

Take this cup away from me; nevertheless, not what I will

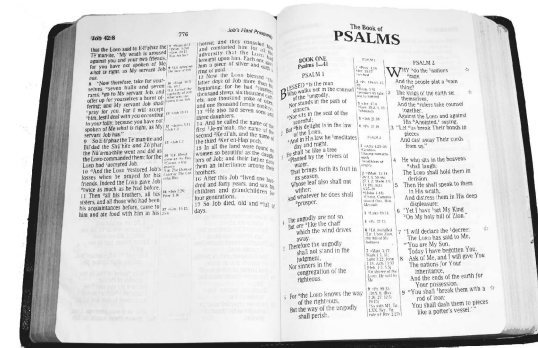
The Lord Jesus warned his disciples that they would be made to stumble because of what would happen to him that night but he also told them that he would be raised and would go before them to Galilee. Peter sincerely believed that he would never deny his Lord. He would rather die than deny his Master (29-31). He didn't know his own heart! We must beware of being self-confident so that we forget our need to depend on the Lord at all times. (cp. 1 Corinthians 10:12). Let us also be encouraged and comforted that the Lord does not cast off any Christian because of failure and shortcomings.

At the first Communion service the Lord Jesus *took the cup* and gave it to the disciples (23). That cup is for us *'the cup of blessing'* (1 Corinthians 10:16). Jesus, however, had to drink 'a cup' of terrible suffering and sorrow in order to save us. In Gethsemane he was overwhelmed with anguish as he contemplated this 'cup' that he had to drink (32-36). *He began to be troubled and deeply distressed*. He was in such agony, that *his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground* (Luke 22:44). His love for us is so great, that he submitted to the Father's will to be punished for our sin. He said to God the Father, *'Take this cup away from me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what you will'* (36). He drank that terrible cup in order to give us a cup of blessing, a cup of salvation. **When we think of what it cost him to save us, we should shudder at the very thought of sinning!**

The Lord Jesus returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. He said to Peter, *'Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation ...'* (37-38). He went away and again prayed to the Father before finding them still asleep. They were again sleeping when he returned to them a third time after prayer. Peter was not alert and failed to pray because he was tired. He was soon to *enter into temptation* and to sin. **If you are neglecting prayer – beware!** You will be very vulnerable when the devil tempts you or attacks you.

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



September 2015

Bible readings from Gospel of Mark chapters 8 to 14

My blood of the new covenant which is shed for many

Religion can be a cloak for great wickedness. The Jewish leaders and Judas Iscariot are examples of religious people who were wicked and would not hesitate to commit an act of betrayal or murder (1–2,10–11).

The Lord Jesus sent Peter and John to prepare the Passover (12–13; Luke 22:8). They were to follow a man carrying a pitcher of water who would lead them to the house where they were to go. The Feast of Unleavened Bread began with the Passover meal. Lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs were eaten and three cups of wine were taken during the meal. The bitter herbs were a reminder of the bitter slavery of the Israelites in Egypt. The lamb commemorated the protection of Israel's first-born, and the unleavened bread was a reminder of the haste in which the Jews escaped from Egypt. As Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with the twelve disciples, he warned them that one of them would betray him. He said that *'it would have been good for that man if he had never been born'* (18–21). Judas was on the slippery slope to hell!

Jesus gave bread and wine to his disciples as a remembrance of his body and blood given for us at Calvary (22–24; cp. 1 Corinthians 11:24–25). He is described as *'our Passover'* (1 Corinthians 5:7). He has delivered us from a far greater tyranny than that suffered by Israel in Egypt. He has saved us from our sin and from the power of Satan (John 8:34–36; 1 John 3:8). Jesus said of the wine that we take at the Communion service, *'This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for many'* (24). The holy Son of God was punished for his people (Matthew 1:21; 1 Peter 3:18). At this service we especially remember how our Saviour was tortured, crushed and slain to save us. **Salvation is free but we must never forget that it was purchased at tremendous cost.** *You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's* (1 Corinthians 6:20). If we are truly grateful to the Lord for doing so much to save us, this will be no great hardship but a delight.

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She has done a good work for me

On the Tuesday before the crucifixion, the chief priests and scribes were still seeking a way in which they could take Jesus *by trickery and put him to death*. They were hesitant about doing this during the Passover and the Feast of unleavened bread, however, fearing an uproar from the people (1–2). At the same time Mary of Bethany was showing her love and devotion to Christ in pouring the costly perfume over his head (3–9; cp. John 12:1–8).

The disciples and Judas in particular were critical of Mary for her lavish sacrifice. They asked, ‘*Why was this fragrant oil wasted?*’ (4–5; John 12:4–6). The perfume was very valuable (three hundred denarii was a year’s wages for a working man). Had it been sold, the money could have been given to the poor, though Judas himself cared little for the poor. After this he went to the chief priests and agreed to betray his Lord for thirty pieces of silver (10–11).

The Lord Jesus rebuked Mary’s harsh critics, saying, ‘*She has done a good work for me*’ (6). The Greek word for ‘good’ (‘kalos’) can be translated ‘beautiful’. Why was Mary’s work ‘*a good work*’? Jesus said, ‘*She has done what she could.*’ Her act was a symbolic pre-anointing of the body of Jesus for burial (8). It was an act of faith. Mary’s act was also one of great love and gratitude to the Lord who had raised her brother Lazarus from the dead (John 11). It was a costly sacrifice, but such an act of sacrificial devotion to the Lord Jesus is never a waste (4). He delights in our extravagant expressions of devotion to himself. Sadly, they are very rare. Jesus, though he was rich, became poor for our sakes (2 Corinthians 8:9). Dare we be miserly in our giving to him?

