to attend good schools. Ceyda is actually more intelligent than Derya. But she seems to hate work. She just wants entertainment," her father said.

Staring into her tea-cup his wife said, "In life there are three things: genetic heritage, environment, and personal choice. In my classroom I have seen kids from bad home environments that choose to work hard. They excel in class and accomplish everything they do. I have also seen kids with every privilege just waste their time and talents. Genes play a role. Environment is a factor. But the greatest factor is the choice we make."

Ceyda wasted an opportunity to get a college education. Her mother concluded that there were three factors that affected life: genetics, environment, and choice. But is there a fourth factor? Could it have been Ceyda's fate to be lazy and flunk out of school? Did God pre-ordain laziness to be a part of her life? Did He write it in His book before she was born?

We began these lessons wanting to know the conditions for, and possibility of, changing our fate. We examined nature and the scriptures to learn about God and what God might change in answer to prayer. We learned from His word and His actions the things that are predetermined in our lives and what God may be willing to change if we ask Him.

As we have read scripture, certain things seem evident. We have a fate that comes to us and cannot change. This fate includes where we are born and who our family is. But while the place and circumstances of our birth come to us as an unchangeable fate, the fact of

our birth has to do with someone else's choice, namely our parents. Although two people, Enoch and Elijah, were translated to heaven without seeing death, for most of us, death is a fate that is unavoidable. Beyond these simple facts we see that most of our life has to do with our choices.

The scriptures say,

"How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep -- so shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, and your need like an armed man."³¹

Ceyda didn't do her work and she flunked out of school. Will she be able to blame her parents for her lack of education or poverty? Most certainly not! In the passages we just read, the message is loud and clear: "**You reap what you sow.**"

Ceyda didn't listen to her parent's correction. Is that fate? Not according to the Bible. The Bible says,

"Poverty and shame will come to him who disdains correction, but he who regards a rebuke will be honored."³²

The choice is ours. If we obey, we will be honored. If we disobey, we will be shamed and bring shame upon others.

But there are things that happen in our lives over which we have no control. Although we obey the traffic rules perfectly, someone else can run a red light and hit our car. Is that our fate according to God's will? King Solomon had this to say,

*"I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill; but **time and chance happen to them all.**"³³*

31 Proverbd 6:9-11

32 Proverbs 13:18

33 Ecc. 9:11

Time and chance do not fall into the category of things we would consider fate as written by the hand of God. Rather, they are the result of probability in a world with millions of people whose movements are bound to intersect or collide. In addition, there are millions of factors like weather and other natural events that randomly affect our lives.

Now we must ask an important question. Will God change things in our lives as an answer to prayer? The answer is a resounding "Yes!" As an answer to prayer, God provided a spouse for Isaac³⁴, gave Daniel visions and dreams revealing the future³⁵, and influenced kings to give favor to God's people³⁶. By prayer Elisha caused his servant's eyes to be opened so he could see God's angels as an army of horses and chariots of fire surrounding and protecting them.³⁷ We read that Jesus worked miracles and changed the fate, the chances, and ill timing in people's lives. He healed the sick³⁸, forgave sins³⁹, and even raised people from the dead!⁴⁰ Your life can change and be changed through prayer!

In this lesson we will look at the story of two men, Judas and Peter, and show how each of them committed a huge sin. But the outcome of their lives was vastly different. One life ended in shame and the other in glory. We will emphasize once again a most crucial point: **God does not determine your eternal salvation or eternal damnation beforehand. He offers a way of salvation to us and we either accept or reject that salvation through the choices we make.** He does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked. He wants them to turn from their ways and live.⁴¹

34 Genesis 24

35 Daniel 2

36 Nehemiah 2

37 2 Kings 6

38 Matthew 4

39 Mark 2

40 John 11

41 Ezekiel 33:11

Let's pick up the story right after Jesus ate the Passover meal with his disciples. We will start reading in John chapter 18 verses 1-5:

1 When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered. 2 And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples. 3 Then Judas, having received a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons. 4 Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, "Whom are you seeking?" 5 They answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am He." And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them.

In the above texts we see that Judas betrayed Jesus. Did Jesus know that Judas was a betrayer? Yes, Jesus even told the disciples that there was a devil among them fully one year before the betrayal.⁴² Judas was the treasurer for the group but he was a thief and was stealing money out of the bag he carried.⁴³ In spite of this, Jesus permitted Judas to be among the twelve and gave him power to heal and cast out demons.⁴⁴ Judas was a witness to Jesus' self-sacrificing life. They walked hundreds of kilometers together over dusty roads and served the crowds from morning until night, often going hungry because there was not even enough time to eat. His heart must have burned within him as he heard Jesus preach the way of eternal life. With the other disciples he stood paralyzed in shock when he saw Jesus calm the storm. How could Judas not admire a man who healed the sick and raised Lazarus from the dead? Jesus loved Judas so much that he even stooped down and washed his feet. How could Judas find it in his heart to betray a man like that? If all that wasn't enough, Jesus actually told Judas that he knew he would betray him.⁴⁵ With all the evidence before him that Jesus was sent from

42 John 6:64, 70, 71

43 John 12:6

44 Mark 3:14-19

45 John 13

God why would Judas betray Jesus? Isn't that crazy? What could he hope to gain?

Judas betrayed Jesus for money.⁴⁶ We got our first glimpse into his treachery and feelings of betrayal when Mary anointed Jesus with expensive oil. Judas complained that this was a waste and the money should have been given to the poor. But Jesus' opinion was different. He said that Mary had done a good thing and blessed her for it.⁴⁷ Perhaps this gentle rebuke offended Judas. As we stated earlier, Judas was stealing from the moneybag. It seems that Judas' love of money was greater than his love for Jesus. This certainly is a lesson for us. No matter what talents we have, no matter what good aspects of character we may possess, **if we cherish a sin, that sin may lead us to greater sins.**

Perhaps too, Judas was looking for a kingdom of glory for himself. We know that he loved money. So what might he have thought when he saw the king washing his own feet? Maybe he thought,

"This is not the type of kingdom I want! I want riches and power, not humility and sacrifice!"

So what do you think happened to Judas? Let's find out in Matthew chapter 27 verses 1-5:

1 When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. 2 And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor. 3 Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, 4 saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." And they said, "What is that to us? You see to it!" 5 Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself.

46 Mark 14

47 John 12:7, 8

Did Judas repent when he confessed his sin? It is not likely considering he went and hanged himself. The priests used the money to buy the very field Judas hung himself in and it became a graveyard for strangers.⁴⁸ Jesus had said,

*"The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born."*⁴⁹

In the end it seems that Judas confessed his sin because of a guilty conscience, not because of true repentance.

Why didn't he just simply repent? Hadn't he seen Jesus forgive the lowliest of sinners? Wouldn't this same Jesus who was so humble as to wash Judas' feet, even when he knew that Judas would betray him, also forgive him of all things? Imagine the pain that someone feels if they are so hopeless that they would rather die than face the future. Why wouldn't he simply accept the love that Jesus offered him? Was it simply a matter of pride? Was it pride that led to Judas' suicide and ignominious death?

If Judas's confession was not true repentance, what does true repentance look like? We can actually see a perfect example in the life of Peter.

Peter was there when Jesus was betrayed. He was a proud, tough fisherman. He was used to depending on his own skills and strength while working long hours out at sea. He thought that he could use that same ability to remain loyal to Jesus and even proclaimed,

*"Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake."*⁵⁰

But Jesus' response was not what he expected to hear,

48 Matthew 27:6-10

49 Matthew 26:24

50 John 13:37

"Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times."⁵¹

Jesus' words of course were correct. When the soldiers took Jesus, Peter was there and tried to defend Jesus by force. Let's what happened in John chapter 18 verses 10 and 11:

10 Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. 11 So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?"

Now let's see how Peter handled himself a few hours later when he was accused of being a disciple of Jesus. We can read the account in John chapter 18 verses 12-17:

12 Then the detachment of troops and the captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him. 13 And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year. 14 Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. 15 And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. 16 But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in. 17 Then the servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also one of this Man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not."

Peter denied knowing Jesus. Why? Was he scared? This is the same Peter that had cut off the High Priest's servant's ear to defend Jesus. What caused the change in his outlook? Jesus had said to Peter,

51 John 13:38

"Satan has desired you to sift you as wheat." ⁵²

Peter proved to be a strong defender of Jesus in a physical fight. But Satan found a weakness in Peter when it came to scorn. His knife had no power over the girl's words. Peter's denial of Jesus was a serious offense. Jesus had said,

"But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven."⁵³

By denying Jesus, Peter was cutting himself off from God. Unfortunately he didn't do it just one time but three. Let's read what Peter did in John chapter 18 verse 25:

25 Now Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. Therefore they said to him, "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not!"

Jesus was arrested in early spring, and his trial took place in the cool weather of the morning. Peter was standing outside by the fire with some servants and officers. The fire illuminated the faces of those who were gathered around it. Each person looks silently at the others as their outstretched hands absorb the heat of the flames. Suddenly one of them shocks Peter by identifying him. Peter felt like they were all staring at him. He was uncomfortable and afraid. Without thinking he blurts out his response.

"I am not his disciple!"

Where was Peter's strong resolve to follow Jesus even unto death? What happened to his courage? Let's see what happened when Peter denied Jesus a third time in John chapter 18 verses 26-27:

26 One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" 27 Peter then denied again; and immediately a rooster crowed.

⁵² Luke 22:31

⁵³ Matthew 10:33

Jesus' prophecy had come true. We can see Peter's response in Matthew chapter 26 verse 75:

75 And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So he went out and wept bitterly.

Can you imagine this fisherman, skin tanned from being in the sun, hands rough from handling nets, now barely able to stand, shaking, overcome with abhorrence of his own self? He must have said over and over to himself in disbelief,

"I have betrayed my master!"

He could not have felt lower. But what did Peter do? Did he run off and hang himself in despair? Did He hide in a cave? No, he continued to be with the other disciples. How do you think he felt while among them? Perhaps he hung his head when they looked at him, ashamed to look into their eyes.

What kept Peter from giving up all hope? Was it his love for Jesus? It seems that Peter's confidence in himself was gone now. He knew that in a crisis of faith he could be a failure. So Peter wasn't relying on his own ability to love and be loyal. That couldn't be the secret of his repentance. Perhaps it was his confidence in Jesus' love for Peter! That was something he could count on!

There was good news on the horizon. When an angel appeared to the two Marys at Jesus' tomb, he said to them,

*"But go, tell His disciples and **Peter** that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you."*⁵⁴

The angel called Peter by name! Think what joy that brought to Peter's heart! He was not cast out! He was not rejected! His repentance was seen and accepted by God! Didn't Jesus say that when he was in front of God, he would deny those who denied him? Yes, but **repen-**

54 Mark 16:7

tance is the supreme choice that alters our fate! Judas rejected the chance to repent and ultimately lost his life. Peter on the other hand, seized the opportunity and changed his fate forever.

We looked at the lives and experiences of two people who committed great sins, Peter and Judas. One repented, the other didn't. One will receive glory and the other condemnation. It was their choice. **God didn't force them to make the choices they made. He gave opportunity to do what was right and left them to write their own destiny.**

What if the opposite were true and God chose some people to be condemned before they were even born? As an illustration, imagine that there is a festival for the fig harvest in Aydın. People from the surrounding villages come by minibus and car to join the harvest celebration. The people are trying to find a place to park and a policeman says,

"Park here along the street."

