

*How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?*

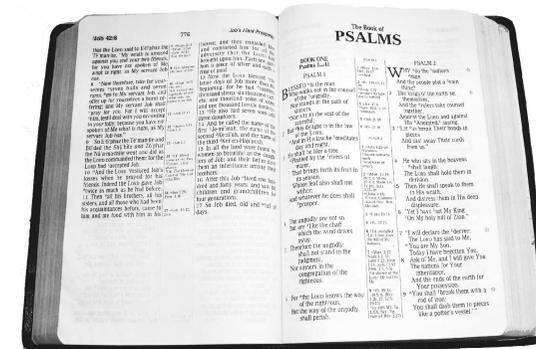
Some scoffers claim that there are contradictions in the Bible and that the incident recorded in these verses proves their case; they only prove that they are ignorant of Scripture. They say that in one place the Bible speaks of the feeding of the five thousand and in another the feeding of four thousand. These are, however, two distinct miracles and there is no contradiction whatever (see verses 18–20). Those who scoff at the gospel are very perverse and even miracles will not convince them (cp. Luke 16:29–31).

The Lord Jesus was still on the eastern side of the sea of Galilee. He told the disciples of his compassion for the people who had been with him for three days and were hungry. Some of them were far from their homes and he did not want to send them away hungry (1–3). The disciples had not learned the lesson of the feeding of the five thousand (6:30–44). They thought it impossible that the crowd could be fed with just seven loaves and some small fish. They asked, *‘How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?’* (4). Jesus went on to miraculously feed four thousand men, besides women and children, and seven large baskets were filled with the remains of the meal (7–9. cp. Matthew 15:38).

There is very little famine in the western world but the spiritual need is immense. There is a famine *of hearing the words of the LORD* (Amos 8:11). Religion without true godliness and power sends away the people and their spiritual hunger is not satisfied. Do you have any compassion for those who are lost? Are you concerned that they will spend eternity in hell unless they are saved through the Lord Jesus? **Are you seeking to share your spiritual food with those around you? Let this be your concern that you do not want to send anyone away from you still having unsatisfied spiritual hunger.**

# PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



**August 2015**

Bible readings from Gospel of Mark chapters 1 to 8

# MARK

30 AUGUST

Mark 7:24–37

## *He has done all things well*

The gospel of Mark is the shortest of the four gospels. The name of its author is not mentioned within its pages, but the early church fathers recognised Mark as the author. He is also known as John Mark; his mother, Mary, lived in Jerusalem and the church sometimes met in her house (Acts 12:12).

Mark was a cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10). He accompanied Paul and Barnabas at the start of the first missionary journey, but he turned back (Acts 13:13). He later became a worker whom Paul valued (Colossians 4:10–11; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24). Peter regarded him as his spiritual son (1 Peter 5:13) and was probably the main source of Mark's material for his gospel. Papias (AD 70–130) wrote, 'Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately all that he remembered of the things said and done by the Lord, but not however, in order.'

Mark is concise, brisk and vivid in his style (notice how many times the word '*immediately*' is used). Many verses in this gospel begin with the word '*and*' (Greek = 'kai'). The AV, NKJV and ESV translations show this but it is generally ignored in the NIV translation of the Bible. Peter's words in the house of Cornelius provide a fitting summary of the contents of Mark's gospel (Acts 10:37–43).

### Outline of Mark

1. The way prepared for the ministry of Jesus – 1:1–13
2. The ministry in Galilee – 1:14 to 9:50
3. The ministry in Perea (journey to Jerusalem) – 10:1–52
4. The ministry in Jerusalem – 11:1 to 13:37
5. The suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ – 14:1 to 16:20

*The notes for 1 and 2 August are included with notes for July*

*All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.*

Jesus left the Gennesaret area of Galilee to go outside of Israel to the region of Tyre and Sidon (24; cp. 6:53). \* He wanted solitude, but his fame was known in that land and *he could not be hidden* (24). A Gentile woman, Syro-Phoenician by birth, heard about Jesus and came to him, pleading that he cast a demon out of her daughter (25–26). The Lord's attitude to the woman may appear harsh and indifferent, but he was testing her faith, (and what great faith she had)! She would not take 'no' for an answer but persisted in her request even though Jesus said that '*the children's bread*' was not for '*the little dogs*' (in other words, he had come to minister to the Jews). The woman pointed out that '*even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs*' (27–28). She asked for some crumbs and her faith pleased the Lord who then delivered her daughter from the demon (29–30).

Jesus then travelled south-east to the region of Decapolis \* where he healed a deaf man who also suffered with an impediment in his speech (31–37). We are not told why he put his fingers in the man's ears and spat (probably on his own fingers with which he then touched the man's tongue, 33; cp. 8:23). The Lord sighed as he prayed for the man, being moved with compassion for him (34). The people were *astonished beyond measure* when they witnessed the healing of the man and said, '*He has done all things well*' (37).

God often delays to answer our prayers but we must never stop praying. Like the Syro-Phoenician woman, we too must persevere. The Lord tests our faith in order to strengthen us, but we must always remember that he loves us and feels for us. **The Lord Jesus has also done all things well for us.** He has saved us, forgiven us and cleansed us from our sins. He lovingly cares for us and he will surely bring us to heaven. He will never fail us. Let us be encouraged and praise him.

\* See map on page 3.