Jesus said that Mary’s act of devotion would be remembered wherever the gospel is preached (9). He never forgets our sacrificial expressions of devotion to him because they are beautiful works which delight him. **Can you think of any beautiful work which you can do as a token of your love for Christ?**

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees

The Pharisees and the Sadducees had seen enough evidence of the mighty power of Jesus but the perfect teacher, the almighty miracle-worker, failed to convince them. They wanted Jesus to produce a miraculous sign from heaven. He sighed deeply, being grieved at their hardness of heart and unbelief (11–12). Faith does not come through seeing signs and wonders but through the preaching and hearing of the word of God (Romans 10:14–17). *We walk by faith, not by sight* (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Jesus and his disciples went by boat to Bethsaida on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The disciples were concerned because they had forgotten to take bread with them and had only one loaf with them in the boat. Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith, reminding them of the miracles of the feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand (18–20). They were puzzled by the warning of Jesus, ‘*Beware of the leaven (yeast) of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod*’ (15). They may have thought that Jesus was forbidding them to accept bread from these people, but he was warning them against their doctrine and against hypocrisy (Matthew 16:12; Luke 12:1). The Pharisees were proud and lacking in compassion. They were more concerned for their unbiblical tradition than for loving God and obeying his word. The Herodians were a political party who supported Herod and their ‘*leaven*’ is worldliness. We must not allow our thinking or behaviour to be shaped by the godless society in which we live but rather by the word of God (cp. Psalm 1:1–3; Romans 12:2).

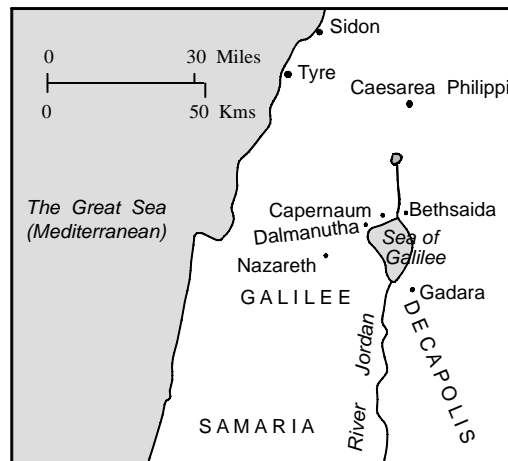
The warning of the Lord Jesus is most important for us today. We must beware of any teaching which adds to Scripture with unbiblical traditions, or which takes away from Scripture by denying the death and resurrection of Christ for sinners, of judgment and hell. We must beware of hypocrisy and worldliness. Such leaven saps a believer of spiritual vitality. **Let us too beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.**

But who do you say that I am?

When Jesus came ashore at Bethsaida a blind man was brought to him for healing. Why did he lead the blind man out of the city before healing him? At first, the man's vision was blurred and the Lord Jesus put his hands on his eyes again and the man was able to see clearly. William Hendriksen comments, 'It should be emphasized that this act of healing is by no means in line with slow present-day healings that require several visits to the 'healer'. In the case recorded here the entire healing process was accomplished within a few moments, with the result: a change from complete blindness to perfect vision' (COMMENTARY ON MARK, page 323 published by Banner of Truth Trust).

Why did Jesus tell the man not to return to Bethsaida to make known what had happened to him (22–26)? Could it be that the city which had seen many mighty works had become so hardened in unbelief that he would not perform the miracle within its boundary (cp. Matthew 11:20–21)?

After travelling north to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked his disciples, 'Who do men say that I am?' Opinions varied, some thought that he was John the Baptist, Elijah or one of the prophets (27–28). Jesus then challenged the disciples, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter's confession, 'You are the Christ' (29) acknowledged that Jesus is more than a man. He is God! Any religion that denies that Jesus is God is false (John 1:1–3; Romans 9:5; 1 John 4:2–3). **Who do you say that Jesus is?**

*Take heed, watch and pray*

The Jewish historian, Josephus, records that there were false prophets at the time of the Roman assault on Jerusalem. Jesus warned that before his return there will also be false christs and false prophets; they will work *signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect* (22). Immediately before the return of the Lord Jesus there will be frightening cosmic disturbances (24–25). Everyone living will see Jesus return, *coming in the clouds with great power and glory* (26). Every true Christian ('*his elect*') will be gathered by the angels to meet the Lord in the air, together with every believer from previous ages. It will be the day of resurrection for our bodies (27; cp. John 5:29; 1 Corinthians 15:51–55; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17).

No one knows the date of Christ's return. Jehovah's Witnesses have made many mistakes in their understanding of Scripture. They actually believe that Christ returned invisibly in 1914, whereas the Bible says that everyone will see him. There will be no invisible return (26; Revelation 1:7; cp. 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10). The Lord Jesus has been with his church invisibly throughout the ages (Matthew 28:20) Jehovah's Witnesses also predicted that the world would end in 1975. They are false prophets, but their zeal in promoting their religion is a rebuke to many Christians who know the truth and do not share their good news with those around them.

The Lord Jesus reminds us, '*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away*' (31). His prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 was fulfilled and his words concerning his second coming will certainly come to pass. How are we to react to all that is happening and will happen? We are not to be troubled (7). Remember that God is sovereign and is in control of all things. The Lord Jesus will return suddenly. He tells us three times to watch and to be on our guard (33–37). We are to be ready. Jesus said, '*Take heed, watch and pray*' (33). Do you pay attention to his words. Are you on your guard? Do you take time to pray? **If Jesus returned today, would you be ready?**

For the elect's sake

The abomination of desolation (14; cp. Daniel 9:27) speaks of the time when the temple and its holy sanctuary would be desecrated. Daniel's prophecy had already been fulfilled when Antiochus Epiphanes invaded Canaan in 171 BC. He desecrated the temple and stopped the offering of the daily sacrifices (see also Daniel 8:10–12). The temple was reconsecrated in 164 BC following the Maccabean revolt. The Lord Jesus warned that the temple would again be desecrated and this happened in AD 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed. Jesus used the fig tree as an illustration to prepare people in the first century for the destruction of Jerusalem which was to happen in their lifetime (28–30). A fig tree coming into leaf indicates the approach of summer. When the Roman armies approached Jerusalem, they would know that the destruction of the city was imminent.

Many of the early Christians remembered the warning of Jesus (14–18) and did not flee to Jerusalem at the approach of the Romans but to the mountains; they thus escaped the massacre. Many Jews did just the opposite and fled into the city and into a blood-bath. The suffering endured by those in Jerusalem at that time was far greater than anything previously suffered by its inhabitants (19). The suffering in the tribulation before Christ's second coming will be even greater. Christians will still be on earth (they are described as *'the elect'* in verse 20; cp. Romans 8:33). God will shorten the days of tribulation *for the elect's sake, whom he chose* and they will be saved.