One of the visitors says, "It says 'No parking.' Are you sure it is okay to park there?"

"Yes," says the policeman.

The people return from the festival to find a fine on their car. Seeing the policeman they complain,

"Hey, what is this ticket? You yourself said to park here!"

The policeman answers, "Yes, I told you to park there, but it is illegal. I fined you for it."

"You are not only unjust, you are crazy!" declared the driver.

God does not make us do evil by writing it in His book of fate beforehand nor does He punish us because we did it. That wouldn't be just. Ceyda chose to waste her opportunities for an education. Derya took advantage of her opportunity. It was their choice. If we

sow figs we reap figs. If we sow thorns, we reap thorns. It is written in nature and in the Bible. We saw the principle of choice once again in the lives of Judas and Peter. No matter what we have done, God is willing to receive us if we choose repentance. What is your choice? Will you rely on your own power of loyalty to God or on God's loyalty to you?

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Did Derya refuse to study because she thought her sister was smarter than her? What does that tell us about the abilities we are born with?
2. Do you think Judas felt remorse for stealing money from the bag? In the end, how much wealth did Judas gain from betraying Jesus?
3. Sometimes people want to stop doing something wrong but they feel they have no power to quit. In light of Peter's experience, what advice would you give them?
4. It is both a physical law and a spiritual law that whatever we sow, we reap. What are some good spiritual things that we can sow?
5. The power of choice is the gift of God. What do you need to do to choose eternal life?

11 THE FATE CHANGER SUFFERED FOR YOU!

If someone else pays a debt for you is it a shame or a blessing?

When we think of the word self-sacrifice, what comes to mind? Do you think of a mother staying up all night to care for her sick child? Do you think of a father selling the family summer home to pay for his son's university education? It is true that both of these acts require self-sacrifice. What then would be the ultimate self-sacrifice? Yes, you were right! The ultimate form of self-sacrifice is much greater than laying aside our desires or wishes, doing something inconvenient, or selling something to pay a bill. It means giving up our own life for the benefit of others. Before we read about the greatest display of self-sacrifice in the history of the world, let's review a piece of history that we will never forget.

The weeks leading up to April 25, 1915 had been tense. The Turkish soldiers encamped along the Dardanelles knew that a major battle was imminent. They felt the first blows in February during a French and British naval attack on the northern end of the peninsula. This was followed by a major offensive in mid-March. The sounds of exploding shells, the cries of wounded soldiers, the blood stained soil, and grumble in their stomachs were constant reminders of the costs of war. Their supplies were low, food was being rationed, and ammunition was scarce. But they still held the high ground and had thwarted the enemy's attempt to cut the peninsula in half.

At the same time, on their boats and in their offices in faraway lands, the Allied Powers' morale was high and their victory assured. True, they had suffered great losses in the previous attacks. But they were confident that another naval attack supported by ground forces would open the way to Istanbul. So, they began to assemble their forces and make preparations in Egypt.

With very little intelligence and contact to the outside world, the Central Powers also began preparations. Unfortunately while the commanders of the Turkish forces were discussing their strategies a disagreement broke out. They didn't know where the Allied Forces would attack nor where they should station their troops. If they made the wrong decision it could be fatal. Although they didn't accurately predict the location of the largest attack they were able to prepare the beaches, build roads, and transport troops. But nothing could prepare them for what they saw and experienced the morning of April 25!

When the first beams of the sun's light came over the horizon, they could see hundreds of ships anchored in the sea. Soldiers were being carried to the beaches and alarms were sounding. The calmness of dawn and the sounds of chirping birds were drowned out by gunfire and cannons. Can you imagine how our troops felt when they saw thousands of Allied men approaching the beaches and hillsides from all directions? Add to that the fact that they had almost no ammunition. Many of the soldiers probably knew that the sunrise of April 25 would be their last!

Almost 2000 years ago, in spite of all that Jesus had said to prepare his disciples they too couldn't believe what was happening. The teacher, prophet, and man that they had lived with for three years was gone. He had been arrested in the night like a common criminal, betrayed by a close friend, and taken away like a prisoner of war. The dreams of an earthly kingdom were shattered. The expulsion of the Romans from Israel a passing thought.

In the middle of that dark, hopeless night all the disciples had fled in fear except for John and Peter. They had followed the temple guards to a secret meeting where the high priest planned to question Jesus. After a friend let John in, he witnessed the events as they unfolded. He was shocked to hear the priests' accusations and see that Jesus didn't fight back or even try to defend himself. Let's read his account in John chapter 18 verses 19-21:

19 The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine. 20 Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. 21 Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said.

In the field, on hill tops and mountainsides, even in the Temple Jesus openly spoke the truths that God gave him. He had no secrets or secret agenda. He had nothing to hide. His simple response was the only challenge he made. Jesus knew the law; **he was God's Word!** According to the Old Testament, even the priests needed at least two witnesses to convict someone of a crime. In essence, Jesus was saying

“You and everyone else know what I have been saying. If I have done as you claim, where are the witnesses? Go get them!”

If the high priest's voice tone and accusations weren't shocking enough, how do you think John felt when he saw the events recorded in verses 22 and 23:

22 And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? 23 Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?

A guard, a sinner, hit the sinless Jesus Christ in the face! Did you notice what Jesus did? He didn't hit the man back. He didn't yell. He calmly looked at the man and asked him why he hit him. We don't

get hit in the face very often, but sometimes people say rude things. What did you do the last time someone offended you?

With the same voice that calmed the storm and called Lazarus from the grave, Jesus could have condemned that man to eternal destruction. He could have called forth angels to kill him. But instead he asked the man to justify his actions. Jesus never developed sinful traits of revenge, spite, or hatred. He was a man like no other.

At the time, the Jewish authorities weren't allowed to administer the death penalty because they were under Roman occupation. Therefore they had to send Jesus to the local governor of Judaea, Pontius Pilate. Although Pilate had the ultimate authority to do as he pleased, he also had to keep the province of Judaea under control. Thus under constant threat of insurrection, Pilate became a master of compromise, a shrewd politician.

Let's see what happened when Jesus was taken as a prisoner to the high court of Pilate in John chapter 18 verses 28-32:

28 Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the Passover. 29 Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man? 30 They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee. 31 Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death: 32 That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die.

If there had been any doubt as to why the Sanhedrin arrested Jesus, there shouldn't be any now. It is obvious from their own statements that they wanted to kill Jesus. Sadly, they were so worried about remaining ceremonially clean for the Passover that they forgot murder is a sin! Let's continue with verses 33-35:

33 Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews? 34 Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? 35 Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done?

Sometimes reading these verses is like watching a bad movie. You just want to yell out,

“He hasn’t done anything worthy of death! This is God’s Word in human flesh. He healed the blind, calmed the storm, cast out demons, and brought the dead back to life. Can’t you see that Jesus isn’t an ordinary man?”

As for Jesus being a king, let’s look at how he responded to Pilate’s question. We can read it in John chapter 18 verses 36 and 37:

36 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. 37 Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.

It is clear from Jesus’ statement that he is a king; but not the kind that we typically think of. At the time, many Jews thought the Messiah would come to destroy the Romans and set up a new Jewish kingdom. But Jesus’ statement makes it clear that their thoughts were wrong. **He didn’t come to establish a worldly kingdom. No, he was focused on something greater, the kingdom of God which resides in heaven and on the new earth and in the hearts of all who love God.** Before we continue the story in Matthew let’s read verse 38 in John chapter 18:

38 Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all.

What is truth? We live in a time when people are more confused about truth than ever before. They say that truth is relative to culture, time, and living conditions. They say that what may be truth for you isn't for them. Well, water quenches thirst and bread nourishes the body. There is truth and it can be found.

In a previous lesson, Jesus said He was the way, truth, and life. **Pilate didn't realize that Truth was standing right in front of him!** Jesus was the exclamation point of all that the prophets had ever written. He was the arrowhead of God's efforts to eradicate evil from the universe. Truth was not only knowable, it was visible and alive in the person of Jesus Christ.

Now let's move to the book of Matthew and pick up the story again in chapter 27 verses 15-19:

15 Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. 16 And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. 17 So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" 18 For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. 19 Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream."

Pilate knew from Jesus' noble yet humble manner, that he wasn't a criminal worthy of the death penalty. He also didn't want to condemn a man that seemed so harmless. Sure his teachings were radical, maybe even spiritually revolutionary. But he hadn't hurt anyone or threatened the Roman Empire. As if that weren't enough, God spoke to his wife in a dream and warned him not to get involved

with this charade. Unfortunately, Pilate was already in too deep. As he stood there in front of the crowd he said,

“Who do you want me to release: Barabbas or Jesus?”

Barabbas was a member of the zealots who supported the use of violence to obtain independence from the Romans. In fact, he had led a rebellion and been arrested for murder. Who would you choose to free, the murderer or the sinless prophet? Seems like an easy choice to make. Let’s see what the crowd said in verses 20-23:

20 Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. 21 The governor again said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.” 22 Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said, “Let him be crucified!” 23 And he said, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Let him be crucified!”

Unbelievable! The people begged for the freedom of a murderer and the execution of a righteous man. Where was God? Why was he allowing this to happen? He was allowing this to happen because it was part of the plan that went all the way back to the Garden of Eden. A plan that was unfolding before their very eyes. We can continue reading in Matthew 27 verses 24-26:

24 So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.” 25 And all the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!” 26 Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.

When Pilate washed his hands, he thought that it would remove the guilt of condemning an innocent man. But as a leader he couldn’t do that. He too had a choice to make. In spite of the people’s request, he could have made the right decision. Unfortunately he was more concerned with pleasing man than following the truth. But then again,

Pilate himself didn't know what truth was. Sadly, if you read about Pilate's later life, you will learn that he committed suicide.

In verse 26, it says that Jesus was scourged. It is very important that we understand what this means. The Roman tradition was to whip a criminal before he was executed. The whip consisted of a handle with two or three cords. Interspersed throughout the cords were pieces of sharp metal usually zinc and iron. You can imagine what someone's back would look like after receiving several blows. His skin would be ripped off, his muscles exposed; he would lose massive amounts of blood, and be so weak he could barely walk. The only thing the convict would want to do is die. But the Romans would stop before that happened. They had to save the convict for the official punishment, crucifixion.

In the remainder of this lesson, you will read some shocking verses. Some people will say that this could never happen to a prophet of God. They believe that God would never allow it to happen. But we have seen time and time again that God's Word doesn't lie nor is any man strong enough to change God's word. What we will read are simply the facts. So let's lay aside our preconceived ideas, personal thoughts, and doubts. Let's read what the Bible says and try to see how the following events fulfill Bible prophecy. With honor and love for Jesus, let us reluctantly read verses 27-31:

*27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. 28 And **they stripped him** and put a scarlet robe on him, 29 and **twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head** and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 30 And **they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head.** 31 And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.*

Should we even attempt to explain what we just read? Five actions are highlighted in the verses above. The soldiers took off Jesus'

clothes, pressed a crown of thorns onto his head, mocked him, spit on him, and struck him. Remember he was already weak from the beating, hadn't eaten or drunk anything since the previous night, and was bleeding profusely. Can you imagine the pain he felt when they took off his clothes? There was probably flesh stuck to the cloth. Can you imagine the look of hatred, jealousy, and moral depravity on those soldiers' faces? What could make them do it? Sin! Although we don't want to admit it, **it is the same sin that is in you and me.** The same sin that makes us do the things that we regret and are ashamed of.

