

An Explanation of
**THE GOSPEL ACCORDING
TO MATTHEW**



BEHOLD, YOUR KING



The Gospel According to Matthew

The Gospel According to Matthew

Behold, Your King

Ger de Koning

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Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

Old Testament

Gen	Genesis
Exo	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Num	Numbers
Deu	Deuteronomy
2Ko	2 Korinthiërs
Jos	Joshua
Jdg	Judges
Rth	Ruth
1Sam	First Samuel
2Sam	Second Samuel
1Kgs	First Kings
2Kgs	Second Kings
1Chr	First Chronicles
2Chr	Second Chronicles
Ezra	Ezra
Neh	Nehemiah
Est	Esther
Job	Job
Psa	Psalms
Pro	Proverbs
Ecc	Ecclesiastes
Song	Song of Songs
Isa	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Lam	Lamentations
Eze	Ezekiel
Dan	Daniël
Hos	Hosea
Joel	Joel
Amos	Amos
Oba	Obadiah
Jona	Jonah
Mic	Micah
Nah	Nahum
Hab	Habakkuk
Zep	Zephaniah
Hag	Haggai
Zec	Zechariah
Mal	Malachi

New Testament

Mt	Gospel of Matthew
Mk	Gospel of Mark
Lk	Gospel of Luke
Jn	Gospel of John
Acts	Acts of the Apostles
Rom	Letter to the Romans
1Cor	First Letter to the Corinthians
2Cor	Second Letter to the Corinthians
Gal	Letter to the Galatians
Eph	Letter to the Ephesians
Phil	Letter to the Philippians
Col	Letter to the Colossians
1Thes	First Letter to the Thessalonians
2Thes	Second Letter to the Thessalonians
1Tim	First Letter to Timothy
2Tim	Second Letter to Timothy
Tit	Letter tot Titus
Phlm	Letter to Philemon
Heb	Letter of the Hebrews
Jam	Letter of James
1Pet	First Letter of Peter
2Pet	Second Letter of Peter
1Jn	First Letter of John
2Jn	Second Letter of John
3Jn	Third Letter of John
Jude	Letter of Jude
Rev	Revelation

Explanation of general format

PERSONAL PRONOUNS are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

BRACKETS [] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

SHARP BRACKETS < > are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

When **ASTERISKS** * are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

ALL CAPS in the New Testament quotations are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

The Gospel According to Matthew

Preface

If we describe a person, we can do so from different angles. For example, we can highlight someone as the father of a family. In addition, a description of the same person is possible as a colleague in a company or as a neighbor. In this way we see how four evangelists – under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – report the life of the Lord Jesus during His stay on earth. In the four biographies we have in the Bible, the Gospel according to Matthew declares the Lord Jesus as King, Mark presents Him as Servant, Luke describes Him as true Man and finally John writes about Him as the eternal Son of God.

In this Gospel we see the Lord Jesus as King. This includes the call: “Behold, your King” (Jn 19:14) which is chosen as the subtitle for this book. Whoever reads this Gospel with the desire to see Him as King will “see the King in His beauty” (Isa 33:17).

Ger de Koning
Middelburg, April 2019

Purpose of the Gospel according to Matthew

The purpose of this Gospel is to present the Lord Jesus as the Messiah, the King anointed by God Who comes to His people Israel. This Gospel has rightly been placed as the first book after the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, time and again, a King is announced Who will liberate His people and make them head of all nations.

Matthew makes it clear that with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ the King has come. This is underlined by the fact that in this Gospel we find more Old Testament quotations about the life and death of Christ than in the three other Gospels put together. This also makes clear to whom this Gospel is primarily addressed: the Jews.

This Gospel can be called 'the gospel of the kingdom of heaven'. Matthew recounts the history and discourses of Christ especially with a view on the establishment of that kingdom.

The writer Matthew

The writer is Matthew. Matthew is a Jew, but a despised Jew because he was a tax collector. As a Jew, he is the appropriate instrument that the Holy Spirit has been able to use to write what is important to the Jews. Because this Gospel is not only about the Lord Jesus as the King for the Jews, but also about the kingdom of heaven, this Gospel is also of great and current significance for the Christians. That will become clear.