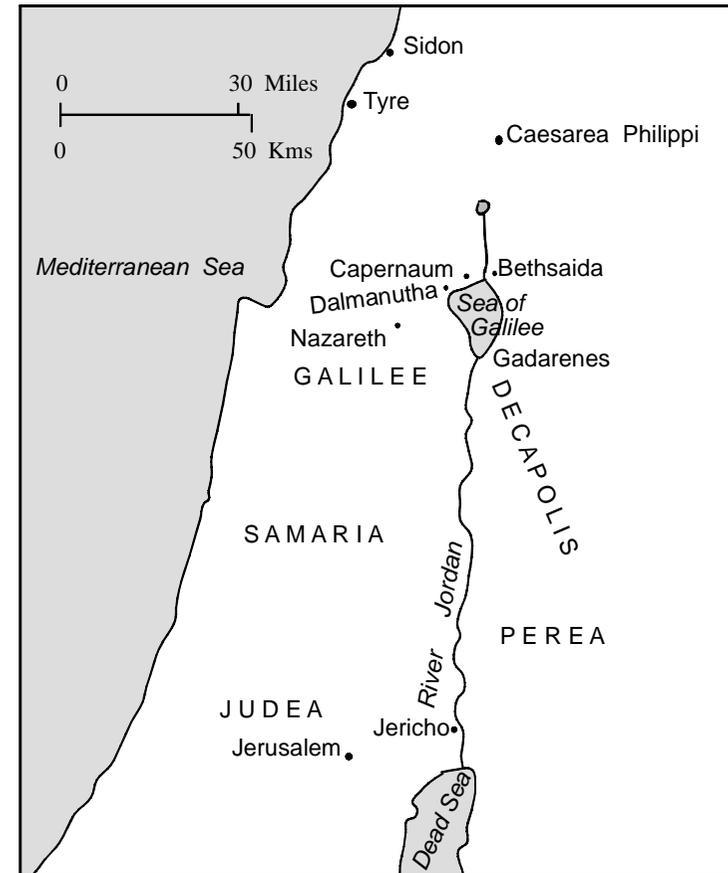
*Their heart is far from me*

In New Testament times, Jewish religious life was marked by many traditions and ceremonies which had no biblical basis. The scribes and Pharisees meticulously observed the tradition of the elders and were quick to condemn those who did not share their scruples. They censured the disciples who had not performed the ritual washing of hands before eating a meal. In this ritual, hands were washed in a special manner to clean them of any religious defilement caused by contact with Gentiles in the market-place (1–5). They asked the Lord Jesus why his disciples failed to observe these traditions; this was an implied criticism of Jesus for not teaching the observance of their religious ritual (6).

The Pharisees had plenty of religion but the Lord Jesus applied to them the words of the prophet Isaiah, *‘This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me’* (6). They made a great show of religious tradition but they set aside obedience to God’s commandment to honour their parents (8). They claimed that money that could be used for the support of their elderly and needy parents was intended as a gift for God’s work (9–13). The Bible says that if we do not provide for our own family, we deny the faith and are worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8).

Jesus urged his hearers to understand that we are not defiled by taking in food that is eaten after being handled by hands that are not ritually clean: *‘The things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man’* (14–15). He later explained to his disciples that heart righteousness is more important than ritual cleansing (17–23). Food eaten with unwashed hands has no effect on the state of a man’s heart (his soul, character, mind and will). The human heart is a breeding ground for all kinds of sin (21–22; cp. Jeremiah 17:9). **We may be very religious and yet have a heart which is far from God. How real is your Christianity?**

Map showing some of the places mentioned in the Gospel of Mark



*All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.*

*The gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*

Mark describes the Christian message as *the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God* (1). Let us think about this description:

- The name '*Jesus*' is the Greek form of 'Joshua' which means 'Jehovah saves' (cp. Matthew 1:21).
- The name '*Christ*' is the Greek equivalent of the word 'Messiah' which means 'anointed' (cp. Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:16–21). Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament; he is God's anointed one!
- '*The Son of God*' is a title which proclaims that Jesus is very God; he is equal with God (cp. John 5:18; Philippians 2:5–6); he is *the eternally blessed God* (Romans 9:5).

Mark does not tell us anything about the birth of Jesus but begins his gospel with the ministry of John the Baptist. John was the messenger sent to prepare the way for Christ as foretold by the prophets, Isaiah and Malachi (2–3; see Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3). He was a rugged character who had a spartan lifestyle (6). He preached *repentance for the remission of sins* (4). Repentance is a radical change of mind and heart which completely changes the direction of our lives. Without repentance, there can be no remission ('sending away') of sins. The gospel includes repentance! Have you truly repented of your sins? Does it show in your life?

John preached that the Lord Jesus is mightier than himself and that he would baptize all who follow him with the Holy Spirit (7–8). The disciples waited for the promise of the Father (Acts 1:4) but we do not need to tarry or agonise for the coming of the Holy Spirit into our lives. All who repent of their sin and trust in Christ are baptized in the Spirit (Acts 2:38; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:13–14). We do not have to seek for a 'second blessing' because every believer has the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9; Galatians 4:6). **Those who follow the Lord Jesus and seek to please him will enjoy one blessing after another.**

*It is I; do not be afraid*

Jesus sent the disciples ahead of him to cross the Sea of Galilee to Bethsaida in Gennesaret which is south of Capernaum (53; cp. John 6:17). This Bethsaida is not to be confused with the Bethsaida on the northern shore of Galilee. He spent time alone in prayer before walking on a wind-tossed sea to the disciples' boat (46–48). They were terrified when they saw him believing that they had seen a ghost. Jesus calmed them with the words, '*Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid*' (50). The Greek for '*It is I*' ('egō eimi') is literally, 'I am' which is the covenant name of God (Exodus 3:14). The Jews recognised this when Jesus used the expression on another occasion, and they attempted to stone him for blasphemy (John 8:58–59). The enemies of Jesus understood that he was claiming to be God and they rejected him (cp. John 5:18).

The disciples had no need to fear when their Lord was with them, but, oh, the dullness and hardness of their hearts! They were greatly amazed at the demonstration of the Lord's power over the sea, but hadn't they already seen his divine power in multiplying the loaves and fish (51–52). **Why should they fear when they had such a wonderful Saviour? Why should we fear?** Jesus says, '*Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.*'

The chapter closes with a comment on the healing ministry of the Lord Jesus. Many today claim to be able to heal as Jesus healed but they deceive themselves and their followers. We would not deny that God sometimes answers prayer for healing, but healing ministries were restricted to the apostles and their associates (2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3–4). Modern healers make great claims but their miracles always seem to happen somewhere else. They cannot produce real miracles such as the blind seeing, the paralysed walking or the dead being raised. Jesus sometimes refused to perform signs and wonders in the face of unbelief but he never had any failures when he prayed for the sick. *And as many as touched him were made well* (56).

*Jesus ... was moved with compassion for them*

The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle recorded in each of the Gospels, except for the resurrection of Christ. We learn two wonderful things about the Lord Jesus from this miracle. It reveals his great love and compassion and it reveals his great power.