Jesus is God's Word and the personification of God's law and righteousness on this earth because he never sinned. When we violate God's law by sinning (e.g., lying, disobeying our parents, stealing, not keeping the Sabbath holy, etc.) we are mocking, spitting on, and slapping Jesus Christ! According to the Bible, the only thing that can atone for our sin is blood.⁵⁵ That is why our ancestors sacrificed animals. But the animals' blood didn't really make atonement for their sin. They were only a symbol of the ultimate sacrifice that would bless the whole world.⁵⁶ Let's see what happened next in verses 32-36:

32 As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. 33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), 34 they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. 35 And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. 36 Then they sat down and kept watch over him there.

In the Roman world, crucifixion was the worst punishment imaginable. It was reserved for the lowliest criminals. Therefore it was normal for people to watch the spectacle, mock the criminal, and serve as witnesses to the criminal's penalty. Jesus the Messiah, the

⁵⁵ Lev. 17

⁵⁶ Genesis 3

Good Shepherd, the Word of God, the Changer of Fate was the focal point of such a spectacle.

Jesus was so exhausted after the beating that he couldn't carry his cross the whole way to Golgotha. His shoulders couldn't bear the weight of that wooden beam and even if he could hold it, the blood on his shoulders and back would have made it slide off. He staggered, fell, got up, and maybe even crawled at times. He knew this was going to happen months in advance. He knew where he was going. But most importantly **he was going willingly!**

Have you ever hammered a nail into a piece of wood? You lift up the hammer while holding the nail with your other hand. As you bring the hammer down, you strike the nail head as hard as you can. The sound of steel on steel makes a loud ping. When the Roman soldiers stretched Jesus out over that wooden cross, they drove nails into the wood. But before the nails hit wood, they had to pass through Jesus' wrists and feet first.

We can't even begin to imagine how painful it was. The nails severed tendons, ligaments, and nerves. They were the only things holding Jesus on the cross as the soldiers lifted him up. As gravity pulled his body down making it impossible to breathe, Jesus would arch his back and pull with those wounded arms. Time and again, he pulled himself up just to get one breath. At the same time, people were walking by and taunting him.

Do you know what Jesus said when the soldiers nailed him to the cross? Let's find out in Luke chapter 23 verse 34:

23 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

Jesus asked God to forgive the soldiers, the priests, and the mockers! Pause and think about that for a moment.

In his time of trial, when he was being murdered, Jesus was concerned about his killers' salvation. He knew that the soldiers

didn't understand what was happening. In their eyes, Jesus was just another unruly, problem-causing Jewish man. Little did they know that by the end of the day, they would learn who he really is.

Let's continue in Matthew chapter 27 with verses 37-44:

37 And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." 38 Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. 39 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads 40 and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." 41 So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, 42 "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" 44 And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

Unfortunately this wasn't a bad movie or a made up story. Jesus was beaten, nailed to a cross, and ridiculed. If you could paint a picture showing the result of humanity's sin, it would surely be this image: **God's appointed Messiah nailed naked to a cross on the top of a hill.** Let's follow this story to its end by reading verses 45-50:

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" 47 And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." 48 And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. 49 But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." 50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

In the middle of the day the sky grew dark. For three hours there was no sunlight. After hours of agonizing pain, Jesus cried out to God. Through the years there have been many interpretations of Jesus' statement. But they all come to the same conclusion. Jesus was feeling something he never felt before. He felt alone and abandoned.

For three years he told people of his oneness with God. He likened God to his father and was constantly doing as he was commanded. But hanging on the cross, **Jesus felt like a chasm had separated him from God. He was no longer connected to the Source of Life.** In light of Jesus' clean record, that is his sinlessness, we have to wonder why. Jesus didn't do anything to deserve this punishment. Not once did he ever break God's law! So there must be another reason.

The night before, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked God if "this cup" could be taken from him⁵⁷. In the Bible, God's judgment is often portrayed as a cup filled with pestilence, wrath, and destruction.⁵⁸ If Jesus didn't sin, why would he be drinking from the cup of God's wrath?

This next statement might be a little shocking. **Jesus, on behalf of every human being, was experiencing God's full judgment of sin.** This is why he felt alone and separate from God. There can't be any other reason. Think about it! Jesus went to the cross willingly. He suffered the penalty of death for nothing more than being a righteous man. Just as the Israelites had to sacrifice perfect sheep, Jesus gave himself as a perfect sacrifice. John the Baptist called him the "Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world."⁵⁹ Jesus was the epitome of self-sacrifice. He was the last sacrifice, the one that had been predicted on the day that Adam and Eve first sinned. **He suffered the penalty of sin, so that we wouldn't have to.**

57 Luke 22:42

58 Psalm 75:8

59 John 1:29

On April 25, 1915 every Turkish man, woman, and child wasn't at Çanakkale. But they were in the hearts of every soldier that dug a trench, endured the cold nights, and stood guard. When the enemy began to climb the hillsides and defeat seemed a forgone conclusion, a young general stepped forward. He knew the enemies had more soldiers, better weapons, and abundant supplies. But he also knew that they didn't have something that our soldiers did; the desire to save what was rightfully theirs and to protect their people and homeland.

As the enemy was advancing up the hill, Mustafa Kemal was determined to hold them back. If they couldn't, the war would most likely be lost. There was no time to lose, a decision had to be made quickly. The 57th regiment had to hold the line until reinforcements came. But how could they do that when they had no ammunition and the soldiers were weak from not eating? There was only way, but it would be costly. The soldiers would have to fight face to face and stop the enemy with their bare hands. Perhaps their sacrifice would give the reinforcements enough time to arrive.

But how could he give the order knowing that mothers would lose the sons that they had nursed, raised, and entrusted to him? How could he send them to their deaths? Was there any other option? Which would be harder, to give the order to die or to carry it out? Yes, it had to be done. The whole nation depended on this action.

Mustafa Kemal turned to the soldiers of the 57th regiment, told them to return to the front lines, and commanded them to attack the enemy. He sent them off with this statement,

“I send you not to fight, but to die.”

How would you have felt to be one of those soldiers charging into certain death? Would you have been able to do it? If you believed with all your heart that you were doing something greater than yourself and that you were saving your family and your nation, you too would have run into the battle. What did the men of the 57th do?

They willingly ran to their death.

As God's Word⁶⁰, Jesus willingly left heaven, was born as a baby, lived a human life, and died on the cross. He was sent to die! He paid the ultimate price for your sin, separation from God, so that you could be with God.

Just as Jesus' birth was a supernatural event, so too was his death. Let's see what happened by reading Matthew 27 verses 51 and 54:

51 And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. 54 When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

The curtain that divided the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place in the temple was torn in two. **There was no longer separation between God and man. Jesus had finally paid the price for every person's sin and provided a direct path to the Father.**

As the sun turned black and the earth shook in salute to Jesus' last breath, one of the Roman soldiers who had gambled for his clothes recognized that supernatural events were taking place all around him. He looked up at the lifeless face of Jesus Christ and exclaimed,

"Surely this was the Son of God!"

⁶⁰ John 1:1

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. What is truth?
2. Do you realize that when Jesus questioned the guard about his actions, it was a form of judgment? Jesus said that he was given the authority to judge people's sins. What will you say when he asks you about the bad things you have done?
3. Jesus asked God to forgive the people who condemned and murdered him. Do you realize that he will ask God to forgive your sins too?
4. Do you see that Jesus' death was necessary? Why did he have to die?
5. Jesus died on Passover. Do you remember what the blood of the lamb did for those who spread it on their doorposts in Egypt?
6. How does Jesus' death forgive your sins? How could one man serve the penalty for someone else's offense?
7. Jesus the Bread of Life hung on the cross like a bag of bread hanging on a tree beside a dumpster. In the light of that image, does it give new meaning to the phrase "bread is a blessing from God"? Every time you see bread suspended above the ground, think about the Son of Man, the Bread of Life, who was lifted up and what he did for us!

12 HE OVERCAME DEATH!

Do you need a miracle? You have one!

There are very few moments in life that are truly unforgettable. As we age, memories of great business deals, high test scores, parties, and fun weekends with friends all seem to pass away. But, occasionally, there are shocking events that are etched into our memories forever. They are what we call miracle moments, times when sadness and joy meet head-on and tragedy becomes triumph. They are the moments when tears of joy flow because a person knows,

“I have been touched by an angel. God has visited me.”

Like a jolt from an electric line, these events shock us, wake us, and unexpectedly change our life course. In this lesson we will witness such an event. We will see that Jesus changed not just one life, but also the whole course of human history.

Anise was just 16 when she started to suffer from crippling stomach pains and developed lumps on her ankles.⁶¹ Concerned, her parents took her to a hospital. They were told that Anise had a rare form of leukemia and needed chemotherapy and radiotherapy. She also desperately needed a bone marrow transplant, to replenish the

⁶¹ This true story appears on the cover of the June 1990 Time magazine, and the November 1994 and June 2009 issues of People magazine. For ease of reading the names have been given their Turkish equivalents. The family's given names in English are Abraham and Mary Ayala and their two daughters Anissa and Marissa Eve.

red blood cells that her disease and treatment would kill. Without a transplant, Anise would die.

Anise's parents, brother, and extended family were all tested to determine if they could be marrow donors. But none of them were a match. Eventually, a donor was found. But unfortunately he backed out, leaving Anise's parents with a crisis.

“We were devastated,” remembers Anise's mother Meryem.

The only thing they could do was pray. Meryem recollects,

"Then I had a dream. In this dream I saw a child."

Immediately, she and her husband, Ibrahim, put all of their hope into a baby that wasn't even conceived. Could this baby save their daughters life? When they asked the doctor, he said there was only a 23% chance that a new sibling would have the same bone marrow. But they were determined to save their daughter's life and were willing to take the chance.

It wasn't an easy decision, or a simple 1 in 4 chance. Ibrahim had had a vasectomy and would need to have the operation reversed, which is not always successful. Meryem was already 42, with just a 40% chance of a successful pregnancy. Moreover, there was no guarantee the bone marrow would be received by Anise's body. The family knelt and prayed,

“Dear Father in heaven, we need a miracle. If it be your will, let it be. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.”

Now it would take great patience to wait for the plan to perfectly unfold. Ibrahim had his surgery; it was a success. Then a baby was conceived. The excitement of family and friends grew. The baby was healthy and growing normally. However, Anise's condition was worsening.

Seven months into the pregnancy, Meryem and Ibrahim were told the unforgettable news that the baby would be a bone marrow match!

With that grand hope now burning in their hearts the next several months passed by quickly. When the precious baby was born they named her Melis Havva and loved her immensely. She was not an ordinary baby because she had been born to save her sisters life! Then came an even bigger test of patience. The family had to wait 14 months before Melis was old enough to make the bone marrow transfer to Anise. Would Anise live to see that day? The clock was ticking.

Then the day came in August 1991. Doctors removed bone marrow with a long needle from little Melis' hip and gave it to Anise intravenously. Anise's condition began to improve dramatically. A short time later she was pronounced cancer free. The family was ecstatic.

“We felt like God had done miracle after miracle for us.”

Not only had God rescued one child but now they had a baby “hero” to love and adore.

Twenty years later, the two girls laugh and joke with one another. Their love for one another is stronger than we can ever imagine. Anise feels like a mother to her little sister. Melis has grown up with more love than anyone could ever hope for. Their home is filled with constant gratitude. For in a very real way Anise wouldn't be alive today if her sister hadn't been born. And truthfully, Melis wouldn't be alive if Anise hadn't had cancer!