Are you fearful concerning the future? Do you wonder how you would cope with persecution and suffering if it came upon you? If you are a Christian, do not fear. The Lord will give you grace to endure and he will never forsake you. We are never out of his sight and he constantly cares for us. He is mindful of his elect people. If you are not a Christian, you too can know Christ, if you will come to him, repenting of your sins and trusting in him to save you. You will then know that you are one of God's elect.

He rebuked Peter, saying, 'Get behind me, Satan!'

We are not told why Jesus commanded the disciples that they should not reveal his identity as the Christ (the Messiah; 30). It was probably to prevent the people acclaiming him as a political leader who would free the nation from Roman servitude and restore Israel's greatness. After Jesus had fed the five thousand, many of those present acknowledged that he was the great Prophet spoken of in the Old Testament and tried to make him king (John 6:13–14; cp. Deuteronomy 18:15–18). Jesus did not come to set up a political kingdom, however; he had a far greater mission.

Peter had confessed that Jesus is the Christ (29) but from that time Jesus began to teach his disciples that he must suffer many things. He was not going to Jerusalem to be crowned as king but to be rejected by the Jewish leadership, and be killed and raised the third day (31). Peter refused to accept this and he rebuked the Lord Jesus for saying these things, but the Saviour rebuked him with the words, *'Get behind me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men'* (32–33). Peter wanted to turn Jesus away from his mission of suffering and death, but such thoughts came from Satan.

Those who would know God must be sure of two things – who Jesus is, and why he came to this earth (i.e. the Person and the Work of Christ). Most false cults and deviations from Christianity go wrong in their understanding of Christ. Some view him as a political revolutionary, which is not true (John 18:36). Others rightly see him as a fine example and as a great teacher but they fail to understand that he came to this earth to save sinners. He died on the cross as the perfect substitute to be punished in our place (Isaiah 53:5–6). When the apostle Paul went into the Jewish synagogue in Thessalonica, he preached that Jesus was the promised Messiah, that he came to die and that he rose from the dead (Acts 17:2–3). Paul described Jesus as *'the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me'* (Galatians 2:20). **Have you asked the Lord Jesus to save you from your sins? Do you love him and obey him?**

Let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me

The Lord Jesus had shocked the disciples when he had told them that he was to be rejected by the leaders of the Jews and that he would be killed. After calling the people to himself, he made it very clear that following him was no easy option. The word ‘*whoever*’ is found four times between verses 34 to 38. He said, ‘*Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me*’ (34). If you desire to be a Christian, you must:

- Deny yourself. This means putting the interests of others before your own interests (cp. Philippians 2:3–4). You cannot enjoy a selfish lifestyle and at the same time follow Christ. You must be prepared to undertake the most humble tasks in serving the Lord Jesus. Remember, he washed the disciples’ feet (John 13:1–14).
- Take up your cross. The cross is a symbol of suffering and death. Taking up the cross is not bearing gracefully some illness or suffering that comes upon us (unbelievers suffer the same things); it is to do with the choices we make and being prepared to suffer personal loss rather than to deny Christ.
- Follow the Lord Jesus as his disciple, obeying his word (Matthew 28:19–20; John 14:15).

The devil uses all manner of lies to keep us from following Christ. He will try to persuade us to ‘save our lives’ from the demands of discipleship. He will tell us that self-denial will make us miserable, but remember, Satan is a liar (John 8:44). Whoever ‘*loses his life*’ for the sake of Jesus and the gospel will save it to enjoy precious fellowship with God, surpassing joy and peace, and eternal life. Discipleship is costly but the alternative to following Christ is too dreadful to contemplate. Jesus said, ‘*For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*’ (36–37). To lose one’s soul is to suffer eternal loss. **Have you taken up your cross to follow Christ? Are you denying yourself to please him or are you a coward and ashamed to follow him (38)?**

Take heed that no one deceives you

The disciples were admiring the beauty and the grandeur of the temple and were shocked to hear the Lord Jesus say that it would be destroyed (1–2). They left Jerusalem for the Mount of Olives, where Peter, James, John and Andrew ask him two questions:

1. ‘*When will these things be?*’ (i.e. the destruction of the temple).
2. ‘*What will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?*’ (Matthew 24:3).

Some of the events leading to the destruction of Jerusalem are similar to the events preceding the second coming of Christ. Some verses may refer to both and there is a certain amount of overlap in the verses of this chapter. The Jews rebelled against the Romans in AD 66 who then besieged Jerusalem, destroying the city and the temple in AD 70. There was terrible slaughter, many of the victims being women and young children.

The conditions which preceded AD 70 are not a sign of the end of the world. They are to be found in any age. There are false teachers (5–6, 21–23) wars, rumours of wars, earthquakes, famines and troubles (7–8) and persecution of God’s people (9–13). **How are we to react to all that is happening around us now, and in the future?**

- We must be on our guard against deceivers. Jesus said, ‘*Take heed that no one deceives you*’ (5). Many are ‘taken in’ by false teachers today because they do not ‘*take heed*’ to God’s word.
- We are not to let fear and trouble overcome us (7). Remember, God is sovereign and he is in control of all these things.
- We are to be encouraged because *the gospel must ... be preached to all the nations* (10). We are rightly concerned today at the spread of false religions, at the increase of occult activities in our land and at the confusion in so many evangelical churches but nothing will prevent the progress of the gospel.
- The Holy Spirit will help us when we face our enemies (11).
- We must persevere to the end for we shall be saved (13).

This poor widow out of her poverty ... put in all that she had

A scribe had questioned the Lord Jesus concerning the greatest commandment (28) and Jesus asked a question about the scribes as he taught in the temple. The scribes acknowledged that the Christ is the Son of David but how could he be his Son when David by inspiration of the Holy Spirit called him 'Lord' (35–37)? In other words, the Messiah is more than a descendant of David. He is God! The scribes refused to recognise Jesus as the Messiah and they would not submit to his lordship.