The twelve disciples had just returned from their preaching mission (30; cp. verses 12 to 13). At this time Jesus heard the dreadful news of the murder of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:12–13). Christ and his disciples had been so busy that they had not had any time to eat. They needed rest and refreshment so they went by boat along the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee to a deserted place. There was no escape from the huge crowds who went by foot round the shore to await the arrival of the Lord (30–31). When Jesus saw the huge multitude he *was moved with compassion for them because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So he began to teach them many things* (34).

When evening came, the weary, hungry disciples wanted Jesus to send away the multitude (35–36), but he miraculously fed them from just five loaves and two fish. Five thousand men, besides women and children had more than enough to eat and twelve baskets were filled with the remains of the meal (38–44). We must never let weariness or other personal needs shut off our compassion for needy souls.

God had given the Israelites manna (Exodus 16:15) when they were led by Moses, but after seeing this miracle, the crowd recognised that someone greater than Moses was among them, and that Jesus was the promised Prophet (see John 6:14; cp. Deuteronomy 18:15–18). The Lord Jesus is wonderful in his power and compassion. He became man, knowing grief (eg. over the death of John the Baptist), hunger and weariness, but he would not send away the needy crowd until they had been fed. **Child of God, Jesus knows about you and about all your needs and burdens. He is full of compassion and love for you (Hebrews 4:14–16).** Come to him and cast *all your care upon him, for he cares for you* (1 Peter 5:7).

*My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*

Mark deals very briefly with the baptism and temptation of Jesus (see Matthew 3:13 to 4:11 for a more detailed account). Following his baptism, the Lord Jesus was driven by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness, where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. Though weak in body through lack of food, he did not yield to the enticements of the devil (12–13).

John baptized those who had repented of their sin (4). **Why then did the Lord Jesus submit to baptism when he is sinless and has no need to repent?**

- Baptism speaks of identification. When a believer is baptized, he is identified with Jesus in his death and resurrection (Romans 6:3–4). The sinless Lord Jesus took human flesh to identify himself with sinful mankind, being born under the law (Galatians 4:4). The law of God curses and condemns the sinner. Our sin was laid upon Jesus who has redeemed us from the curse of the law through his death at Calvary (Isaiah 53:6; Galatians 3:10–13). God the Father punished him for our sin, making *him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him* (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- Baptism also speaks of suffering. The baptism of Jesus not only symbolised his identification with us, but also his suffering and death to take away our sin. He spoke of a baptism which was a cup of suffering that he had to endure (10:38; Luke 12:50).

The whole of the Trinity was involved in the baptism of Jesus. As the Son came up from the water, the Holy Spirit descended like a dove upon him and the Father spoke from heaven, *'You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'* (11). The Father loves the Son (John 3:35) and has accepted him as the perfect substitute to die for sinners. All Christians are *accepted in the Beloved* (Ephesians 1:6). We are 'in Christ' and we are clothed with his righteousness. We are no longer condemned for our sin (Romans 8:1,34). **Let us rejoice and give thanks to God for our wonderful salvation**

*I will make you become fishers of men*

A year had passed since the temptation of Jesus (events recorded in John 2:1 to 4:43 took place before we come to verse 14 in this chapter). Herod cut short John's ministry by putting him in prison, but the ministry of Jesus began to flourish (14–15, 28). Wicked men may silence God's messengers, but they cannot silence God!

The Lord Jesus came to Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, saying, *'The kingdom of God is at hand'* (15). John the Baptist had also said the same (Matthew 3:1–2). The expressions, *'the kingdom of God,'* and *'the kingdom of heaven,'* refer to the same thing and are found 117 times in the four gospels and 32 times in the rest of the New Testament. Jesus made it clear that his kingdom was not an earthly kingdom (John 18:35–36). It is a spiritual kingdom which embraces people from all nations (Revelation 7:9). Those who would enter this glorious kingdom must repent of their sin and believe (trust) in the gospel (15).

Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist before following Christ. Both he and Peter had followed Jesus before John's imprisonment (John 1:35,40–41). Jesus now called them to leave their fishing business and devote all of their time to his work. He promised them, *'Come after me, and I will make you become fishers of men'* (17). They may have been expert in the business of catching fish, but they were novices in the art of man-fishing, of soul-winning. They were not slow to obey the Lord's call, however; together with James and John, they responded *immediately* (18–20).

**Do you long to win souls to Christ? Do you feel inadequate in your attempts to witness to others?** Take heart from the statement of the Lord Jesus, *'Come after me, and I will make you become fishers of men.'* If you commit yourself into his loving hands, he will fit you for his service. Follow after the Lord Jesus and submit to his will as it is revealed in the Bible. Be his disciple and he will graciously prepare you for usefulness in his service.

*Herod feared John ... and heard him gladly*

Herod the Great, the tyrant who had sought to kill the infant Jesus, had ten wives. He bequeathed his kingdom to three of his sons. Herod Antipas ruled over Galilee and Perea. Another son, Philip, ruled over the north-eastern territories of the kingdom, and Archelaus ruled over Judea and Samaria. Archelaus was deposed by the Romans who then imposed direct rule over Judea and Samaria in AD 6 (Pontius Pilate became governor of these territories in 26 AD).

The fame of Jesus reached Herod Antipas who was living in adultery with Herodias, wife of his brother, Philip. John the Baptist had fearlessly denounced Antipas for his sin and the enraged king had him thrown into the dungeon at his palace. The evil scheming Herodias wanted to kill John but was thwarted because Herod respected John. He also feared the reaction of the people who recognised John as a prophet (19–20; Matthew 14:5). Herod also *feared John ... and when he heard him he did many things, and heard him gladly* (20). He did many things (better translated, *'was greatly perplexed'*) but he failed to do the one thing that was necessary. He may have resolved to be a better man but he did not repent of his sin. Herodias later had her revenge when Herod made a rash promise to her daughter. John was executed *and the king was exceedingly sorry* (26) but he did not have a godly sorrow which produces repentance (cp. 2 Corinthians 7:10).