If tragedy sets the stage for miracles, could there be one for the tragedy of humanity's moral degradation? We are most certainly a long way from the perfect plan that God established in Eden. What could God do to counter the greatest tragedy of all, our disposition towards sin? Allegorically speaking, would the world ever receive its bone marrow transfusion? To answer this question let's now turn to the scripture portion of our study. We left off last lesson with Jesus' tragic death.

The shocking events surrounding the crucifixion of Christ sickened his mother, disciples, and other followers. They stared with disbelief

and horror at Jesus' lifeless body. The meek miracle worker who had stunned crowds with his powerful healing, creative teaching, and mastery over demons now hung nailed to a Roman cross between earth and sky! What had gone wrong? They felt the darkness of loss overcoming their hearts like the unexpected darkness that descends on our homes when the electricity suddenly goes out during a storm. They had lost their light!

The earthquake that shook Jerusalem when Jesus died had ended. The sun, which had turned black while Jesus was in his last hours on the cross, was now coloring the earth again in gold as it hung low on the western horizon. But life would never be the same. Those who saw the torture and death of Jesus were unable to erase from their minds the look of Jesus' bleeding face and pierced hands. They had witnessed something unusual, cruel, and devilish. Yet, again and again, they saw in this tortured man a calmness, reassurance, and dignity that they had never witnessed in another person. The light of the world had gone out and the crowds went home hopeless and confused.

With Sabbath quickly approaching, the Jewish leaders did not want the criminals and Jesus to remain on their crosses. In spite of the fact that they had just killed an innocent man, they were worried that their bodies would desecrate the Sabbath's holiness. Let's see what they did in John chapter 19 verses 31-40:

31 Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. 32 So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. 33 But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34 But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. 35 He who saw it has borne witness--his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth--that you also may believe. 36 For these things took place

that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken." 37 And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced." 38 After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. 39 Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. 40 So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.

Joseph of Arimathea⁶² and Nicodemus⁶³ were wealthy and influential men, both on the Jewish religious counsel. Despite personal danger from the radical Jewish opposition, they boldly stepped forward to show Jesus' body the honor it deserved. Even though they were risking their reputations, their deed revealed that he had won their hearts and they would forever side with Christ.

Let's see what Joseph and Nicodemus did in Matthew chapter 27 verses 59 and 60:

59 And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed.

Perhaps you have seen some of these ancient graves carved into a mountainside. Similar ones are found in Myra and other places throughout Turkey. Inside the graves there is a stone bed to lay the corpse on. Did you notice Joseph gave his own tomb? The dead Messiah was laid in the very spot that Joseph had recently prepared for himself! **Perhaps we too should consider laying Jesus in the tomb prepared for us.**

Like an overcrowded government hospital lobby, Jerusalem was packed with people who had come to Jerusalem seeking Jesus' heal-

62 Luke 23:50, 51

63 John 3 and Fate Changer Book 4 lesson 7

ing touch. Now news traveled quickly that he was dead. A wave of sorrow and anger swept through Jerusalem. The violent revenge that the Pharisees had thought would be so sweet had already become bitter. Most assuredly the people were shocked at what had transpired. The only man who had ever healed blind men and lepers, the one who had restored the cripples' health and the deaf men's hearing, that joyous happy teacher who held the children on his lap was now dead and buried. What had they done?

We can only wonder what the Pharisees, the Jewish religious leaders, must have felt that Friday evening. They had rehearsed in their minds over and over the shameful, treacherous acts they had just committed. Some of the priests had stood by the grave of Lazarus and had seen the dead man brought back to life. Likely, they trembled with fear that Christ would himself rise from the dead and again appear before them. They certainly had heard Him declare that He had power to lay down His life and to take it again.⁶⁴ They remembered that he had said,

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."⁶⁵

Perhaps Judas told them what Jesus said to the disciples on their last journey to Jerusalem. Let's read those words in Matthew chapter 20 verses 18 and 19:

18 "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death, 19 and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify Him: and the third day He shall rise again."

When they first heard Jesus speak these words, they ridiculed them. But they were suddenly shocked to realize that up until this point, all of Christ's predictions had been fulfilled exactly! Now those words, "and the third day He shall rise again," haunted them. Could this

64 John 10:17, 18

65 John 2:19

also really happen? They wished they could shut out these thoughts, but they couldn't.

It is easy to imagine that the frenzy of excitement surrounding Jesus' torture appeared like snapshots in their minds. They remembered him calmly standing there without complaint, suffering their abuse silently. All the events of his trial and crucifixion came back to them with an overpowering conviction that he was the Son of God. If they were anything like us they must have had the haunting thought that he might at any time stand before them exercising the authority that God had given him, demanding justice for the sins they had committed.

In the midst of these fearful thoughts, they hatched a plan. Let's read about it in Matthew chapter 27 verses 62-66:

62 "The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate 63 and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' 64 Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." 65 Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can." 66 So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

A Roman guard typically consisted of sixteen men. These men were stationed around the tomb to prevent it from being tampered with. The priests did all they could to keep Christ's body where it had been laid. He was sealed securely in his tomb as if he were to remain there through all time. Which of course for any ordinary person is exactly where dead men stay. **But Jesus was no ordinary man!**

Little did these murderers realize the uselessness of their effort. In the end, God was glorified by their actions because the very thing they did to prevent Christ's resurrection is the most convincing

argument of its proof. The greater the number of soldiers placed around the tomb, the stronger the testimony that he had risen from the grave. By involving Rome, and a Roman seal, the Pharisees had in essence made a government document proving that Christ had died and been buried. If that seal were broken and Jesus appeared to others alive, it would also prove Jesus' resurrection and power over death. As can be guessed, Roman guards and Roman armies were powerless to confine the Lord of life within that tomb. The hour of His release was near.

Saturday night had slowly turned toward Sunday morning, the first day of the week. Christ was still a prisoner in his dark tomb. The great stone was in its place; the Roman seal was unbroken; the Roman guards were keeping their watch. Most certainly, evil angels, strongly interested in keeping Jesus dead, had to have been gathered about the place. Didn't Jesus say he had prepared eternal fire for them?⁶⁶ If it were possible, Satan, the prince of darkness with his rebellious army of evil angels, would have kept the Messiah sealed in that tomb forever.

But as God so often did through the ministry of Jesus, He was again about to interrupt Satan's plans. Let's continue reading by looking at Matthew chapter 28 verses 2-4:

2 And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.

All it took was one mighty, holy angel to move that stone. Perhaps it was Gabriel, who had announced Jesus' birth. Imagine him flying from the heavenly courts preceded by the bright beams of God's glory. His face was so bright that the soldiers became as dead men.

66 Isaiah 33:14; Matthew 25:41

We ask,

"Priests and rulers, where is the power of your guards now?"

Brave soldiers that have never been afraid of sword or spear are now bowing in shame before the God of heaven! The earth trembles at the angel's approach, and the hosts of darkness flee. Can you imagine the helpless soldiers watching the angel toss aside that great stone covering the front of the tomb like it were a pebble?

Three days earlier an earthquake marked the hour when the Messiah breathed his last breath, and another earthquake marked the moment he began to breath again. The soldiers saw Jesus come out of the grave. Here was the one who had spoken to Lazarus and who had proclaimed,

"I am the resurrection, and the life."

As he came out in majesty and glory, the angel host had to have bowed in adoration before the Redeemer, and welcome him with songs of praise.

As Christ came out from the tomb glorified, the Roman guard must have stared in amazement at him. Their eyes would have been riveted upon the face of the man whom they had so recently mocked. With fear they would have remembered how they had made him suffer. They would have remembered the crown of thorns and his lacerated back from the cruel scourging of their whips. As soldiers they had escorted him between Pilate and King Herod's halls, all the while taunting and spitting on him. This was the man they had nailed to the cross! They had heard the Pharisees sneering,

"He saved others, but himself he cannot save."

They had also heard Jesus say from the cross,

"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

Standing before them now, in power and vigor, was the very one who had died on the cross and been stabbed with a spear. So too in the last day when Jesus comes on the clouds of glory, many of those around us who rejected Jesus will tremble as they think at how casually they tossed aside his appeals to follow him.

In order to seal and secure the tomb the soldiers had officially observed his cold dead body wrapped in linen. **Now they saw him alive!**

Mountains piled upon mountains over his sepulcher could not have prevented him from coming out!

The Bible tells us that others came to the tomb early that morning and witnessed the scene. It was the women who were up early and were faithful to their deceased friend. We can read about it in Mark chapter 16 verses 1-7:

1 When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. 2 And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. 3 And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" 4 And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back--it was very large. 5 And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. 6 And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."

The record of Luke describes in fuller detail the same scene. Let's read from Luke chapter 24 verses 4-8:

4 While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. 5 And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do

you seek the living among the dead? 6 He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise." 8 And they remembered his words.

Their minds were racing with excitement. This was news too good to be true! News never to be forgotten.

Just like Anise, Ibrahim, and Meryem would never forget the joy they felt when they heard that the baby to be born was a bone marrow match, so too, the resurrection was a fact too good to be true.

Some have scorned the cross and resurrection story, attempting to discredit its validity. But the evidence and the witnesses speak for themselves. Four women and a guard of soldiers saw the empty tomb and the angels. The broken Roman seal testified that a miracle had taken place. The events were astounding and supernatural. Yet the evidence was right there in front of them. No matter what happened they could never forget it, erase it, or change it.

Matthew continues to describe the events of that Sunday morning in chapter 28 verses 8-11:

8 So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." 11 While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place.

Can you imagine the joy of the ladies who had come to the tomb to anoint his dead body? Now they embrace him and see his smile and the glimmer of his eyes. Can you imagine the soldiers running on trembling legs from the empty tomb? On the way it seems they pass the women and see Jesus a second time! With fear and amazement they race toward the city!

Where do you think they were going? Let's find out in Matthew chapter 28 verses 11- 15:

11 While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. 12 And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers 13 and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' 14 And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." 15 So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

What an unusual scene. Trembling with fear, these brawny men's faces are pale with shock. Their eyes bore the testimony that they had witnessed something beyond human reason. The truth poured out from their lips like water from a pipe. The soldiers explained everything, just as they had seen it. Their first excited and breathless words may have been:

“It was the Son of God who was crucified! We, we... we heard an angel declaring Him to be the M.. Majesty of heaven, the King of glory.”

Could the chief priests have been anything but stunned? Caiaphas was the high priest who had said,

"It is better that one man die for the people."⁶⁷

Now he must have been speechless. Can you see the anxiety on this man's face? If it were a movie, the music has stopped, and a foreboding silence hangs in the air of the great assembly chamber. Then there is the sound of the shuffling of the soldier's feet on the stone pavement as they turn toward the door. We can almost hear the voice echoing in the council room stopping them,

“Wait, wait, don't tell anyone the things you have seen.”

⁶⁷ John 11:49, 50

The priests then gave the soldiers a false alibi.

"Say, 'his disciples came by night, and stole him away while we were asleep.'"

Obviously, the priest's fear trumped their reason. How could the soldiers say that the disciples had stolen the body while they were asleep? If they were asleep, how could they know? Moreover, if they fell asleep while on duty they would be executed. And if the disciples had been found guilty of stealing Christ's body, would not the priests have been the first to condemn them?