Matthew 1

Mt 1:1-17 | Record of the Genealogy of Jesus Christ

1 The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham: 2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. 3 Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram. 4 Ram was the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon. 5 Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse. 6 Jesse was the father of David the king. David was the father of Solomon by Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah. 7 Solomon was the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asa. 8 Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah. 9 Uzziah was the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. 10 Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, and Amon the father of Josiah. 11 Josiah became the father of Jeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. 12 After the deportation to Babylon: Jeconiah became the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel. 13 Zerubbabel was the father of Abihud, Abihud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor. 14 Azor was the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud. 15 Eliud was the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob. 16 Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah. 17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

Matthew begins his Gospel with the “record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham”. Through this genealogy, the Holy Spirit shows that He wants to present Jesus Christ in this Gospel as the Fulfiller of the promises to Israel and of the prophecies regarding

the Messiah. This also answers the Jews' questions as to whether Jesus really is the Messiah.

The genealogy is that of Joseph. That means that we have the legal genealogy here. This establishes that Joseph is the rightful heir of the throne of David and therefore Christ as well. This has never been questioned by the Jews.

In verse 1 David and Abraham are mentioned together because all of Israel's hope is connected to what has been revealed to these two men. First, the Lord Jesus is the "Son of David" (cf. 1Chr 17:11), God's chosen King. That is why the royal crown belongs to Him. The son of David referenced here is Solomon. The Lord Jesus is the true Solomon Who will bring righteousness and peace.

He is subsequently the "Son of Abraham" (cf. Gen 22:18), God's chosen vessel of the promises. Therefore, He is entitled to the land and all the promised blessings. The Lord Jesus is the fulfillment of all the promises made to Abraham and which He will fulfil as King (2Cor 1:20). The son of Abraham referenced here is Isaac. The Lord Jesus is the true Isaac, the Son Who has gone through death. His death and resurrection are the basis for His reign in righteousness and peace.

From verse 2 follows the genealogy that starts with Abraham. Every Israelite would begin with him. Out of all the sons of Jacob only Judah is mentioned by name. This shows that among all the other descendants of Abraham, the royal tribe (Gen 49:10) is preeminent. However, the mention of "and his brothers" indicates that God has not forgotten them now that the coming of the Messiah is imminent.

Four women appear in this genealogy of the Lord Jesus: Tamar (verse 3), Rahab (verse 5), Ruth (verse 5) and the wife of Uriah (verse 6). Each of these four women is linked to something humiliating. God shows His grace through this. If God deems it worthy to have His Son born into this line, in which these four women are connected, then there is hope for the greatest sinner.

The genealogy ends with Joseph (verse 16). It's about him. He is the man who has the right to the throne. As the legal Son of Joseph, this gives Christ

the legal right to the throne too. Moreover, in Joseph we see the decay of the royal line. The one who had the right to the throne is a simple carpenter. It is important to see that the Lord Jesus was not begotten by Joseph, while He was born of Mary. He is begotten by God the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:35) and is therefore in His nature in truth the Son of God. So He is legally the Son of Joseph and truly the Son of Mary.

Forty-two generations are given from Abraham to the Messiah which are divided into three groups of fourteen (verse 17). The first group of fourteen generations, “from Abraham to David”, bridges the history of Genesis 12 to 2 Samuel. That period gives a full account of the origins and development of men, during which we see through their history that God reveals Himself to them in different ways. We are taken through the time of the patriarch until the days of David, the king. David is the great figure in the period of prosperity in the land and a splendid picture of Him Who is the center of all of the nation’s hope.

In the second group of generations, “from David to the deportation to Babylon”, we see the decay and downfall of Israel. The kingdom begins in its highest glory after which that glory declines and ends in the breakdown of the kingdom in the time of Zedekiah. The splendor of Solomon’s reign is the pinnacle of the nation’s history. His father David caused the name of Israel to be feared and respected everywhere.

Then the decline sets in and the royal glory makes way for the prophetic witness, when men like Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, etc. – the greatest figures in history – do their service. But, regrettably, Israel’s behavior goes from bad to worse, until all must leave the land. The period that began with such rich promise in the construction of the temple, ends with its destruction, together with the breakdown of the kingdom, while Lo-Ammi, ‘not my people’ (Hos 1:9), is written upon the people.