Many people thought that Jesus was the prophet Elijah who had come back to earth and others believed that he was the promised prophet or just a prophet (15; cp. Deuteronomy 18:15–19). Herod had come to a different conclusion. When he heard about Jesus, he thought that John had risen from the dead (14–16). **He had silenced John but he could not silence his own conscience.** He wanted to speak to Jesus, but when the opportunity came, the Lord had nothing to say to him (Luke 23:8–9). He had squandered his opportunities to repent. **It is not enough to be sorry for our sin; we must forsake it and obey God.**

*They were offended at him*

The people of Nazareth were astonished at the wisdom of Jesus when he taught in their synagogue (1–2). They had heard about his mighty works (probably his miracles at Capernaum, some twenty miles away; cp. Luke 4:23). They despised the Lord Jesus and could not understand how a humble carpenter could have such wisdom and power. *They were offended at him* (3); this could be translated, ‘they were caused to stumble because of him’. Jesus reminded them that a prophet is not accepted in his own country nor by his own relatives (4); at this time his own brothers did not believe in him (John 7:5). Jeremiah the prophet had also known rejection from his own people of Anathoth and his own family (Jeremiah 11:21; 12:6; 20:10). Jesus did no mighty works among them because of their unbelief at which he marvelled (5–6). He continued to teach in the villages of Galilee and sent out his disciples to preach (6–13). He had lived a sinless and perfect life among them for thirty years but they still rejected him.

Satan blinds sinful men to the greatness of the Lord Jesus (2 Corinthians 4:3–4). People are still offended at Jesus. The preaching of Christ crucified is a *stumbling-block* (1 Corinthians 1:23 – same Greek work translated ‘offence’). *The offence of the cross* brings persecution (Galatians 5:11).

**We must persevere when faced with indifference or hostility to the message of the gospel. When people refuse to hear our message, they invite terrible judgment upon themselves.** The Lord Jesus told his disciples that when a house or city rejected them and their message, they should shake off the dust from their feet (11). This refers to the Jewish custom of shaking the dust from their sandals and clothes before re-entering the Holy Land after passing through Gentile territory; this was to avoid ceremonial uncleanness. By shaking the dust from their feet, the disciples were giving a symbolic warning that God would surely punish those Jews who rejected the gospel. They were unclean and were no better than Gentiles (cp. Acts 13:49–51). **Are you rejecting Christ? – Beware!**

*He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him*

These verses give an account of a memorable Sabbath in Capernaum. A man was delivered from demon-possession as he heard the Lord Jesus teaching in the synagogue and later, Peter’s mother-in-law was healed. After sunset (when the Sabbath ended), many sick people were brought to Jesus and he healed them and cast out many demons. The subject of demon-possession is quite controversial but the Bible is careful to distinguish between this and physical illness (32–34). Some unbelieving theologians deny the reality of demon-possession, ascribing it to primitive superstition. On the other hand, there are extreme charismatics who teach that most of the problems in the lives of Christians are caused by demons and they spend much time casting these imaginary demons out of their followers. We must beware of both extremes.

The demon in the man was terrified of Jesus and recognised him as ‘*the Holy One of God*’ (24). **Satan and his evil spirits are powerful, but the Lord Jesus is even more powerful.** Those who heard Jesus in the synagogue were not only astonished at the authority of his teaching but also at his authority and power over demons (22,27). They were amazed and said, ‘*He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him*’ (27). In these days when occult practitioners have gained respectability, when thousands are dabbling in the dark powers of evil, we have this assurance: our great Saviour who dwells within us, is far greater than Satan’s army. To him be all the glory!

*Jesus! the name high over all,  
In hell, or earth, or sky;  
Angels and men before it fall,  
And devils fear and fly.* (Charles Wesley)

(I can recommend an excellent book on Biblical demonology, ‘SATAN CAST OUT’ by Frederick S. Leahy which has been republished by Banner of Truth).

*There he prayed*

The Sabbath had been a very busy and exhausting day for the Lord Jesus but he rose *a long while before daylight ... and departed to a solitary place; and there he prayed* (35). The sinless Son of God spent much time in prayer to the Father (eg. 6:46; 14:32; Luke 3:21; 6:12; 9:28; 11:1). Dare we neglect the place of prayer in our lives? Do we rise each day without giving a thought to God? Do we lie down at night without praying? Do we consider the prayer meeting as being of little importance? If we are prayerless, we sin against our Master, we become cold in heart and we are weak. Let us repent of our prayerlessness and be disciplined in setting time aside for regular daily prayer. At this stage of his ministry, the Lord Jesus experienced great popularity but he told the disciples that he had been sent to preach the kingdom of God and must go on to other cities with this message (37–39).

A leper came to Jesus, pleading to be healed, saying, *‘If you are willing, you can make me clean’* (40). Leprosy was much feared in those times because it was incurable and people avoided contact with lepers. Jesus was *moved with compassion* for the leper and touched him (41). That touch would have meant so much to a man who people avoided touching. He was healed as soon as Jesus said, *‘I am willing; be cleansed.’* Some needy souls recognize their need of Christ but wonder if he is willing to accept them. He will never turn away those who come to him (John 6:37).

The man was warned not to tell anyone of this miracle apart from showing himself to the priest for ritual cleansing and confirmation of recovery, so that he could return to normal life (44; cp. Leviticus 14:1–32). In his zeal, he disobeyed the Lord and spread the news of his healing. As a result the Lord Jesus was restricted in his ministry by huge crowds and for a time was unable to go into the city (45). **We often suffer from the opposite problem; we are silent when we should be witnessing. Is it because we lack compassion for those who are lost?**

*Do not be afraid; only believe*

Jairus was convinced that the Lord Jesus could heal his dying daughter (23). The delay caused by the woman’s healing must have sorely tried his faith. While Jesus was still speaking to the woman, Jairus heard the news that he had dreaded – his daughter had died. In his grief and desolation, Jairus heard the wonderful words of Jesus, *‘Do not be afraid; only believe’* (36). The Lord Jesus wanted Jairus to trust him, even in his darkest hour.

In Bible times, professional mourners were called in when someone had died (cp. Jeremiah 9:17–18). They were experts in the art of weeping and wailing, moaning and groaning (38). Their performance turned to scornful laughter when Jesus told them to hush their commotion because the girl was not dead but sleeping (39–40). He put them out of the house and took only Jairus and his wife, with Peter, James and John into the room where the child was lying (37).

Jesus *took the child by the hand, and said to her ... ‘Little girl, I say to you, arise’* (41). She was immediately raised from the dead and began to walk around. Jairus and his wife *were overcome with great amazement* when they saw the Lord Jesus raise their daughter from the dead (42). He told the astonished couple to get something to eat for their daughter. Jesus also told them not to tell anyone, but those outside would know that once the girl appeared, a great miracle had been performed.