He warned his hearers, 'Beware of the scribes' (38). They loved all the pomp and the outward trappings of religion so that people would notice them and admire them ('that they may be seen by men' – Matthew 6:5). They appeared so dignified in their long flowing robes and in their formal greetings when they addressed each other as 'Rabbi' (Matthew 23:7–10). They loved to have the best seats in the synagogues and the place of honour at their feasts. They appeared to be holy by reciting long prayers but they were wicked. They extorted money from weak and vulnerable people such as widows. They would not escape the judgment of God and would receive the greater condemnation because of their hypocrisy (39–40).

While Jesus was in the temple, he observed rich people putting large offerings into the treasury. He then saw a poor widow put just two mites into the box. These small coins were hardly worth anything but the Lord commended this poor woman as he spoke to his disciples. She had given everything that she had, whereas many gave from their considerable wealth and still had much left for themselves. Jesus said, 'This poor widow ... out of her poverty put in all that she had' (43–44). **What is important in the sight of God is not how much we give, but how much we keep back for ourselves.**

This is my beloved Son. Hear him!

The Lord Jesus had predicted his death and resurrection and had also spoken of the need for self-denying discipleship (8:31–38). He promised that those with him would not die before they had witnessed the coming of God's kingdom. He was not suggesting that some of the apostles would still be alive at his second coming. He said that they would 'not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power' (1). This probably refers to his resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and the tremendous impact of the gospel upon the Roman world which the apostles were accused of turning upside down (Acts 17:6).

The transfiguration of Jesus (2–8) was to have a lasting impression upon the three disciples who were with him. John wrote, 'We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth' (John 1:14). Peter records, 'We ... were eye-witnesses of his majesty' (2 Peter 1:16–17). The Lord Jesus spoke to Moses and Elijah at his transfiguration. Moses represented the Law and Elijah the Prophets. In his Gospel, Luke tells us that they were speaking of the death of Jesus (Luke 9:31). In our Saviour the Law and the Prophets are fulfilled (Luke 24:25–27). Moses had seen the majesty of God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:9–10), and later his face shone, reflecting the glory of God (Exodus 34:29–35). The Lord Jesus does not merely reflect the glory of God; he is God! The brilliance and the majesty seen by the three disciples was that of God himself.

The Father told the three disciples who were on the mountain, 'This is my beloved Son. Hear him!' (7). The words of Jesus did not seem to register with them. When he was betrayed and arrested, they were scattered in helpless confusion (14:50). **We will be spared much confusion and trouble if we do all that we can to know and understand God's word.** 'This is my beloved Son. Hear him!'

The Son of man ... must suffer many things

The Lord Jesus had told the three disciples who had witnessed his transfiguration *that they should tell no one of the things they had seen, till the Son of man had risen from the dead* (9). They did not understand *what the rising from the dead meant* (10) and we know that they were surprised when he did rise from the grave. They were also puzzled concerning Elijah who had been spared death and taken up into heaven. They had seen Elijah with Jesus on the mount and they asked him, *'Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?'* (11).

The Lord Jesus agreed with the scribes who were quoting the prophecy of Malachi that Elijah must come before the Messiah and that his ministry would bring about a restoration (12). Where the scribes were mistaken was that they looked for Elijah to come in person before the coming of the Messiah. Some sincere Christians expect that Elijah will come to earth before the second coming of Christ, but I do not agree with them. Jesus said of John, *'And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come'* (Matthew 11:14). This does not mean that John was Elijah; he himself had denied this (John 1:21). His ministry was *'in the spirit and power of Elijah'* (Luke 1:17) fulfilling the prophecy that Elijah would come again (17:11–12; cp. Malachi 4:5). Here Jesus says, *'But I say to you that Elijah has also come and they did to him whatever they wished, as it is written of him'* (13). Matthew informs us that *the disciples understood that he spoke to them of John the Baptist* (Matthew 17:13).

The Lord again reminded the disciples that he was to suffer. He asked, *'And how is it written concerning the Son of man that he must suffer many things and be treated with contempt?'* (12). The scribes failed to recognise that John the Baptist was the forerunner of the Messiah and they also failed to understand that the Scriptures teach that the Messiah *must suffer*. Many who attend Christian churches are also ignorant of the fact that Jesus died to save sinners and that our own good works and religious ritual cannot save us. **How is it with you?**

Not far from the kingdom of God

The scribes and the Pharisees had little time for the views of the Sadducees and would have been pleased at Christ's answer to their question. They were experts in interpreting and applying the Old Testament laws to everyday religion. Many of them were convinced that Jesus had come to destroy the law but that was not so. He had stated quite plainly, *'Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil'* (Matthew 5:17). It is true that Jesus refused to endorse the petty rules that they had superimposed upon God's word; that was not destroying the law but rejecting man-made traditions.

The scribes loved to debate the finer points of the Scriptures and the question asked by the scribe was typical of those which they debated: *'Which is the first commandment of all?'* (28). Jesus replied by quoting from Deuteronomy 6:4–5 and Leviticus 19:18. Those verses repeated in verses 29 and 30 were very familiar to the Jews. They were recited at the beginning of worship in the Jewish synagogues (this custom is still observed).

Our duty to God is to love him with all of our being (30). If we love him, we will desire to obey his word, and to have fellowship with him. If we truly love God, we will love our neighbour as we love ourselves (Ephesians 4:32; 5:2; 1 John 4:20–21). The scribe acknowledged that Jesus had answered him well. He agreed that to obey the two great commandments is more important than observing religious ritual (32–33; this was a surprising answer for a scribe). Jesus encouraged him, saying, *'You are not far from the kingdom of God'* (34). The scribe knew God's word and he recognised the supreme importance of love for God. He was religious, but he was not inside the kingdom of God. **If you are satisfied with being 'not far from the kingdom of God' you will be shut out of it for ever. Give yourself no rest until you are on the inside.**

Greatly mistaken

The Sadducees esteemed the five books of Moses (Genesis to Deuteronomy) above the other books of the Old Testament. They were very influential in Jewish religious affairs but were materialistic and ungodly. The high priests were drawn from their ranks and they controlled the temple which Jesus had cleansed. These men had a score to settle with Jesus and they came with a trick question in an attempt to entangle him in his talk. Like so many modern heretics, they denied the resurrection of the dead. Such people often resort to ridicule in an argument because their own position is very weak.