Little of the third part of the history of these generations, “from the deportation from Babylon to Christ”, is reported in the inspired Scriptures. In His grace, God opens the way for the return of a remnant of the people through Cyrus, the heathen monarch. We see a clear picture of a revival in their return to the city, the temple and the worship of God.

But after a while everything starts to decline again. We learn from the prophets of that period that, although a remnant remains faithful, the people themselves come under the power of Persia and Greece.

When then the New Testament begins, we see that the people find themselves under the iron yoke of Rome.

Mt 1:18-25 | The Birth of Jesus Christ

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. 19 And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. 20 But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." 22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." 24 And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took [Mary] as his wife, 25 but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

These verses are a combination of mystery, dignity, simplicity and beauty. In the time that the house of David has sunk into disregard and poverty, heaven begins to move in relation to the promises. The events are described in a way that impresses the heart and leads to worship. The Eternal One becomes Man and is presented here as the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham. He does not come in the splendor of Solomon, nor with countless holy angels in His entourage. He makes Himself nothing and takes the form of a slave because He comes to serve.

At the birth of the Lord Jesus it is striking that the Holy Spirit is the origin (verse 18) and that He works in accordance with the Word (verses 22-23). The Spirit and the Word always work together. They are always

in agreement and harmony with each other. They are never separate from one another and impossible to be in conflict with one another.

Although Joseph is betrothed to Mary, he is still called “her husband” (verse 19; cf. verse 20: “your wife”). This indicates that ‘betrothed’ is practically equivalent to being married as far as the connection is concerned. The official marriage, however, has yet to take place, which means that there may be no sexual intercourse while betrothed. When Joseph then notices that Mary is pregnant, this can mean nothing other to him than that she has committed fornication. This gives him the right to divorce her (Mt 5:32; 19:9).

Joseph does not act impulsively, but “considers” the situation. This fits with the characteristic described of him. We read of him that he is “righteous”. This gives the Lord the opportunity to clarify the situation to Joseph. Through an angel sent by Him, he explains to Joseph in a dream what has happened and what is yet to happen.

Because Joseph is the important person here in view of the law, the angel appears here to him. In the Gospel according to Luke it says that the angel appears to Mary (Lk 1:28). Also, the angel comes to him here in a dream and not as with Mary during the day and visible.

Joseph is emphatically addressed by the angel as “son of David”. This underlines the legitimate right of the Lord Jesus to the throne of David, for according to the law He is Joseph’s heir. The angel also speaks of the fact that the Son who was conceived in Mary was conceived by the Holy Spirit. That is to say, He is the Son of God, for the Holy Spirit is God.

Joseph is commissioned to give Mary’s Son the name “Jesus”. That name means ‘Yahweh the Savior’, or ‘Yahweh is salvation’. That name declares Who He is: *Yahweh*, the God of the covenant, and what He is: Savior or salvation. From that follows what He will do: He will save His people from their sins. How perfectly the Lord Jesus lived up to this great and glorious Name!

Then come the first quotations from the Old Testament (Isa 7:14; 8:8,10). They are introduced here by the words “to fulfill”. In what Matthew says here, it becomes apparent that it was not Isaiah who prophesied, but God through Isaiah. The first quotation points to the extraordinary cir-

cumstance that a virgin becomes pregnant without the involvement of a man. The second quotation comes from the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which is written mainly in Hebrew. This second quotation gives the special name “Immanuel” with the impressive meaning that God is coming among His people.

In the Lord Jesus, God and man are brought together. The fulfillment of the prophecy lies seven hundred years after its pronouncement. God delivers on His promises, even though their fulfillment seems to take a long time.

Joseph has no doubt whatsoever about what God has revealed to him. He obeys without contradiction out of love for Him and out of love for Mary. Instead of divorcing his wife, as he had initially intended, he takes her to himself. He is married to her, but has no sexual intercourse with her until the Son is born. Everything revolves around the arrival of the Son on earth. To this end, Joseph renounces what in itself would be permitted. Everything shows that he has his own relationship with God. God can address him directly. Joseph gives the Child the name Jesus.