Through the centuries men have attempted to discount in various ways the amazing life of Jesus Christ. The resurrection comes as an exclamation point that some men do not want to hear. Why? The death of Jesus is offensive and nonsensical to those who have not studied the Old Testament. And the resurrection seems impossible to those who only talk of the prophets but never read them. But as you yourself have seen through careful study, Jesus' death and resurrection are a marvelous culmination to everything God had foretold since Adam and Eve first sinned. We saw this in Abraham's sacrifice of his son, the wilderness sanctuary given to Moses, the prophecies of David in the Psalms, and Daniel's prophecies of world history and the Messiah's ministry. Actually, **the prophets' main purpose was to supply a road map to the empty tomb of Christ, the place where humanity's fate was forever altered.**

But why do men fight the truth of Jesus' resurrection? Here is the reason: even the rebellious and those absorbed in their own philosophies or religious ideas understand that there can't be two truths. If Jesus rose from the dead, then all that he said about himself must be true. The resurrection of Jesus Christ verifies that every belief system claiming to be a road to heaven without Jesus as its centerpiece is a false road.

Before raising Lazarus to life Jesus said in John chapter 11 verses 25 and 26:

25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: 26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

Isn't that your goal, to live again for eternity? **Jesus, who brought Lazarus back to life and conquered his own death, invites us to believe and live!** It is that simple. Why is believing in Jesus so important? Why is believing in Jesus strong enough to alter a person's eternal destiny? We will answer this question in full in the next lesson.

To the one who believes, that which has been lost through sin is restored. Just as through the medium of doubt Eve lost her place in paradise, it is through belief that we can regain it! The one who believes gains the right to eat of the tree of life. And where is life? Do you remember Jesus invited his disciples to "eat of his body"? Yes, life is in him. In symbol, we eat his body, with its resurrection power, when we believe what he said and who he is. He gives the life that he laid down to humanity so they can live. Jesus said,

*"I have come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly."*⁶⁸

He also said, *"Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst: but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life"*.⁶⁹

And in John chapter 6 and verse 54 he said,

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks My blood, has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day."

Jesus has life in himself and has authority to give immortality. He says it is granted to those that believe in him.

68 John 10:10

69 John 4:14

When Jesus was laid in the grave Satan triumphed. He hoped that the Savior of the world would never live again. But when Satan saw Christ stand up victorious, he knew with certainty that his reign of world terror had an end and that one day he would die an eternal death. If we side with Christ, we too can know for certain that the sin and evil in our lives will end and paradise will be our home forever.

Let's continue with a few more events of that royal day when Jesus conquered death.

The women who had come to the tomb early to see Jesus had gone to tell the disciples what they had seen. Here is the story in Luke chapter 24 verses 9-12:

9 and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, 11 but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12 But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

We all want to see evidence for ourselves. When Anise was told one year after the bone marrow transplant that her body had become cancer free, she was elated. But do you think she still wanted to see the blood tests herself? Absolutely! Even good news begs for evidence. So the disciples wanted to see Jesus for themselves. That evening they were given the opportunity. Let's read about their encounter with the risen Christ in Luke chapter 24 verses 36-49:

36 As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" 37 But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. 38 And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself.

*Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." 40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41 And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate before them. 44 Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that **everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.**" 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and **that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.** 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."*

It was an unforgettable moment. A jolt of surprise so strong the disciples would carry that memory the rest of their lives. In fact, perhaps the greatest evidence of the death and resurrection of Jesus is the willingness of all of these men to spend the rest of their lives proclaiming what they had seen and touched. They were tortured and suffered painful deaths, martyred for their peaceful convictions of what they knew to be true.

Jesus appeared again and again to his disciples over the next 40 days. In fact at one time he appeared to over 500 people.⁷⁰ For more details about Christ's time on earth after his resurrection, read John chapter 20 and 21.

One of the greatest stories of our modern history is that of Seyit Ali Çabuk (1889-1939), usually called Seyit Onbaşı. After serving in the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, he was transferred to the forts defending the Mediterranean entrance to the Dardanelles. Following the heavy naval bombardment of the forts guarding the Narrows

70 1 Corinthians 15

on March 18, 1915, the gun he was serving in the Mecidiye fort remained operational but its shell crane had been damaged.

Here is where he performed a feat of superhuman proportions. Seyit, with eyes on his duty to save Turkey, attempted the impossible. Seyit had his sights set on one deadly enemy, the HMS Ocean battleship. At 130 meters in length, armed with four 305 mm guns, and twelve 152 mm guns, as well as four 450 mm and an additional sixteen large guns, this ship was a deadly enemy. Seyit, seeing the need for action, but knowing the shell crane was broken, took matters into his own hands.

Seyit placed the 260 kg artillery shells on his back and hoisted them into place. To put this into perspective, consider Naim Süleymanoğlu, the world's strongest man for his size. The most weight that he has ever lifted is 152.2 kg in the snatch, and 190 kg in the clean and jerk! Yes, Seyit Onbaşı had performed the impossible. Whether he did it with his own strength, or with God's help we don't know; what matters is he did it!

One of the three shells Seyit loaded and fired, reputedly hit the British battleship HMS Ocean leaving it to limp to its demise, later being fully sunk by a Turkish mine.

What Jesus did at the resurrection was also something no human had done before or since. Jesus broke the power of death. The weight of death was greater than any human could lift. Jesus in one brilliant moment defeated the enemy.

Today, if you put all your hopes in Jesus, you will no longer need to fear death. Death doesn't have to paralyze us with fear. Jesus has carried the load and hit the enemy target squarely. The life hidden in Christ, though he dies, will live again. To the believer and follower of Jesus, death is nothing more than sleep, a moment of silence and rest. The scriptures tell us that when Christ, who is our life, appears the second time in the clouds, the graves will open and we will be together forever.

Do you remember when Jesus was on the cross and cried out, *"It is finished"*? His voice was heard among the dead! It pierced the walls of sepulchers, and summoned the sleepers (dead righteous people) to arise. Let's read those verses in Matthew chapter 27 verses 50-53:

50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. 51 And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, 53 and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

It will be like this when the voice of Christ is heard from the sky. His voice will penetrate the graves and unlock the tombs, and the dead who have believed in him will arise. At the Savior's resurrection a few graves were opened, but at his second coming a great multitude will come back to life. In fact, all the dead who have believed God's words will hear Christ's voice, and will come out to glorious immortal life. Just as Jesus said,

*"My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."*⁷¹

The same power that raised Christ from the dead will raise his people and give them a perfect body that will never die. The old will become young, and the lame will walk. Every trace of sin and its power over us will be gone!⁷² It is for this reason God has set Jesus above all principalities, above all powers, above every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in the world to come. **Jesus is the fate changer.**

⁷¹ John 10:27, 28

⁷² 1 Corinthians 15

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. The real life names of Anise's parents were Ibrahim and Meryem. Reflecting on their Biblical counterparts, how are those two names well suited to birth a "miracle child?"
2. Why were the Jewish leaders so intent on guarding the tomb?
3. Why did the disciples want to touch Jesus' hands and side?
4. What hope ought you to have for the future? What gives you the "right" to hope in such a way?
5. Is there anything keeping you from believing in Jesus' death and resurrection?
6. How was Jesus' death part of God's plan?

13 LET YOUR EYES BE OPEN!

What would Jesus tell you, if you had a private conversation with him?

When you were a child, did you ever have a hero or someone you wanted to be like when you grew up? Maybe you had dreams of being a world leader, a famous movie star, or a powerful businessperson. Many young people want to be a champion athlete. They put posters on bedroom walls showing their sports hero in some moment of victory or achievement imagining it will be them someday.

But how often do we see pictures of sports heroes or movie stars practicing long hours so they can be the best in their field? Rarely do we see a leader and think of him/her studying all-day and night in a library or working fourteen hours a day in a menial job. Sometimes we hear the story of a successful person's early struggles, but most of the time we forget how hard these great leaders, sportsmen, businesspeople, and celebrities worked to be successful.

In this lesson we will see that Jesus had to suffer before he was glorified. In fact, it would have been impossible for him to be glorified without suffering. We will also learn that there were lots of eyewitnesses to both his suffering and resurrection, before and after the fact. To introduce our topic, consider the following story.

Gürsel looked over his son Selami's shoulder at the computer screen to see what he was so intently looking at. Selami had opened a web

site showing videos of Naim Süleymanoğlu's career as the king of weightlifting.

"What are you looking at Selami?" his father asked.

Ten year old Selami didn't look up from the screen and said, "Wow Dad, Naim Süleymanoğlu is not only a legend in weightlifting, he is Turkish!"

"That's right son. Look over to the left at the list of his accomplishments."

Selami looked at the list. Naim Süleymanoğlu became the first weightlifter ever to win three gold medals in the Olympics, first in Seoul (1988), then in Barcelona (1992), and finally in Atlanta (1996). He broke 46 world records and is the second of only seven lifters to ever clean and jerk three times his bodyweight.

"This is so cool, Dad. Watch this video as he wins medal after medal. Look how the people are cheering for him!"

The father and son sat enthralled as they watched a video of a million Turks gathering in Istanbul to greet Naim after he won the Olympics in Seoul.

"Wow, Dad, I want to be a champion like Naim!" Selami said.

"You need to get busy son!" his father shot back with a smile.

"What do you mean, Dad?"

"Look at this other website."

His father navigated to a website about Naim's training.

"Look here. Naim was lifting weights 6 days a week for a total of 22 hours a week when he was only 10 years old. At the time, he was lifting close to 10,000 kilos per week. In 1981 when he was 14 years old, every week he lifted 20,895 kg in classical lifts and 18,870 kg in assistance exercises. The following year

his intensity grew with his age and he worked out three times a day four days a week, and twice a day two days a week. That year he worked out 500 times for a total of 1180 hours. He was doing exercises that totaled more than 39,000 kilos per week. That's not easy son. That is a hard, disciplined life. He also suffered a lot personally."

"In the early 1980's in Bulgaria, Bulgarian nationalism was high and ethnic Turks were being forced to deny their culture and ethnicity by accepting Slavic names. Violence against Turks was very high. His neighborhood became a battleground. The communist regime tried to make his success as a weightlifter an example of successful "Turkish assimilation." But while in Australia, Naim Süleymanoğlu defected from Bulgaria and eventually came to Turkey. The Turkish government realized his dream of competing in the Olympics as a Turk by paying Bulgaria one million dollars to release him. Those certainly weren't easy days for him I am sure."

"What I am saying, son, is that while it takes talent to be a great athlete, it also takes grueling hours of hard work. People tend to focus on the fame and the glory, but for the athlete, it is a culmination of years of, well, suffering. There are no easy roads to being a famous athlete."

Jesus achieved the greatest victory that anyone can attain; he was victorious in the battle with sin. No one shares the championship crown with him. He is the only one who did it. Even though Satan tried to get Jesus to sin, he couldn't.

When we think of Jesus' victory as Messiah, we need to remember that he paid a big price for that victory. Jesus was tested to the point of death by crucifixion and through it all he completely submitted his will to the Father's. No one in the history of the earth has ever submitted to God's will like Jesus did. The Old Testament prophets wrote a lot about the suffering that the Messiah would go through in order to achieve this victory. Unfortunately that aspect of the Mes-

siah's experience went unheeded by the Jewish people and when the Messiah Jesus came and suffered, they would not believe it. They didn't want to believe it! They wanted a hero who was all victory and no suffering. But most great victories involve a price. For Christ that price was suffering and death.