They raised the principle of ‘levirate marriage’ taught in Deuteronomy 25:5–10. When a man died childless, his widow was not to remarry outside of his family, but be married to his brother. The marriage would enable the widow to bear children from the same flesh and blood as her deceased husband. This would preserve his name and inheritance. They related a far-fetched story of a woman who survived seven husbands, all brothers. They asked to which man the widow would be married in the resurrection.

Jesus said to them, ‘*Are you not therefore mistaken because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?*’ (24). His answer completely turned the tables on them. There is no marriage in heaven (25)! He quoted from one of the books of Moses to show that the dead are raised. God told Moses that he was ‘*the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*’ (Exodus 3:6,15). The great patriarchs had died long ago, but they were alive with God in heaven. Jesus said, ‘*He is not the God of the dead but the God of the living*’ (26–27).

The Sadducees were therefore *greatly mistaken* (27). It is possible to have a form of religion, which is empty and sham, which has no power (2 Timothy 3:5). **We too will make many mistakes if we do not know the teaching of Scripture. We cannot afford to be wrong concerning God and future resurrection. The Day of Judgment will be a day of shocks for those who have been greatly mistaken.**

Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!

When Jesus, Peter, James and John returned to the other nine disciples, they found them surrounded by a great crowd. They were in a dispute with the scribes and the Lord Jesus asked the scribes, ‘*What are you discussing with them?*’ (16). We are not told that they answered his question but a distraught man explained how his son was tormented by a demon which the disciples had been unable to cast out of the boy. Their failure would have been an occasion of much gleeful scorn for the enemies of Jesus.

The father asked in desperation, ‘*If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us*’ (22). The Lord Jesus replied, ‘*If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes*’ (23). The man’s reply reflects the state of many a person’s faith: ‘*Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!*’ (24). Our faith is often mixed with unbelief. We want to have a faith which will not waver, but we are much aware of our own weakness. Let us pray for grace and for the strengthening of our faith, and be prepared for the Lord’s testing to build us up. Jesus graciously answered the man’s prayer and the boy was delivered from the tormenting demon.

The disciples were concerned that they had failed to help the boy. They had been successful on other occasions (6:13). Jesus told them that they were lacking in prayer, in fasting, and in faith (29; cp. Matthew 17:20–21). We cannot live on past successes. **If we neglect our communion with God, we will become weak, impotent, and embarrassed that we are ineffective in a wretched, needy world.**

*Give me the faith which can remove
And sink the mountain to a plain;
Give me the childlike praying love
Which longs to build thy house again;
Thy love, let it my heart o’erpower
And fill me from this very hour.*

(Charles Wesley)

The greatest

The Lord Jesus again taught the disciples that he would be killed and that he would rise again the third day (31; cp. 8:31). They just could not take it all in and were bewildered and *exceedingly sorrowful* (Matthew 17:23). They were afraid to ask the Lord any further questions about this prediction.

Their sorrow was soon forgotten as they *disputed among themselves who would be the greatest*. Little wonder they were ashamed and silent when the Lord Jesus asked them later about their conversation (33–34). We often read of power struggles in the world whether in politics, business or sport. Some are so determined to get to the top that they have no concern for those who will be hurt in the process. It is a sad fact that this worldly attitude is often found among Christians. Many a church has been wrecked by someone who has been driven by selfish ambition. There was such a person mentioned in the New Testament, *Diotrephes, who loves to have the pre-eminence* (3 John 9).

The Lord Jesus said that true greatness is in being the servant of all (35). He set a little child in the midst of his disciples and then took him in his arms. He told them that whoever receives such a child, receives him (37). We must reach out in love and mercy to those who cannot possibly reward us or promote us.

Do you love your fellow-believers enough to serve them? Are you a willing volunteer when there are unpleasant duties or laborious tasks to be done in the church? The word of God urges us to serve one another through love (Galatians 5:13). If we deny ourselves and take up our cross (8:34), selfish ambition will be kept in check in our lives. *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself* (Philippians 2:3). The Lord Jesus is our great example; he is God and yet he took the form of a servant (Greek = ‘a slave’) to save us from our sins (Philippians 2:5–8). **Let us follow his example (John 13:1–17).**

Render ... to God the things that are God's

The remainder of this chapter records several incidents in which the enemies of Jesus tried *to catch him in his words* (13). The Pharisees made believe that they were very concerned about keeping God's law, whereas the Herodians were worldly, caring very little for the Jewish religion. They were united however in their desire to get rid of Jesus. Notice their hypocrisy. They said that Jesus taught *‘the way of God in truth’* (14), but they persistently rejected his claims. On a different occasion Jesus quoted the Old Testament to describe the Pharisees, *‘These people ... honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me’* (Matthew 15:8). We will never deceive God with lip-service.

The question that Jesus was asked appeared to be quite straightforward, but there was a catch to it: *‘Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?’* (14). Every adult male Jew was obliged to pay a denarius in tax to Rome each year; this was about a day's wages. The Jews resented paying taxes to Caesar and if Jesus had said directly, ‘Yes, pay your taxes,’ the Pharisees would have branded him as a traitor. If he had told them that it was wrong to pay these taxes, the Herodians would have accused him of treachery against Rome. The wicked Jewish leadership were to accuse him of this very thing before Pilate (Luke 23:2).

The Lord Jesus saw through their craftiness and asked them to show him a denarius coin. He asked them whose image and inscription was upon the coin and they admitted that it was of Caesar (15–16). He then told them, *‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.’* His superb answer to their trick-question caused them to marvel (17). Jesus is teaching here that we cannot shirk our duty to be law-abiding citizens. We must pay our taxes whether we like it or not. Even more important, we must *‘render ... to God the things that are God's’* (17). **He has bought us for himself at great cost (1 Corinthians 6:19–20) and he demands first place in our lives. Are we robbing God by not rendering money, time or talents to be used for his work (cp. Malachi 3:8)?**

They will respect my son

The parable of the wicked vine-dressers is a parable of the history of the Jewish nation which had enjoyed the special care and goodness of God for centuries. The man represents God and the vine-dressers the civil and religious leaders of Israel. The servants in the parable represented the Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist. God had given them good laws and had favoured them above other nations, but they still rejected him. *They mocked the messengers of God, despised his words, and scoffed at his prophets* (2 Chronicles 36:16).