Our faith is often tested and it is sorely tried when we pass through dark and perplexing periods in our lives. We may be tempted to doubt the goodness, compassion and wisdom of God but he does care for all his children. We may fear that he is far from us but nothing can separate us from his presence and his love (Romans 8:35–39). **Are you distraught and fearful? Oh, trust in our precious Saviour who says, ‘Do not be afraid; only believe.’**

*When she heard about Jesus*

The Gadarene people did not want the Lord Jesus, but he was welcomed by a great multitude when he returned to Galilee (21,24). Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, came to Jesus begging him to come to his house to heal his twelve year old daughter, who was at the point of death (22–23). We will return to Jairus' story tomorrow.

While Jesus was going to the house of Jairus, he was interrupted by a woman who was desperate to reach him for healing. This poor woman had suffered twelve years of misery through continuous haemorrhages:

- She had lost her health having been weakened by twelve years of excessive loss of blood and she was getting worse (26).
- She had lost her wealth because she had spent all that she had in search of a cure, but without success (26).
- She had lost her standing in society. Her condition would have rendered her ceremonially unclean. Anyone touching someone in her condition would also be unclean (Leviticus 15:19–27). This probably explains why she did not want the Lord Jesus to know that she had touched his garment (27–28,33).

She was a very needy person but she received hope. How? *When she heard about Jesus* (27). Someone told her about the Saviour, about his power and his compassion, and she came to faith in Christ. Many people had touched Jesus as they crowded upon him but her touch was one of faith. She expected to be healed and the Lord Jesus responded to her faith by healing her. Notice how kind and gentle he was in the way he spoke to her. He said, '*Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction*' (34). Her twelve years of misery came to an end because *she heard about Jesus*. **Is there some needy soul known to you, waiting to hear you tell them about our wonderful Saviour?**

*When Jesus saw their faith*

When Jesus came to Capernaum, a great crowd thronged the house in which he was staying *and he preached the word to them* (1–2). Four men brought a paralysed man to him for healing but they could not get near to him because of the crowd. These resourceful men took the paralytic up an outside stairway to the roof of the house. They opened up the roof and lowered the man on his mattress. *When Jesus saw their faith*, he forgave the man's sins and healed him (5,11–12).

The scribes rightly recognised that the Lord Jesus was claiming to be God when he told the man that his sins were forgiven. They thought that he was blaspheming because God alone can forgive sins. Jesus knew what they were thinking and pointed out that he had authority to forgive sins (6–10). The Bible plainly teaches that the Lord Jesus is God, but many false cults deny this. The title '*Son of Man*' is also a title of Deity (10; cp. Matthew 26:64–65; Daniel 7:13–14).

The paralysed man had a great physical need but when his friends brought him to Jesus, an even greater need was met – his sins were forgiven! Jesus saw that their faith was not put off by seeming obstacles (the crowd thronging the house) and he honoured that faith. It was a faith that persevered despite apparent setbacks. *Without faith it is impossible to please him* (Hebrews 11:6). What kind of faith does God see in you? Do you have the faith that perseveres in prayer for your loved-ones and friends who do not know the Lord? **Let us look on obstacles as an opportunity to prove the faithfulness of God.**

*Doubt sees the obstacle,  
Faith sees the way;  
Doubt sees a long dark night,  
Faith sees the day.*

*Doubt dreads to take a step,  
Faith soars on high,  
Doubt thunders, 'Who believes?'  
Faith answers, 'I.'*

*He arose and followed him*

Levi is the same person as Matthew the gospel writer (cp. Matthew 9:9). Tax collectors were hated and despised because they worked for the Romans who occupied their country. They also had a well-deserved reputation for being dishonest and corrupt. As long as they collected an agreed amount of tax for the Roman authorities, they could overcharge and keep the surplus for themselves. The tax payer had no right of appeal against the tax collector's levy. The scribes and Pharisees put tax collectors on the same level as the worst of sinners and wrote them off as far as salvation was concerned (16).

The Lord Jesus called Matthew, one of these social outcasts, to follow him and to be one of those most closely associated with him (14). His other name, Levi, means 'attached.' The tribe of Levi was attached to God in a special way, being set aside for the service of God. They provided the priests and teachers of God's law and others involved in the service and ritual of the temple. Matthew Levi had not attached himself to the Lord's work but to serve the heathen Romans. Can you imagine his amazement to hear the great teacher, the holy Son of God, saying to him, *'Follow me.'*

Matthew *arose and followed him* (14). He gave up a comfortable living to become attached to the Lord Jesus. He did not become a secret believer, but made a great feast to which he invited many other tax collectors and he introduced them to his Saviour. They too followed the Lord Jesus (15; cp. Luke 5:29). **Are you glad to own Jesus as your Lord before your friends and colleagues at work? Do you earnestly desire and pray for their salvation?**

No one is beyond the reach of God's mercy. Christianity is for sinners, but the churlish, self-righteous Pharisees did not recognise their own spiritual need. Jesus told them, *'I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance'* (16–17). He does not call the righteous because there are no righteous people (Romans 3:10). We are all sinners and he calls us to repentance. How is it with you?

*Tell them what great things the Lord has done for you*

The terrified swineherds fled and told their story in the city and in the surrounding countryside. The people of the region went to see what had happened and were afraid when they saw the man, who had been previously possessed, *sitting and clothed and in his right mind* (14–15). We read of two requests in verses 17 and 18 which show two contrasting attitudes towards the Lord Jesus:

- The people of the region did not welcome Jesus nor did they bring their sick for healing but they *began to plead with him to depart from their region* (17). He granted their request. Are you shocked by the attitude of those people? The demons knew that they had no hope of forgiveness. Their doom was already set; they knew that everlasting torment awaited them. The people of the city could have heard a message of glorious hope. They had no need to fear the Lord Jesus if only they had embraced him and asked him to be their Saviour. Many people say that they are too busy to think about God or the Christian message. They are more concerned for their hobbies and pleasure than for the eternal well-being of their soul. They scoff when told of coming judgment. It is tragic that men and women, blinded by Satan and enslaved in sin refuse God's offer of mercy. Jesus once said to others who had rejected him, *'You are not willing to come to me that you may have life'* (John 5:40). **Are you uncomfortable with Jesus, or do you welcome him?**
- The man who had been delivered from the demons was different, however. He begged the Lord Jesus that he might remain with him, but he was to be more useful at home, witnessing to his family, friends and neighbours. Jesus said to him, *'Tell them what great things the Lord has done for you and how he has had compassion on you'* (18–19). He needed no persuasion but went throughout Decapolis *and began to proclaim all that Jesus had done for him; and all marvelled* (20). **When did you last tell someone what the Lord Jesus has done for you?**