There were eyewitnesses to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus just as there were eyewitnesses to Naim's victory in Seoul. There were also millions who watched Naim's victory on television. When Naim stood on the podium, he could not hear the television viewers' cheers. But they were still eyewitnesses to the event. Did you know there were some other surprising witnesses to Jesus suffering and death? To begin learning who those "other" witnesses were, let's read about Jesus' encounter with two people after his resurrection in Luke chapter 24 verses 13-14:

13 Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 And they talked together of all these things which had happened.

Have you ever walked along the road from the city to a village? The sun is hot on your face, there is no cloud in the sky. You kick a stone and it pops up a cloud of dust when it lands. As your mouth gets drier and it becomes hard to even speak, you wish you had some cool water. As far as you can see in front of you there is only asphalt. Twelve kilometers is a long way. It can seem like forever if there is no one to talk with. But when there is an interesting conversation, time can fly by. Jesus was about to shorten their trip dramatically. Let's continue reading in Luke chapter 24 verses 15-24:

15 So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. 16 But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him. 17 And He said to them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?" 18 Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, "Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened

there in these days?" 19 And He said to them, "What things?" So they said to Him, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 "and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. 21 "But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. 22 "Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. 23 "When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. 24 "And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see."

Wow! The conversation wasn't about the price of cucumbers or whether it would rain next week. It was on the greatest news of the day and indeed of all time. **The story was that Jesus of Nazareth was alive!** But had he not been crucified in front of hundreds of witnesses? Everyone saw him die. They all saw the blood flowing from his shredded, beaten back and nail pierced wrists. They witnessed the Roman guard drive his spear into Jesus' side. They saw the blood and water drain from the hole. There was no question about it. Jesus had died.

Let's read Jesus' response to them in Luke chapter 24 verses 25-27:

25 Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

What? When did the prophets say that the Messiah would suffer and afterward enter into his glory? Jesus added that Moses and all the prophets wrote things concerning himself. What might Jesus have

told them? What passages of scripture and which prophets mentioned him?

Surely Jesus would have started in the very first book of the Bible, Genesis, after Adam and Eve sinned. God knew that the serpent, Satan, had enticed Eve to sin. As a consequence, He said to Satan,

*"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."*⁷³

Perhaps the disciples were looking down, thinking deeply as Jesus recited that familiar text. Suddenly the light came on in their minds (perhaps jeton dustu) as Jesus explained that the Messiah was the seed of the woman, the one bruised by Satan. The Messiah would have to suffer to gain victory over the serpent. It said so in the first few pages of the Bible! They must have said to themselves,

"Why didn't we see that before? It was right before our eyes! We know that text!"

Then their thoughts turned to Christ hanging on the cross with nails in his hands and feet. They must have asked themselves,

"Could it be true that when Jesus was hung on the cross he fulfilled that prophecy? If so, how would a crucified Messiah bruise Satan's head, that is destroy him? The Christ would be dead!"

Before their question was answered perhaps Jesus reminded them of the time that Abraham was about to offer up his son as a sacrifice. God stopped him and provided a ram in his son's place.⁷⁴ Abraham had said to his son,

⁷³ Genesis 3:15

⁷⁴ It is interesting to note that the ram's head was stuck in the thorn bushes. Before he was crucified, the Roman soldiers pressed a crown of thorns onto Jesus' head.

"My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering."⁷⁵

Maybe Jesus tied this in with what John the Baptist had said:

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"⁷⁶

The story of Abraham offering his son was a foreshadow of an even greater event! God would offer His Son as a sacrifice for the sins of the world! The disciples looked at one another in amazement. They had never heard things like this before. The Rabbis had never explained the scriptures this way.

Maybe Jesus smiled to himself as he saw the excited looks on their faces. There was more to come! Perhaps he retold the story of the Exodus and how the destroying angel passed over the houses of those who by faith had killed a Passover lamb and put the blood on the doorposts of the house.⁷⁷ Those lambs were symbolic of the true lamb, Jesus, whose blood takes away the sin of the world and protects us from eternal death. Jesus had to have asked them,

"Isn't the book of Leviticus and the entire sacrificial system based on the principle that only blood sacrifice can atone for sins? Don't all those sacrifices, just like Abraham offering up his son, point to the suffering of the Messiah as a sin offering? Why else would God ask Abraham to sacrifice his son?"

Then appealing to their logic in a more precise way, Jesus probably told them Daniel's prophecy about the Messiah:

*"And after the sixty-two weeks **Messiah shall be cut off**, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined.*

75 Genesis 22:8

76 John 1:29

77 Exodus 12

*Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week **He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.** And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate."⁷⁸*

The Messiah would be cut off on behalf of others and he would cause the sacrificial system to cease! Jesus, as the fulfillment of all the sacrifices, brought the necessity of animal sacrifice to an end. The disciples' worldview would have been shattered. Hadn't they been taught all their lives that the Messiah would be glorious and powerful? Jesus could read the shock in their faces. But he didn't stop talking. Most certainly he shared the crown of all prophecies written by the prophet Isaiah concerning the Messiah's suffering:

*"Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. Just as many were astonished at you, so **His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men;**"⁷⁹*

*"He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge **My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.** 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.**"⁸⁰*

The scenes of Calvary flashed like lightning through the disciples' minds. Death. Transgressors. It was just as Jesus was describing from the Bible. The Messiah would die like a criminal. They saw it with their own eyes! Prophecy was fulfilled! Jesus really was the Messiah after all! Their confusion turned to joy because they understood that their hope in Jesus was never in vain. It had to happen that

78 Daniel 9:26, 27

79 Isaiah 52:13, 14

80 Isaiah 53: 11, 12

way! The Messiah's death paid the sin debt. But wait. Where was the new era of everlasting peace, righteousness, and glory? When would it come and how could the Messiah be its leader if he was dead? Jesus would have then reminded them of a psalm written by King David:

"For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption."⁸¹

The Holy One, that is the Christ, would rise from the dead even before his body decomposed. He would not stay in the grave. The disciples would have looked at each other and remembered the women who said that Jesus was alive. What if they were right? What if the Messiah had risen from the dead as the scriptures were saying? Unable to contain their excitement, they wanted to interrupt and ask questions. What about the glory of the Messiah? When would that be? Perhaps Jesus raised his fingers to his lips as if to say,

"Hold on, the answer is coming!"

Maybe Jesus reminded them of one of the quotes given above.

"Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high".⁸²

Somehow the Servant, the same Servant that would pour out his soul unto death for the sins of all mankind, would also be exalted. The prophet Micah also prophesied this hundreds of years before Jesus lived:

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting."⁸³

81 Psalm 16:10

82 Isaiah 52:13

83 Micah 5:2

Jesus would have explained that the coming Ruler of Israel would come out of Bethlehem. Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judah. Maybe the disciples looked puzzled and asked themselves,

"When did Jesus become the ruler in Israel? He didn't rule, he died."

The disciples hadn't arrived in Emmaus yet nor had they found answers to all their questions. The road was long, but Jesus was leading them step-by-step. Most likely he showed them a prophecy written by Zechariah:

*"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey."*⁸⁴

Can you imagine Jesus saying to them,

*"Do you remember when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, the week before he died? The people were shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest!'"*⁸⁵

Perhaps the disciples blurted out,

"When would Jesus the Messiah take the throne?"

Of course, Jesus would have answered with a promise that God made to king David:

*"When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."*⁸⁶

84 Zechariah 9:9

85 Matthew 21:9

86 2 Samuel 7:12, 13

One of David's descendants would have an eternal kingdom, not a temporary one like other kings. The prophet Isaiah repeated this promise:

"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this."⁸⁷

Jesus would have followed up this quote with another question,

"What descendent of David has had an eternal kingdom?"

Once again, Jesus would have answered the question with two more prophecies. This first would have been from Isaiah chapter 11 verses 1-10:

1 There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. 2 The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. 3 His delight is in the fear of the LORD, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears; 4 But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. 5 Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist. 6 " The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them. 7 The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together;

87 Isaiah 9:6, 7

And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. 8 The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. 9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea. 10 "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious."

King David's father was Jesse. So once again there was a prophecy about a descendent of David obtaining an eternal kingdom. The disciples knew it would be eternal because the wicked are slain and the world is free from violence and death. Jesus would have pointed out to them that the Branch would have the Spirit of the Lord upon him and judge the earth with justice, including the Gentiles. Jesus would have then filled in the picture with the following prophecy in Isaiah chapter 42 verses 1-4:

*1 "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. 2 He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. 3 A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. 4 **He will not fail nor be discouraged, Till He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands shall wait for His law.**"*

Suddenly through the haze of the setting sun these two men could see Emmaus and started to understand the meaning of the scriptures more clearly. The Branch and the Servant do the same things. They are one and the same person! **We know the Servant is Jesus because he is the one who suffered and died for the sins of the world according to the prophet Isaiah.**⁸⁸ So Jesus will be glorified and inherit the earth as his kingdom. When he inherits the world as his kingdom a new order will be set up and the wolf will lay down with the lamb. There will be no more death! There will be

88 Isaiah 52:13,14 and 53:12

no more crying! There will be no more wicked people. Evil will be destroyed! This is the eternal kingdom, and Jesus will be its ruler forever! He is the Servant who suffered. He is the Branch who is the king. Jesus said all this succinctly when he said,

"O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"⁸⁹

The disciples were most certainly jumping with every step as they heard the truth about the kingdom. They had no weariness in their muscles from the long road. Their hearts pounded and smiles were on their faces. Their journey seemed shorter than normal. If they could only have more time to talk and ask questions! Let's read what happened next in Luke chapter 24 verses 28-35:

28 Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. 29 But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them. 30 Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. 32 And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" 33 So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, 34 saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" 35 And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread.

Jesus appeared to his disciples numerous times after his death. It was a testimony to the truth of the resurrection. But for Jesus, the greatest testimony of his resurrection was not his physical presence among those who witnessed his death. You may say,

⁸⁹ Luke 24: 25, 26

"What could be more convincing than that?"

Personal eyewitness is important. But people can be deceived. People can spread lying reports. People could say,

"Jesus didn't really die."

They could say,

"It wasn't him on the cross."

Jesus did not want the testimony of his resurrection from the dead to be based on personal testimony alone. He spent time with two disciples opening their understanding to an even greater witness, the Old Testament scriptures. Jesus taught his disciples to trust them and rely on them. Every true prophet agrees with the previous prophets forming a train of truth. God preserved them as an uncorrupted source of truth. Jesus wanted the faith of his disciples to be based on the unchanging word of God revealed through the prophets. He wants our faith to be based on the Bible's testimony. In some ways it's like a signature circular. Consider the following story.

Erol went down to the notary office with Levent, the representative from his accountant. It wasn't all that sunny but he wore his sunglasses to hide the concern in his eyes. He was opening a market on one of the main streets in Erzincan. The economy had been fairly stable the last few years but there had been some scary changes lately. The dollar shot up and he knew what that meant, inflation. Would he be able to pay the rent? It was his first business venture and he was nervous at every step. What other unforeseen dangers lay lurking around the corner?

Levent was taking Erol through the procedures of opening the business. Erol didn't know what all the papers were that the official was shuffling back and forth. He watched as the official pecked away at the keyboard with amazing speed and accuracy, all the while using only his two index fingers. Erol hoped it would end soon as they breathed in the heavy smoke lingering in the air. He looked up at the

no-smoking sign and sighed to himself,

“Why don’t people follow the rules?”

The official startled Erol when he said, "Sign here and here and here and here, three times each."

"Wha... what? Oh! O.K. What am I signing?" he asked to the official.

Levent cut in and said: "This is a signature circular (imza sirkül-eri)."