The Lord Jesus went on to reveal what was to happen to him that very week (6–8). The man in the parable said, *'They will respect my son'* but he was treated far worse than any of his servants. The Jewish leaders did not respect the Son of God. They were plotting the most terrible crime of all – the murder of the sinless Saviour. Just as the owner of the vineyard destroyed the wicked vine-dressers, so the Jews would be rejected and their kingdom given to the Gentiles (9; this prophecy was fulfilled about forty years later in AD 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans following a Jewish uprising).

Jesus quoted Psalm 118: *'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner-stone'* (10; cp. Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:6–8). He is the rejected stone. The chief priests, scribes and elders had questioned Jesus about his authority (11:27–28) because they did not respect him. They knew that Jesus was directing this parable against them and they would have laid hold of him but for the multitude (12).

Do you respect the Son of God by obeying him, by giving him first place in your life? One day every knee will bow to him (Philippians 2:9–11). Far better to submit to him now and discover that he is a wonderful and kind master than be punished by him as your Judge on the day of judgment.

We saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons

The Lord Jesus had just spoken about true greatness when John reported, *'Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us'* (38). The man was not against them. He was obviously a true believer but he did not belong to the group of disciples. Jesus told John and the disciples not to forbid him (39–40).

We must not be intolerant of other Christians who love the word of God and its infallible truths. We must never be so small-minded that we would silence all Christians who do not belong to our denominational group. They may differ from us in their understanding of certain doctrines (eg. baptism or church government), but we should rejoice when God blesses them in their gospel preaching (Philippians 1:18). The Lord sees even what may be considered as insignificant acts of kindness shown to his people and he rewards those deeds (41). Let us seek always to be kind to all our fellow-Christians, even though they do not *follow us*.

These verses do not suggest that we should not question the dubious claims of miracle-workers today many of whom are also false teachers. We must remember the words of the Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount where he warns us against false prophets. He points out that on the day of judgment there will be many who have prophesied in his name, cast out demons in his name, and done wonders in his name, who nevertheless will be cast out of his presence. They were never true servants of his but practitioners of lawlessness (Matthew 7:15, 21–23).

*Give me a faithful heart,
Likeness to thee,
That each departing day
Henceforth may see
Some work of love begun,
Some deed of kindness done
Some wanderer sought and won,
Something for thee.*

(Sylvanus O. Phelps)

The fire that shall never be quenched

The Lord Jesus gives us some solemn warnings in the passage we have just read:

- Woe to that person who causes a believer (*'one of these little ones who believe in me,'* 42) to stumble. Those who would harm the Lord's people by seeking to entice them into sin or to destroy their faith will surely be punished.
- We must remove anything from our own lives that would cause us to stumble. **This means giving up anything that stands between us and the salvation of our souls. These things may be as dear to us as our hands, feet, or eyes but we are to remove them if they make us sin or cause us to stumble.** We must crucify fleshly passions (Galatians 5:19,24). Better the pain of putting sin to death in our lives so that we enter into eternal life, than to suffer the eternal pains of hell in *the fire that shall never be quenched* (43–48)!

There was a valley to the south of Jerusalem called 'Gehenna'. It became known as the place of fire because during the reigns of the wicked kings Ahaz and Manasseh, children were roasted to death as sacrifices to the god Molech (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6; 23:10). Gehenna became the word used to describe hell where the fire is eternal (cp. Matthew 18:8; Revelation 14:11; 20:10,15). The Lord Jesus quoted the last verse of the prophet Isaiah (66:24) three times as he said, *'the fire shall never be quenched'* (44,46,48). The truth about hell should cause us to be urgent in making the gospel known to sinners (2 Corinthians 5:11).

Some believe that verse 49 refers to hell but not *everyone* will be seasoned by hell-fire. Others believe that it refers to the refining and preserving process of the believer in the fire of trial. Salt is a symbol of purity and of preservation. We are to have salt in ourselves and be at peace with each other (50). We are the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13). **What use are we if our lives do not have a purifying effect upon those around us?**

Whenever you stand praying

We saw yesterday that we must have faith when we come to God in prayer. There is another vital element in prayer. *Whenever you stand praying* (25) you must have a forgiving spirit which delights in showing mercy toward those who have wronged you. It is possible to have much faith, to persevere with fervent prayer, and yet for prayer to go unheard. If you nurture hatred and bitterness in your heart, how can you expect God to hear you? You have been forgiven much and you dare not withhold forgiveness from any who ask you to forgive them (cp. Matthew 18:15–35). Forgiveness must be from the heart and you must not brood over the wrong done to you.

If those who have wronged you do not repent, you must pray that God will bring them to repentance. Jesus said, *'Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you'* (Matthew 5:44). The Lord Jesus prayed for those who crucified him (Luke 23:34). Stephen prayed for his murderers (Acts 7:60). Among those for whom Stephen prayed was Saul of Tarsus (Acts 8:1), who became Paul, the great apostle and missionary. **When did you last pray for someone who hates you?**

The chief priests, scribes and elders questioned Jesus about his authority. Who had given him the authority to do the things that he was doing (eg. cleansing the temple)? He responded by asking them about the ministry of John the Baptist: *'The baptism of John — was it from heaven or from men? Answer me'* (30). They refused to answer, however, because they were not enthusiastic about John. They knew that if they acknowledged that John's ministry was from God, Jesus would ask them why they had refused to believe him. If they denied the validity of John's ministry they would incur the wrath of the people who acknowledged John as a prophet. They refused to answer the question of Jesus and so he refused to answer their question (1–8). People still reject the authority of Christ, but we must pray for them, that they will come to faith in him and submit to his lordship.

Have faith in God

Returning to Jerusalem the next day, the disciples saw that the fig tree which Jesus had cursed, was dried up from its root. Peter said to the Lord Jesus, ‘*Rabbi, look! The fig tree which you cursed has withered away*’ (20–21). Jesus told them that if they had faith and did not doubt, they would do similar miracles. Prayer without faith is useless (James 1:6–7).