*Jesus, Son of the Most High God*

Jesus and his disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee and came ashore in the country of the Gadarenes in Decapolis, which was mainly populated by Gentiles. This explains the *large herd of swine* (11) which were ‘unclean’ animals, not kept by Jews. Decapolis was a federation of ten cities, nine of them to the east of the River Jordan. Among those cities were Damascus in the north and Philadelphia (now Amman, the capital of Jordan) in the south. When Jesus and his disciples left the boat they were met by a demon-possessed man. This poor wretch lived among the tombs and ran around wild, naked and shrieking. He had superhuman strength through demonic power, and chains could not hold him. *Always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones* (1–5).

The encounter of Jesus with the demons teaches us two vital truths:

- That Jesus is God. The disciples had asked a short time earlier, ‘*Who can this be, that even the wind and the waves obey him?*’ (4:41). The demon speaking through the man’s vocal chords, supplied the answer: ‘*What have I to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?*’ (7). This title of Jesus shows that he is God. The Jews recognised this and their leaders hated the Lord Jesus for calling God ‘*his Father*’ (John 5:18).
- That demons are subject to the Lord Jesus. He is sovereign over them and they begged Jesus not to torment them. His lovely presence was a source of torment to these foul, unclean spirits. Their king and master is Satan whom they gladly serve, but when confronted with Jesus, they were in the presence of One who is greater than the devil. They knew that they could only go where he permitted (7–10). The demons left the man at the command of Jesus, and entered a herd of pigs which ran over the cliffs to perish in the sea (12–13). **Christian, remember that though Satan hates you and opposes the gospel, your precious Saviour who loves you, will always take care of you. Nothing can separate you from his love (Romans 8:31–39).**

*New wine must be put into new wineskins*

Some of the disciples of John the Baptist and of the Pharisees saw the happiness and feasting at the house of Matthew. They were puzzled that the disciples of Jesus did not fast and asked him, ‘*Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?*’ (18). He replied that fasting was inappropriate for his disciples, comparing his presence on earth with a wedding feast. A Jewish wedding in Bible times was a very festive time. The couple who were married did not go away for a honeymoon but stayed at home. An open house was kept and the bridegroom and his bride were treated like royalty as their closest friends shared all the joy and feasting of the week. These close friends were called ‘the children of the bride-chamber’ (translated here as ‘*the friends of the bridegroom*’).

The Lord Jesus was comparing himself to the bridegroom and his disciples to the bridegroom’s closest friends. How could they fast and mourn? They were with the almighty Son of God. They were seeing corrupt tax officials like Matthew coming to faith in Christ and their lives completely transformed. There was daily rejoicing over sinners repenting. The Lord Jesus went on to speak of the bridegroom being taken away: ‘*But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days*’ (20). He was speaking of his death on the cross.

Jesus said that a new cloth patch would soon pull away from an old garment as it shrunk in the wash. New wine would burst an old wineskin as it fermented because the old wineskin could not stretch like a new one (21–22). We are not saved by patching up our lives with good works. Jesus said, ‘*New wine must be put into new wineskins*’ (22). When a man or woman is saved by grace, they are a new creation in Christ and the old things have passed away (2 Corinthians 5:17). The garments of the old life are replaced with the garments of salvation (Isaiah 61:10). **The new wine of salvation must be poured into the new strong wineskins of joyful thanksgiving and sacrificial service which glorifies God.**

*The Sabbath was made for man*

The scribes and Pharisees made Sabbath-keeping a great burden with all their petty rules and regulations. They were very quick to criticise the disciples for plucking ears of corn on the Sabbath in order to feed themselves (23–24). Jesus reminded them that David had done an unlawful thing by eating the showbread (25–26; cp. 1 Samuel 21:1–6). He taught that human need must be met on the Sabbath just as it is on any other day. Mercy is far more important than outward religious observance and Jesus reminded them, *'The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath'* (28). The Pharisees endured miserable, joyless Sabbaths but *'the Sabbath was made for man'* (27), not to be a burden but a blessing. It is a gracious gift from God which should be the best day of every week for the believer.

There was a man in the synagogue with a withered hand and the Pharisees watched the Lord Jesus closely to see if he would heal him (3:1–2). He asked them, *'Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?'* but they refused to answer him (4). He was angry and grieved by the hardness of their hearts and he then healed the man (5). The Pharisees had no compassion for the man and were annoyed to see him healed on the Sabbath. If you lack compassion for the lost and needy, what kind of Christian are you? Those Pharisees were very rigid in their interpretation of the law and yet they plotted to murder the Lord Jesus on the Sabbath (6).

***'The Sabbath was made for man'* but when we misuse it, we are the losers.** The world of business has destroyed the sanctity of the Lord's Day. We must be different. This is the day that we celebrate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead. It is the day the Lord would have us give ourselves especially to worship him and to undertake works of mercy. **Is Jesus the Lord of your Sabbaths? If he is, the Lord's Day should be the highlight of your week.**

*How is it that you have no faith?*

The Sea of Galilee is about thirteen miles long and up to seven miles wide. It lies about seven hundred feet below the level of the Mediterranean. When cool currents of air sweep down from the surrounding hills, they collide with the warm air above the sea, whipping up fierce winds. The Lord Jesus fell asleep soon after he entered the boat.

As Christ and his disciples crossed the sea, a furious storm arose which threatened to capsize their boat. Some of the disciples were experienced fishermen but they were terrified and awoke their sleeping Master. They thought that he did not care about their plight (35–38). He rebuked the wind and calmed the raging sea with the words, *'Peace be still'* (39). He asked the troubled disciples, *'Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?'* (40). They had seen him perform astounding miracles and they had experienced his care for them, how could they imagine that he would fail them now? Jesus is not just a man, he is almighty God! The disciples' fear of the storm turned to a fear inspired by awe of Jesus. They exclaimed, *'Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey him!'* (41).