"What is it for?" asked Erol.

"We need you to sign the paper many times to register your signature. Every time you sign the paper it is slightly different, but there are elements in your signature that are uniquely yours. Unfortunately, there are people who might try to pose as you and do official business in your company’s name. By comparing one of your signatures to the ones on this circular, officials can determine if the signature in question is really yours. You need to present this paper when you sign up for electric or water service and other official business in your company’s name. This helps protect you and your business from fraud."

All the papers were piled up and one by one they were stamped what seemed like a million times. Then the papers were taken to the chief notary who authorized each one with his own signature. It took a long time, but when they were done, the paper sure looked official! Erol hoped that all that effort would protect his company from fraud.

The Bible is somewhat like a signature circular. Each signature on the circular is slightly different but carries essential characteristics of the signatory. Each one of the prophets who wrote the Bible wrote in their own style. But since the Spirit of God inspired all the

prophets, their writings contain God's message, just expressed in different ways through the individuality of the writer.

Jesus explained that all of the prophets had written about the Messiah. We saw a few examples of that in this lesson. Although their writings differ in style and sometimes they used symbolic writing, we see that they were writing about a Messiah who would suffer, die, and be glorified with his own kingdom. Someone may try to spread lying reports or make false scriptures, but when we compare them to the Bible, God's signature circular, they prove to be false. How do we know? They don't carry God's message of salvation that points to Jesus as the Savior who would die for the sins of the world and be glorified with an eternal kingdom. If the reports don't agree with that they are a false signature!

Jesus wanted the disciples' faith to be grounded in the signature circular, the Bible. That way when hearsay, false reports, and false holy writings appeared they would be aware of the fraud.

There were many witnesses of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. There were the 11 disciples and their companions. There were these two disciples on the road to Emmaus. But the greatest witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus and to his role as Savior of all mankind were the prophets. We just compared the writings of several prophets and saw that their message concerning Jesus was the same. No one could have forged so many witnesses over hundreds of years to the point that their testimonies agreed. Shall we be as Jesus said, "foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken" or shall we receive the truth and be obedient to it?

— DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1. Naim Süleymanoğlu is one of the greatest weightlifters of all time. What do you think made him want to train so hard while maybe his friends were out having fun? Do you think it was worth the effort for Naim?
2. Jesus suffered greatly on the cross. What was the benefit of that suffering? Do you think it was worth it to him?
3. Erol learned at the notary office that people with bad intentions could pretend to be him. Was the signature circular a good protection? Why?
4. Why would someone want to say that Jesus didn't really die? What would you say to them if they asked you if Jesus really died?

14 WII YOUR FATE BE CHANGED?

Wouldn't you like to learn the seven steps to peace?

What promises can you confidently rest your life on? Some people have risked their life fortunes on business promises and have lost everything. Some people spend a lifetime following political parties and their promises only to be disappointed. Every-day we hear subtle promises from advertisers that their products will change our lives. But seriously, can a vitamin pill or toothpaste really change your life? Promises are often more words than substance.

But what if you were to receive a promise from heaven? Could you count on it? Would you orient your life around it and make it the foundation of your whole existence? Moreover, would you let it define who you are and will be forever? In a world of uncertainties, God is challenging us to accept His promise, believe it, and receive its eternal reward.

On December 28, 2009, the Turkish Government made a most unusual announcement. It announced that it would be formally requesting the return of the bones of St. Nicholas, better known as Santa Claus, to Turkey. The request was made to the Italian city of Bari, where the bones now reside.

Of course Santa Claus is a fictional character who travels the world and gives gifts to children at year's end. As the fable goes he has elves that work overtime somewhere near the North Pole wrapping

the gifts. Reindeer pull his magical, flying sleigh. The popular tale claims that he lands on rooftops and climbs down the chimney to deliver gifts for children around the world. You know the story. Maybe your children have wished this fat man dressed in red would visit your home. According to the legend, Santa Claus has a big list and is constantly checking it to see if girls and boys have been naughty or nice. If they boys and girls names are on the "nice" list, gifts are given according to their deeds.

What interest does Turkey have in Mr. Claus' bones? The truth is they aren't so interested in the fabled character. They are more interested in the real man of history that this silly fable is built on.

The true Santa Claus was named Nicholas and born during the third century in the village of Patara, near the modern small town of Gelemiş in Antalya Province. His wealthy parents died in an epidemic while Nicholas was still young. Obeying Jesus' words to "sell what you own and give the money to the poor,"⁹⁰ Nicholas used his whole inheritance to assist the needy, the sick, and the suffering. He dedicated his life to serving God by serving people. In modern terms, we would say he was one of the "honest Christians." People saw and appreciated his sincerity and while still a young man he was made the leader of the church in Myra. Nicholas became known throughout the land for his generosity to those in need, his love for children, and his concern for sailors who would come into port.

Under the Roman Emperor Diocletian, who ruthlessly persecuted Christians, Nicholas suffered for his faith by being exiled and imprisoned. After his release in 343 AD, Nicholas was buried in his church in Myra (modern day Demre.) Well, that is just the beginning of the story as far as his bones are concerned!

Around 1086, Seljuk Turks were pushing back the Byzantines across Asia Minor and overtook Myra. Taking advantage of the confusion, sailors from Bari in the region of Apulia, Italy seized the remains of

90 Matthew 19:21

Nicholas from his burial spot in Myra. The remains arrived in Bari in May 1087.

How did this man's real story devolve into a fable that the whole world chooses to perpetuate and celebrate? Well, that is a different story for a different time. But for Professor Nevzat Çevik, the leader of archeological research in Demre, it only makes sense that Nicholas' bones be returned to their original resting place. Prof. Çevik says,

“We should respect the wish of St. Nicholas to be buried in his home town.”

Antalya Museum Director Cumali Ayabakan told newspapers that people visiting the church in Demre have complained about the absence of Saint Nicholas' bones and said an empty grave means nothing to them.

“If the bones can be brought back to Turkey, they will be returned to the original grave,” he added.

In contrast to St. Nicholas' story, in the Bible we find that an empty grave means everything. Jesus' tomb has no bones, and for that very reason it has power to change lives!

As the legacy of Nicholas has turned into a fabled gift giver, we find that the story of Jesus has also turned into something it was never intended to be. Statues of Jesus, relics, and crosses are esteemed with magical and mystical powers. Towering cathedrals decked in golden images do a great disservice to the humble, sacrificial Messiah named Jesus. Wars and bloodshed fought "in his name" bear no resemblance to his real message or purpose. How did the pure and noble teaching of Jesus become overrun by so many false, even pagan, religious practices? That too is a different story for a different time. What we have pursued in these lessons is to know the truth of Jesus.

What can we know for certain about Jesus? Let's review the facts about the historicity of his death and resurrection.

- 1) Jesus' death and resurrection were seen by hundreds of eyewitnesses both Jew and Gentile.
- 2) The eyewitnesses were so convinced of the validity of Jesus' death and resurrection that they themselves risked and many lost their lives because they were convinced that Jesus was who he said he was and that the events of his life, death, and resurrection were true.
- 3) Several eyewitnesses wrote down what they saw and heard. Others told their remembrances to reliable men who wrote down the events of Jesus life.
- 4) Extra-biblical historians, both of Roman and Jewish background, refer to the historicity of Jesus, his life, and work.
- 5) Literally thousands of ancient manuscripts exist and are in agreement that Jesus died and rose again.
- 6) Copies of these written documents were scattered throughout Africa, Asia, and Europe allowing for greater verification of the original documents than any other work of antiquity.
- 7) The resurrected Jesus remains alive and has visited people in dreams and visions for almost 2000 years.
- 8) Testimonies of total life transformation through Jesus' help are too numerous to recount. Men and women addicted to alcohol, rage, and other addictions have been released to live positive happy lives.
- 9) Jesus prophesied of traumatic global events leading up to his second coming. Some of these have already happened, some are now happening, and others are soon to unfold.

Let's read Jesus' last conversation with his disciples in Matthew chapter 28 verses 18-20:

*18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.** And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Jesus told them that God had given him “all authority in heaven and on earth.” In other words, **if you have sickness, family, or personal crises, there is no other name with the authority to solve those problems except for Jesus.** Moreover, Jesus is not in his grave; he is alive! In fact he promises to be near us. He said,

“Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Parts of Jesus' final speech are written in several other places. Let's read the next part from Luke chapter 24 verses 44-53:

*44 Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that **repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations,** beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." 50 Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. 51 While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. 52 And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple blessing God.*

The thrilling moment of Jesus going up into heaven is described in more detail in Luke's second book called Acts of the Apostles. That book is a description of all the early miracles that Jesus performed through his followers after Jesus ascended to heaven. Luke wrote it for a man named Theophilus, probably a Roman official, who had showed interest in following the truth of Christ. We can continue reading about Jesus' ascension to heaven in Acts chapter 1 verses 8-12:

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." 9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." 12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.

Did you notice in this passage, and the previous passage, that the disciples were reminded of the promise of the Holy Spirit? Jesus had a great work for them to do, but first he wanted them to wait. They wouldn't be working under their own power, but rather the power of God.

When a couple is engaged it is a really serious promise. Jesus' promise to the disciples was just as serious. The engagement gift he had promised was the Holy Spirit. He had promised that God's Holy Spirit would come upon them and be an active, sweet heavenly help to them. So what did they do? The group of believers, which numbered close to 120, waited expectantly for its fulfillment. For ten days they gathered together and prayed. Let's see what happened next in Acts chapter 2 verses 1-4:

1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Do you remember first reading about the Holy Spirit in the story of creation? The Old Testament begins with these words in Genesis chapter 1 verses 1 and 2:

*1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And **the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.***

We also saw the Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism, when it descended from heaven in the form of a dove.⁹¹

Jesus had spoken about the Holy Spirit with his disciples in John chapter 14 verses 15-20 and 26:

*15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, 17 even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. **You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.** 18 "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. 20 In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

91 Matthew 3:16

The house where the disciples were praying suddenly began to shake. God's power was descending upon them. A mighty rushing wind shook everything in the house and the people's fear was quickly overcome with joy as they realized this was what they had been waiting for. This was the Helper Jesus had told them about.

Like Moses when he had seen the burning bush in the wilderness, God's spirit appeared as flames of fire. But most curiously, here, the flames of fire rested over the heads of each person in the room. It was as if Jesus' words were literally coming true,

"You know him (the Holy Spirit,) for he dwells with you and will be in you."

Later the disciples would learn that it was this Holy Spirit that enabled them to have the character traits of kindness, patience, love, and gentleness in their lives. The indwelling Holy Spirit would cultivate these character traits, like the sweet fruits of summer. It would also empower them to perform miracles and do deeds of selfless service.

As a result of the Holy Spirit's arrival, a remarkable miracle took place. Tens of thousands of devout people from many countries of the known world had made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. These were people who were both devout Jews and gentiles who had been converted to Judaism as a result of hearing the truths of the prophets. Early that morning many of them had come to the temple to pray and were amazed at what they heard. Let's see what happened next in Acts chapter 2 verses 5-12:

5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. 7 And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites and

residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, 11 both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians--we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." 12 And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"

That day each person began to speak in known languages that allowed them to communicate with all the different nationalities who had come to Jerusalem for the feast. Millennia earlier at the tower of Babel God had confused the languages for the purpose of slowing the spread of the knowledge of evil.⁹² Now, through the Holy Spirit, He was removing that obstacle so that knowledge of the Messiah could go to the ends of the earth.