Jesus said, ‘*Have faith in God. For assuredly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain (the Mount of Olives), “Be removed and cast into the sea” (the Dead Sea), and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will come to pass, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, Whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them*’ (22–24). Great faith was linked with moving mountains (Matthew 17:20; cp. 1 Corinthians 13:2). The Puritan, John Trapp, wrote, ‘Faith is the foundation of prayer, and prayer is the fervency of faith. Faith and prayer are the soul’s two hands, whereby she begs and receives from God all things, both for this and a better life.’

The promise in verses 23 and 24 is an encouragement to trust God when we pray, but it is not an invitation to treat God as a ‘Father Christmas’! Some people foolishly take this promise as a blank cheque to claim from God health and wealth for themselves, and then they wonder why their prayers ‘bounce’. God will not listen to greedy, selfish prayers (James 4:3). The promise must be qualified by 1 John 5:14 – ‘*according to his will.*’ There is a wonderful promise in Psalm 37:4: *Delight yourself also in the LORD and he shall give you the desires of your heart* (4). **It is important to note that when we delight ourselves in the Lord, our desires will be God-centred rather than self-centred.**

What God has joined together

The Lord Jesus left Galilee for Judea where the Pharisees questioned him about divorce (1). There were conflicting views concerning marriage and divorce in New Testament times, just as there are today. There were two opposing schools of thought among the Pharisees in understanding Deuteronomy 24:1. Some believed that the verse taught that divorce was only permissible when there was adultery. The others twisted the Scripture by taking part of the verse, ‘*she finds no favour in his eyes,*’ to give a man the most flimsy excuse to divorce his wife (eg. if she served him food that he considered to be overcooked). The Pharisees wanted to trap the Lord Jesus into taking sides (2).

Why did Moses permit divorce? It was because of the hardness of men’s hearts! The provision of Moses was to protect a wife who would be left destitute by divorce with no means of support. It was also meant to make people think very seriously before embarking upon divorce. Once a divorcee had remarried, there was no way that he could marry his former spouse again if circumstances changed (Deuteronomy 24:1–4).

Jesus took his hearers back to the institution of marriage in Genesis and said, ‘*What God has joined together, let not man separate*’ (6–9). If marriage was seen to be a divine institution, people would not rush in and out of it. The worldly, easy-going attitude to marriage and divorce has infiltrated many evangelical churches. Scripture only allows remarriage to those who have been divorced after their spouse has committed adultery (cp. Matthew 19:9) or if they are deserted by their non-Christian partner (1 Corinthians 7:15). This is a complex issue and we could not reasonably expect a battered wife to stay in a marriage where her life is threatened. More Christian marriages are breaking up with husband or wife walking away from the marriage stating that they want to ‘move on’. This is dreadful! Remarriage for such people is not permitted. **We must resist the wicked influences of the world where marital infidelity is acceptable. Let us value our marriage partner, encourage them and pray with them every day.**

He ... went away grieved

The Lord Jesus always had time for children but here the disciples would have sent them away (13–16). We must never despise children or the work among the young. Many Christians come to Christ in their youth and we must always be aware of the children in our church. The old saying, ‘Children may be seen, but not heard’ is not to be practised among God’s people. Children’s work is most important! Sunday School and similar mid-week activities provide an opportunity to bring the gospel to children who are lost. If you are serving Christ in this manner, persevere.

The man who came running to Jesus was young (17; cp. Matthew 19:20) and a ruler (probably an official in charge of a local synagogue; Luke 18:18). He called Jesus ‘good’ but only God is good in the absolute sense (18). He needed to know that Jesus is not only a ‘Good Teacher’ but also the sinless Son of God. He was wealthy and religious, but all this failed to meet his deepest needs. He wanted eternal life (17), but he also wanted to hold on to his possessions. No one can serve God and riches (Matthew 6:24).

Jesus loved this young man, but he let him go. He would not accept a half-hearted commitment to follow him (21) **Becoming a Christian involves more than ‘making a decision for Christ’. It means taking up the cross.** The cross is a symbol of self-denial, of shame, of suffering, of death. We must die to a selfish life if we want to be disciples of Jesus. It is not enough to respect Jesus as a good or great teacher. We must submit to his lordship. The young man who came to Jesus *went away grieved, for he had great possessions* to which he clung (22). Many a person since has turned away from the challenge of following Christ because they consider the cost to be too great. However, those who trust in the Lord Jesus and follow him enjoy priceless blessings.

A den of thieves

Jerusalem was a fig-growing area (‘*Bethphage*’ [1] means ‘house of figs’). When he returned there the next day, the Lord Jesus saw a particular fig tree which stood out for its rich foliage. It should have had its early crop of small figs growing from the previous year’s shoots, but the Lord found nothing except leaves and he cursed the tree (12–14). The barren fig tree provides a solemn lesson. Israel, a ‘fig tree’ planted by God and cared for as no other nation, was barren and was ripe for judgment.

There was corruption on a grand scale in the temple. Male Jews were obliged to pay a half-shekel temple tax (cp. Matthew 17:24–27; Exodus 30:13), but it had to be paid with Jewish coins. Roman coins were inscribed with the head of the Roman emperor whom the Romans worshipped as a god. These coins were strictly forbidden for use in the temple building and the money-changers charged exorbitant exchange rates to those needing to purchase Jewish shekels. Religion was used as a means of fraud. The precincts of the temple which had been consecrated for the worship of God, had become little more than a market place. The Lord Jesus drove out all the traders *and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold doves* (15–16). He quoted the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah saying, ‘*Is it not written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations”? But you have made it a ‘den of thieves’* (17; cp. Isaiah 56:7; Jeremiah 7:11).

On the following day, the disciples saw that the fig tree which Jesus had cursed had withered away. Like much religion at that time, it had much outward show, but it was lacking in fruit. Such shallow religion will not survive the day of judgment. **Let us be sure that there is no pretence in our religion because hypocrisy offends God and poisons our souls.**

The Lord has need of it

When Jesus reached the Mount of Olives just outside Jerusalem, he sent two of the disciples to bring him a colt. The animal obviously belonged to one of his followers who immediately responded to the disciples' words, '*The Lord has need of it*' (3). Do you respond immediately to needs in God's work which you are able to meet? The hymn rightly says, 'There's a work for Jesus none but you can do'.