If we know the Lord, we have experienced his goodness to us and his power in our lives. We are often like the disciples, however, and soon forget these things when the storms and trials of the Christian life disturb us. **Is the Lord saying to you today, *'How is it that you have no faith?'* He will never let you down. He cannot fail, for he is God.**

*Begone, unbelief;  
My Saviour is near,  
And for my relief  
Will surely appear:  
By prayer let me wrestle,  
And he will perform;  
With Christ in the vessel,  
I smile at the storm.*

(John Newton)

*The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed  
on the ground*

The first parable in our reading informs us that *the kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground* (26). The man who does the sowing, cannot make the seed germinate, but he leaves nature to take its course; eventually, he is able to reap the harvest (27–29). This parable encourages us to persevere in sowing the word of God and to remember that it is God who gives the increase (14; cp. 1 Corinthians 3:7).

The apostles and early church members were zealous in sowing the seed of God's word. Persecution did not deter them in this important work (see Acts 8:1–4). Paul was encouraged that the Thessalonian church did not allow opposition or suffering to dampen their enthusiasm. He wrote, '*For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth*' (1 Thessalonians 1:8). You may not be a preacher, but you can scatter the word of God through personal witness, Sunday School teaching, house visitation, distributing good gospel tracts or by giving good evangelistic books and booklets to other people.

J.C. Ryle points out that the parable of the mustard seed (30–32) illustrates 'the progress of professing Christianity in the world.' (EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON MARK, published by Banner of Truth, page 77). The mustard seed is minute but it grows into a tree which is ten to fifteen feet high and which could shelter birds in the shade of its branches (30–32). We may be disheartened that our churches are small and that God's kingdom sees very little increase around us. Many churches are closing down in Britain, and unbelievers write us off as having no relevance to the 21st century. Can it be that the kingdom of heaven is really growing like the mustard seed? The answer is that the church is rapidly growing in many parts of the world, even if it appears to be in decline in the western world. **Let us remain faithful to God's word and never compromise his truth in order to attain apparent growth.** There are setbacks and difficulties in gospel work but we must persevere. *We shall reap if we do not lose heart* (Galatians 6:9).

*That they might be with him*

The Lord Jesus withdrew from the synagogue because of the plot to kill him (6–7; cp. Matthew 12:14–15). He went with his disciples to the shores of Galilee where his miraculous ministry attracted great multitudes. They came not only from Galilee and Judea but also from east of the Jordan and from Tyre and Sidon in the north-west. Many were healed and unclean spirits (demons) cringed in his presence (7–11). Their confession that Jesus is the Son of God would have been heard by some of the scribes and Pharisees who were hardened and blind in their opposition to Jesus. They refused to accept this truth, which should have been obvious to them (cp. 22; John 5:18).

The Lord Jesus *called to him those he himself wanted* (13). He wanted the disciples and they came to him. Christian, God called you because he wanted you! You were no better than any other person. You did not deserve to be chosen by God! You came to Jesus because he wanted you! He wanted you despite your sinfulness! He wanted you, to make you a new creation in Christ! He wanted you to serve him! He wanted you to be with himself! The Lord Jesus chose the twelve disciples *that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach* (14). Fellowship with the Master is essential if we would serve him.

There is all the difference in the world between following Jesus like the multitudes and following him as a disciple. The multitudes were attracted by the healing miracles of Jesus, but the disciples loved him and wanted to serve him and obey him. Jesus called us to enjoy fellowship with him day by day (John 14:23; 1 John 1:3,7) and ultimately to be with him in heaven (John 14:2–3; 1 Thessalonians 4:17). We lose much if we neglect having this precious fellowship with our Saviour. **How much time do you spend with the Lord? Do you take time to delight yourself in his presence?**

*Unless he first binds the strong man*

The Lord's 'own people' were possibly friends or family but it is more likely that they were those from his own town of Nazareth who were antagonistic to him. Many there had become very hostile towards him and they had concluded that he *was out of his mind* (21; cp. Luke 4:16–30).

The scribes could not deny that Jesus was healing the sick and casting out demons. They said that he was casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of demons, in other words, by the power of Satan (22). The Lord Jesus demonstrated that the reasoning of the scribes was ridiculous. A kingdom that is divided against itself cannot survive and a house that is torn apart with strife cannot stand (23–25). Satan would never wage war against his demons who serve him.

Satan is like a strong man who jealously guards his property. No one can enter his house and plunder his goods *unless he first binds the strong man* (27). The Lord Jesus came into the world to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). He has overcome him and bound him through his death on the cross (Colossians 2:14–15). The devil brings havoc, hatred, suffering and misery to the lives of millions of people, but Jesus brings forgiveness, stability, peace and joy. **The evidence of Satan's evil work is all around us but let us be encouraged that Jesus is far stronger than the devil and that he lovingly cares for us.**

*Jesus! the name high over all,  
In hell, or earth, or sky;  
Angels and men before it fall,  
And devils fear and fly.*

(Charles Wesley)

*Take heed what you hear*

We continue with the theme of hearing and receiving God's word in our reading today. The terracotta saucer-shaped lamp was a common sight in Jewish homes in New Testament times; it had a handle at one end and a nozzle at the other through which a wick was inserted to reach the oil inside. There were two holes at the top of the lamp, one for adding oil, the other to take in air. A shelf or a brick protruding from the wall was used as a lampstand. A lamp was not purchased to be put under a basket (a dish used to measure grain) or under a bed, but to be set on a lampstand so that it could give out its light (24).

The Lord Jesus has set each Christian as a light in the world which is full of spiritual darkness (cp. Matthew 5:14–16). The evidence of this darkness is all around us, eg. false religions, spiritual ignorance, superstition, wickedness, hatred of God's law and indifference to the gospel. We will only shine as the fruit of the Holy Spirit is seen in us (20–22; Galatians 5:22–24). How can we cultivate spiritual fruit? We must listen to what God is saying to us through his word and obey him. The seed of the word will then produce precious fruit – *love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control* (Galatians 5:22–23).