Then Peter stood up in front of that great assembly of people and delivered this impromptu sermon with power and conviction. Remember, he was a fisherman! God's unique work is to take ordinary people and do the extraordinary through them. Peter explained to the international crowd how this miracle of language fits into the larger picture of God's plan to bless the whole world and forgive people's sins through the Messiah. We now read with interest Peter's full sermon beginning with the first section in Acts chapter 2 verses 14 and 16-20:

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. 16 this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: 17 "'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; 18 even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. 19 And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; 20 the sun

⁹² Genesis 11:1-9

shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

The Prophet Joel had foreseen that there would be a mighty outpouring of God's Spirit when many youth, even young women, would prophecy and have visions. Peter knew that while he was speaking, the very event that Joel had prophesied was in part happening. However it's greater fulfillment was still to come, in a day near the end of time.

Then Peter began his very direct appeal to believe in the Messiah for salvation. His next words show us a very profound truth. Let's read them in verse 21:

21 And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Here is the remarkable gospel, which Jesus had come to proclaim. Salvation is God's work, not ours. It isn't a difficult work of ritual. We receive it by "calling on the name of the Lord" with a sincere heart.

Peter is standing before this group of several thousand men. It's hard to believe this is the same disciple who only weeks before had denied Jesus for fear of the Jews. He is now filled with boldness. Though uneducated by formal standards, he has spent three incredible years carefully observing Jesus. Now he speaks his mind openly from conviction. The Holy Spirit has filled him, and he appeals to the men's sense of reason and their honest religious interest. Peter had seen and heard so much while with Jesus. How could any honest person reject Jesus' clear appeal to put their faith in him?

In the next part of Peter's sermon he clearly states that Jesus was sent by God. Secondly, he says that the Jews were directly responsible for killing God's man. Thirdly, death could not hold Jesus who rose from the grave. Let's continue reading his sermon in Acts chapter 2 verses 22-36:

22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know - 23 this Jesus, delivered up **according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God**, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. 24 God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. 25 For David says concerning him, "I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; 26 therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. 27 For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. 28 You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.' 29 "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, 31 he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. 32 **This Jesus God raised up**, and of that we all are witnesses. 33 **Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.** 34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, 35 until I make your enemies your footstool.' 36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that **God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.**"

Peter stopped his speech right there. This was a major crossroads for the carefully listening crowd. Had they not walked all their lives in the footsteps of their father Abraham? Should they accept Peter's words and thereby acknowledge their own guilt in crucifying Jesus? Should they acknowledge that God had exalted Jesus? The avoidance of personal and national shame was at odds with the personal

desire to be right with God. The sword of truth had cut straight to their hearts. Let's read their response in verse 37:

37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

A man must be big enough to admit his mistakes, smart enough to profit from them, and strong enough to correct them. The open, empty tomb of Jesus spoke volumes. They had all heard the stories of Jesus' remarkable, humble life and blessed miracles. They had studied the prophets and Jesus' life fit their prophecies precisely. Some had listened to his teachings. These were the people who had neglected Jesus, ignored him, postponed decision, and clung to their traditional religion. Now it all came clear to them how stupid they had been! Why had they allowed the Messiah to be killed? Why had they not sat and listened to this man sent from God?

Admitting your failure is extremely difficult, but in God's eyes it is essential to life. Burning with conviction they called out,

"Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter shot back an answer clear and direct. It is found in verses 38-40:

38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." 40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation."

The following is a story that typifies the experience of millions who have come to the same point as the crowd who listened to Peter on the day of Pentecost.

Deniz says smiling with a tea glass of salep in hand,

“Happy is he who can say I am a Turk.” And truly, I could say I love everything about Turkey.”

Waving his hand in a broad stroke he continues, “Everything about my country from the sea to the mountains, from the seasons, to the red poppies and white daisies covering the hills in spring. I love our olive oil. I love our history. I love our culture. I love our four seasons.”

Suddenly a crease comes across Deniz’ forehead as he glances down and continues, “I loved all of Turkey except for one thing, my discontent.”

Deniz, a 44 year old, professional accountant in Istanbul shares his experience openly,

“I have never lacked work. I am industrious. I have a fine family. My wife and two girls love me. My parents are still living. I have 450 relatives just in this area who admire me. But I carried a secret burden.”

Taking a sip of salep, “Perhaps it could be called a fear. I had a dangling uncertainty about my life’s purpose and end. I had this nagging sense that because God is orderly, for all nature shouts it, He would make some orderly way for a man to live with certainty about his future. I like things in order, and here was a thing I couldn’t clearly account for. Was God only a cosmic accountant measuring people’s good deeds against their bad deeds? Was He like Santa Claus in the sky carrying a list of who has been naughty and nice? No. I couldn’t accept it. If God were all-powerful, He would certainly use that power to make a better system than my scattered good deeds stamped over my wrongs. In simple kindness, I reasoned, God had to have a way that humans could go through life with a sense of peace about their destiny. Didn’t Abraham have that? Shouldn’t I too?

I had read over and over the words, "Peace at home, peace in the world," but as I thought more about those words, I couldn't help but ask myself, "What about 'personal peace?'" It seemed to me there was a third dimension of peace that was essential for peace in the world. I needed 'peace in me' before I could appreciate 'peace at home.' Where would I get peace?"

My story is too long to tell all the details, but **I found peace in Jesus Christ.**

Here, the whole picture of why I exist and where I am going, and who controls the judgment, and by what I would be judged all came into focus. I had always known about Jesus and admired him, for aren't we taught he is one of the greatest prophets? But I had not really known him. In fact if anything I avoided him because of the stigma my culture puts on being his follower.

But when I started reading the Bible, I saw for myself that just as clear as the stars have their orbits and constellations, and that the nervous system of the body is carefully woven together, God has made a plan for my salvation. It is as orderly and certain as the lines on my accounting pad. But it came with a price, Jesus Christ's death. I fell on my face weeping with joy and appreciation for God and his Messiah.

Don't get me wrong. I am a Turk. And now I am a Turk who has found peace in a living King. No, I don't bow to an icon of the man, or wear a crucifix, or light candles whispering prayers in his name. No, I have found that Jesus is alive, and at work, and that there is a real friend in heaven. God loves us and sent Jesus to communicate that love.

As I continued to study the Bible, I realized that I was guilty of breaking God's laws and deserved punishment. I wondered if God would ever forgive me. My spirit was crushed and burdened, godly sorrows flooded my heart, and actually for several weeks my silent pain increased. I felt hopeless in every way because

everything I had trusted in seemed to be slowly fading away.

But in studying the life of Jesus, in seeing the event of his birth, in hearing his own testimony about himself being the way, the truth, and the life, and in understanding him as the Good Shepherd, my heart was overcome with hope that I had never felt before. In a positive sense I gave up on trying to do enough good deeds to outweigh my bad ones. Instead, I began to see Jesus as my hero, in the boxing ring, fighting Satan and sin on my behalf. I began to inwardly cheer for him.

I will never forget the day when I read Jesus words in John chapter 14 verse 47:

27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

It was the third dimension I had been missing! Yes, “Peace within me, peace at home, peace in the world.” It was a promise from heaven to supply me with peace. How could I turn down such a wonderful offer?

I will tell you how a person can turn down a heavenly promise, because in an instant I nearly lost everything. I loved the Jesus I met in the pages of the Bible. But when I thought about accepting the gift of salvation in his name, I was overcome with a mixture of pride and prejudice. I am a Turk! Turks don’t follow Jesus I reasoned.

In a flash Jesus words came to my mind,

“I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.”⁹³

For an instant I saw myself with every other race, nationality, and people sinking on this ship of a dying world. Jesus wasn’t a Jewish savior, or the Christian’s Messiah, or only the Muslim proph-

93 John 12:47

et. **He was God's promise for the whole world.** Why shouldn't I take the gift! I am a Turk, and I have my right to that gift as much as anyone else! In fact this is the very freedom Ataturk envisioned, and our soldiers died for, the right to be a Turk who can think and believe, as he deems best.

Again my heart was at peace and back on the side of Christ. With no more emotion than a long look into heaven, I told God, "I receive your promise. Jesus you win. My life is yours." He has never left me from that moment and I have never turned back. What can I say more? I found true gold and it has changed everything in my life.

That is my story, now how can I do anything less than invite you to also believe and accept him as your peace? You have come a long way. You have seen God's plan, and heard his voice speaking to you. The pleasure of God is to save men through the Messiah. Let him be the substitution for your sins. Let him straighten out that which is confusing. Surrender yourself into his safe arms. He is the Good Shepherd you know. Be one of his sheep."

That story represents the experience of millions around the world who have found that Jesus meet's their greatest desire. It typifies the discovery of those who have taken time to read God's Holy Bible for themselves. These lessons have allowed you to journey through the old and new testaments and see God with new eyes. On the day that Peter preached his sermon, 3000 people saw with new eyes and received Jesus' salvation as the atonement for their sins. They began living a life free from guilt and shame.

We can finish reading Peter's story in Acts chapter 2 verses 41-47:

41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon ev-

ery soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Now it is our turn. This story has set an example for us. In a very real way, **it was our sins that killed Jesus because he came to the earth and paid the penalty for the sins of the whole world. It was our sins that put him on the cross, and it was our sins that he overcame at the resurrection.** All you have to do is accept these truths and God will forgive your sins forever, as well as give you the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said,

“Whoever believes in me, though he die, he will live again.”⁹⁴

It’s a promise from heaven. Will you take it? The invitation stands open. Here are the simple steps:

1. Kneel and speak to God as a kind Father.
2. Tell him you believe and accept his free gift of salvation through Jesus, His sacrificial Lamb. Tell him you would like to be part of His family, and join his family through the merits of Jesus’ sinless life.
3. Repent of your sins. List them out to God as much as you’re able to remember. All the evil you have thought, said, and done. Ask them to be removed in the name and clean blood of Jesus Christ. Beyond that, repent of the evil thoughts and desires of your heart that never actually became actions! Invite God to totally cleanse you. You may also repent of the good you have done, that you thought could substitute for God’s grace. Just as

⁹⁴ John 11:25

it would be an insult to be invited to a friend's house for dinner and leave 50 lira under your plate to pay him for the meal, so it is an insult to God when we try to do good deeds to pay him for the gift he has given us.

4. Ask for forgiveness and believe that it is yours. You are entering a covenant by legal contract, and whether you feel forgiven or not is less important than the fact that you have made a covenant with God. A baby born into the Sultan's palace may not have "felt rich" but it didn't change the reality that he was very rich. By accepting God's promise, you have become an heir to great wealth.

5. Thank Jesus. He is alive and listening. Consider him your big brother. Tell him you wish for his peace. Ask him to take your burdens, for he says, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

6. Read the Book of Ephesians in the New Testament and see what your inheritance with all the saints will be now that you have accepted Jesus and joined the family of God.

7. Talk to your instructor or a friend, or contact the Webmaster of these lessons to see how you can begin the next series of studies immediately. They will help to prepare you for baptism if you so desire.

— DISCUSSION  QUESTIONS —

1. Is Jesus' resurrection just one miracle among many, or is there something unique about it? Why is it different?
2. What promise had Jesus made to his disciples when he ascended to heaven?
3. What does God's Holy Spirit do for people?
4. If you found peace, as described in the Deniz story, would you tell someone else?
5. Why do you think Peter told the people to repent and be baptized?
6. Are you ready to pray and accept Jesus Christ as your Savior?