Why did the Lord Jesus go into Jerusalem, riding on the donkey?

- It was to fulfil Scripture. The waving of the leafy branches from palm-trees is associated with joy (Leviticus 23:40). He was welcomed as the messianic King, fulfilling Old Testament prophecy (Zechariah 9:9; cp. Matthew 21:4–5).
- Jesus went to Jerusalem to die. He had warned his disciples on three separate occasions that he was going to Jerusalem to die (8:31; 9:30–32; 10:32–34). Jesus did not come secretly into Jerusalem to avoid being arrested. He came quite openly because it was God's time for him to go to the city. Jesus went into the temple and looked around before going out with his disciples to Bethany (11). It is more than likely that they stayed at the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha during the Passover (cp. John 12:1). '*Hosanna*' (9) means 'save now'. The words of the crowd, '*Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!*' are taken from Psalm 118. The same passage in the psalm also speaks of his rejection by the people and of a sacrifice being bound to the altar (Psalm 118:22–27). Jesus went to Jerusalem to die as the Lamb of God on the cross as a sacrifice for sinners.

Many of those who welcomed the Lord Jesus to Jerusalem were probably among the people who were crying out within a few days, '*Away with him! Crucify him!*' (John 19:15). They said all the right words on that first Palm Sunday, but they did not have true faith. They were fickle and shallow, easily moved by the emotion of the occasion. **The Lord wants more than an emotional response from us. He wants our whole-hearted commitment to follow him.**

With God all things are possible

The disciples were astonished at the comments of the Lord as he warned that riches are a great hindrance to any who want to go to heaven (23–24). Jesus said that '*it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God*' (25). Some believe that the eye of a needle was a very narrow and low gate into the city through which a camel had to struggle on its knees if it was to gain entry. This theory was first propounded in the 11th century AD but there is no evidence that such a gateway ever existed. The verse means what it says, hence the astonishment of the disciples at the statement of Jesus. They asked him, '*Who then can be saved?*' Jesus reassured them with a glorious truth, '*With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible*' (26–27).

No one is too hard for the Lord to save! Jesus very soon demonstrated this fact to his disciples when he saved Zacchaeus, who was very rich and also a chief tax collector (Luke 18:24–30; 19:1–10). Tax collectors were generally wicked cheats and as far as many Jews were concerned, they were beyond redemption. **We must never lose heart when we encounter people who are hardened or indifferent to the message of the gospel. The Lord is able to melt the hardest of hearts.** He is able to save the vilest sinner, and he can easily break the chains of sin which enslave people. We think, 'Impossible', but Scripture says, '*for with God all things are possible.*' Let us persevere in prayer and in our evangelism. God has many surprises for those who wait upon him.

Peter spoke about the commitment of himself and his fellow-disciples in following Christ: '*See we have left all and followed you*' (28). The Lord Jesus assured him that those who sacrificially follow him will not only receive everlasting life in the world to come, but will also be richly blessed in this life (29–30). Earthly treasures and pleasures may be sacrificed, but what can compare with God's blessing upon us, and with eternal life and treasure in heaven?

You do not know what you ask

The Lord Jesus predicted his death and resurrection for the third time giving more details concerning his trial and suffering (32–34). After this, James and John came to him with a request. They wanted to sit either side of Jesus in heaven (35–37). They wanted the best and the most exalted places. Little wonder that the other disciples were *greatly displeased* with them (41). **We must beware of seeking power for ourselves. Selfish ambition and pride has wrecked many a church.** Jesus said that the way to true greatness lies in humble service (42–45). Selfish ambition must be kept in check in our lives. *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself* (Philippians 2:3).

Jesus answered them, *‘You do not know what you ask. Can you drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?’* (38). His cup was one of appalling suffering (cp. 14:36) but James and John insisted that they were able to drink of such a cup (39). They did suffer for the Lord. James was killed by Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:1–2). John, who lived longer than any of the twelve disciples, spent the end of his life in exile (Revelation 1:9).

When James and John made their request to the Lord, he said to them, *‘You do not know what you ask’* (38). We are not always wise in our praying. We may ask God for things which would only hinder our walk with him and he wisely and graciously says ‘No’ to us. We may ask the Lord for a closer walk and greater knowledge of himself, and this is good. We must not be surprised, however, if we find that he leads us in a pathway of suffering to lead us to this goal (cp. Philippians 3:10–11). **Our heavenly Father delights to hear our prayers, but we do not always realise the implications of our requests being granted. It is for our good that he doesn’t always say, ‘Yes’, or answer us in the way we expect.**

What do you want me to do for you?

The blind beggar Bartimaeus, saw what the scribes and the Pharisees failed to see, that Jesus of Nazareth, whom they despised, was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. When he addressed Jesus as *‘Son of David’* (47–48), he was giving him the title of the Messiah (or ‘the Christ’ – God’s anointed One; cp. 12:35). The blind beggar had seen none of Christ’s mighty miracles, but he had strong faith in the greatness, power, and willingness of the Saviour to heal him. Bartimaeus also had a persistent faith which did not fail when faced with discouragement. When warned to be quiet, *he cried out all the more* (48).

Despite all the hustle and bustle of the crowd, Jesus stood still and commanded that the blind man be called to him. Jesus asked the beggar, *‘What do you want me to do for you?’* He did not ask for wealth so that he would no longer need to beg. His greater need was for sight and the Lord Jesus gladly granted his request, saying, *‘Go your way, your faith has made you well’* (52). The grateful Bartimaeus didn’t go home first to announce his healing but followed Jesus. How is your faith? Are you following Jesus?

God blesses and honours us when we exercise faith. He wants us to trust him, for *without faith it is impossible to please him* (Hebrews 11:6). If the Lord said to you, *‘What do you want me to do for you?’* what would you say? Do you bring your greatest needs to God in prayer? Think about the wonderful promise in Romans 8:32. *He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* If you do not ask or if you ask amiss (prayers that do not honour God) you will not receive (James 4:2–3). **If God loved us so much that he did not spare Jesus but gave him to die for us, do you think that he will turn a deaf ear to the prayers of those who love him and obey him?** Read Philippians 4:19; Hebrews 4:14–16 and be encouraged.