Jesus urges us, 'Take heed what you hear' (24). We must listen to the sound words of good biblical preaching. What we hear taught is most important. The more we take in of God's word, the more we will be blessed and fruitful (24). If we neglect what little we have of God's word, it will be taken from us, just as the birds devoured the seed that was by the wayside (4,25). **If you are struggling in the Christian life, could it be that you are lethargic in your attitude to taking in God's word and that you have become 'dull of hearing' (cp. Hebrews 5:11)?**

*Good ground*

In the parable of the sower the crucial factor is not the seed, but the ground in which the seed is sown. **The state of the ground determines the fate of the seed.** The seed is the word of God and the ground is the human heart (14–15; cp. 1 Peter 1:23). The preaching and teaching of God’s word must take first place in the work of the kingdom. If we neglect our private reading and meditation of God’s word, or if we attend a church where the Bible is not faithfully taught, we will be weak and unstable in our Christian life.

What happens when the word of God is preached, when it is taught or read? This precious word falls on different types of ground (*‘hearts’*). When the word of God comes into the heart of the *‘wayside’* hearer, *Satan comes immediately* snatches it away from the heart (4,15). Such a person appears to be interested in the gospel when they hear God’s word, but that apparent interest dries up so soon afterwards.

The *‘stony places’* hearer has a shallow heart. Though there is an appearance of life, there is no depth and his profession of faith soon evaporates when trouble comes (5,16–17). Such a hearer desires to have the peace and blessing of following Christ, but is shocked when trials come and he protests, ‘I never thought it was like this.’ The *‘thorns’* hearer has a worldly heart that chokes the word of God so that it becomes unfruitful (7,18–19). Such a person lives for his possessions and pleasures rather than our wonderful Saviour. The *‘good ground’* hearer (8, 20) is the person who hears the word of God, accepts it and bears fruit.

**What kind of ground does your heart provide for the word of God as you hear it taught week by week?** Do you seek to understand it? Are you shallow or worldly? If you want to bear precious spiritual fruit in your life, you will make every effort to prepare yourself to hear God’s word each Lord’s Day. To obtain the best from preaching, we must come to services fresh in body and in mind, with a prayerful and submissive heart: *‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear!’* (9).

*He who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit*

The enemies of the Lord Jesus accused him of casting out demons by the power of Satan and this brought a solemn warning from him (22). He pointed out that God forgives all kinds of sins and blasphemies but that there is an unpardonable sin. Jesus said, *‘He who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation’* (28–29).

What is the unpardonable sin? Bible commentators agree that the precise nature of this sin is not explained in the Bible. There are other passages in Scripture which appear to refer to this sin (Hebrews 6:4–6; 1 John 5:16–17). The word ‘blasphemy’ is derived from the Greek noun ‘blasphēmia’ which means ‘to slander, to defame, to speak evil of someone or something that is good.’ The Lord Jesus was directing his warning to those who rejected him, because they said, *‘He has an unclean spirit’* (30).

John Blanchard comments on Luke 12:10, ‘The Holy Spirit’s great ministry is to bear witness to the truth about Jesus Christ (see John 16:13–14). To blaspheme against the Holy Spirit is to reject his witness altogether. When a person continues to do that there is no hope for him, because he is rejecting God’s only way of salvation. This verse has caused many people great distress because they have misunderstood its meaning; but the person who is anxious that he may have committed the unforgivable sin has almost certainly not done so, or he would have no sorrow or concern about displeasing God or rejecting the clear witness that he gives about his Son’ (LOOK THROUGH LUKE – Edition published by Henry E. Walter 1977 – page 68). The scribes had no such scruples concerning their wicked lies about the source of Jesus’ power.

Christians love the Lord Jesus and though our love is often weak, we do not reject him. **It is possible, however, for the Christian to grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30–32). Let us be sure to avoid such a sin.**

*Whoever does the will of God*

Roman Catholics believe that Mary was a perpetual virgin but her children are mentioned here and are named elsewhere (6:3). Why did the mother and brothers of Jesus come to see him? It may be that they wanted to protect him from those who said, *'He is out of his mind'* (31; cp verse 21). Jesus indicated that those who obey the word of God are his mother and his brothers. He was not despising Mary, but teaching that a spiritual relationship to him is far more important than any natural relationship. Those who belong to God and please him are those who obey his will. The Lord Jesus said, *'For whoever does the will of God is my brother and my sister and mother'* (35).

Jesus often stressed the importance of obedience to the will of God. He also taught the disciples to pray, *'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'* (Matthew 6:10). We find God's will in the Bible. To do God's will is to obey his teaching (Luke 8:21; James 1:21–22). Jesus said, *'If you love me, keep my commandments'* (John 14:15). It is not enough to say that we are born again and that we love the Lord. We show this by our attitude to God's word and the application of it in our lives. **Do you seek to live in obedience to the will of God?**

On the day of judgment, many will be horrified to discover that though they had been religious, they will be cast out of the presence of the Lord. Jesus said, *'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven'* (Matthew 7:21–23).

*But we never can prove  
The delights of his love  
Until all on the altar we lay;  
For the favour he shows  
And the joy he bestows  
Are for those who will trust and obey.*

(James H. Samnis)

*Do you not understand this parable?*

Parables have been described as 'earthly stories with a heavenly meaning.' John Blanchard points out that 'those who treat parables as no more than interesting stories will end up with nothing but interesting stories!' (LOOK THROUGH LUKE, page 44). Jesus used these stories to reveal truth (*'the mystery of the kingdom of God'*) to those who accepted it and to conceal it from those who hardened themselves against it (10–12; cp. Matthew 13:10–17).

After telling the parable of the sower, the Lord Jesus gave the twelve and a wider group of disciples his reason for speaking in parables. Parables are not only 'earthly stories with a heavenly meaning,' they also have a heavenly purpose, dividing the listeners. Some understood the story told by the parables but failed to 'see' the truths that they taught. Jesus said that he spoke in parables to those outside the kingdom of God: *'So that seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them'* (12). Others not only understood the stories, they also 'saw' the spiritual truths revealed in the parables.

Parables are about *the kingdom of God* (11,26,30) and the Lord Jesus explained the meaning of the parables to his disciples, not to the crowds (11,34). He emphasised the importance of the parable of the sower asking the disciples, *'Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?'* (13).

We often teach children and young people the parables. **They are interesting stories (eg. The story of the wise man – Matthew 7:24–27), but we must explain and emphasise the spiritual truths conveyed by the parables.** We must pray that the Holy Spirit will open their hearts so that they may understand and receive these truths.

Are you troubled when some who profess to follow Christ and appear to be enthusiastic Christians fall away? The parable of the sower explains the reason as we shall see tomorrow.