After the Lord Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary do have sexual intercourse. Mary does not remain a virgin. There is talk of brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus (Mk 6:3). Divine intervention in this special case does not set aside the institution of the Creator (cf. Gen 1:28).

Matthew 2

Mt 2:1-2 | The Magi from the East

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 2 "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."

King Herod is in power. That indicates what time it is in Israel when the Lord Jesus is born. Herod is the symbol of the human being who only seeks his own honor, a picture of the antichrist, who assumes power. At the second coming of the Lord Jesus, His return in power and majesty, this false king, the antichrist, will sit on the throne and will be judged by Him.

The birth of Christ passes unnoticed in Israel. The people did not expect Him. However, God makes sure that He is honored. For this He uses people from the Gentiles who come from a faraway country. We have already seen God's attention for the Gentiles in this Gospel, which is written especially for the Jews, in the genealogy. It mentions two Gentile women: Rahab and Ruth.

The magi think that Jerusalem is the place where the King was born. He will reign there, but He was not born there. God leads the magi. He uses various means to this end, making it clear that everything is at His service. He uses a star, a jealous Herod, insensate religious leaders and Scripture.

God has shown the magi the star, "His" star, which is the star of Christ, which would rise: "A star shall rise from Jacob" (Num 24:17). They make the long journey to honor the new born King of the Jews. Their wisdom is evident from their actions.

Mt 2:3-8 | Reaction of Herod

3 When Herod the king heard [this], he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:

6 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH,
ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH;
FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER
WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'"

7 Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found [Him], report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him."

Herod sees a threat to his position in what he hears about a newborn King. That is understandable with this wicked king. But not only is Herod troubled, all Jerusalem is troubled with him. Instead of jubilation there is consternation when they hear of His birth! Their whole attitude is dismissive. The religious leaders have made their choice. They are on the side of Herod, not on the side of Christ. The newborn King is an unwanted intruder and not the fulfilment of a cherished hope. The Messiah is still a Baby, He has done nothing. Yet they feel that His coming will mean a disturbance to their pleasures.

All who live in Jerusalem are the descendants of those who once returned from Babylon to Israel. They should have looked forward to the Messiah. But the Savior has been among them for over a year and they have not noticed it because their hearts do not go out to Him.

Herod lets "all the chief priests and scribes", the religious leaders, come to him and asks where the Christ – in Hebrew *Messiah*; the meaning of both words is 'anointed' – would be born. It is the first appearance of the chief priests and scribes in this Gospel. Here they are still indifferent, but that indifference will grow into hatred as the Lord does His work in Israel.

The leaders know how to answer the question immediately and precisely. They know the Scripture, at least as far as what the letter says, and only use it as that which provides information. What they know, they put at the service of the adversary. With the help of Scripture, they tell Herod the way. They themselves refuse to take even one step down that road, even though that way leads to the Bethlehem of their prophet. While the magi have come to honor the Messiah, they are conspiring together with Herod who has the plan to kill the King.

After being led by the star, the magi are now led by the Word. The leaders indicate the place of the Messiah's birth by citing what the prophet Micah has said (Mic 5:1). Micah speaks of him as a Ruler Who will simultaneously shepherd His people, so He will be a Shepherd. Both aspects of this magnificent combination come only fully into their own in God's Son (cf. 1Chr 11:2).

Herod now knows the place of birth, but he wants more information to carry out his murderous plans as effectively as possible. He therefore deceptively enquires of the magi the course of the birth. He subsequently sends them to Bethlehem and they unintentionally become a signpost to the Child. He wants them to come and tell him when they have found the Child. He asks them with the hypocritical statement that he also wants to honor the Child.

Mt 2:9-12 | The Magi with the Child

9 After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over [the place] where the Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And having been warned [by God] in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

Without saying a word to Herod, the magi go their way. When they are outside, they see again the star they have seen at the moment of the birth of the Lord Jesus. That star led them to depart, but the star did not lead them along the way. The star now goes before them to the place where the Lord Jesus is. Seeing the star brings them great joy. God always provides guidance for all who walk according to the light they have, even if it is so little. The present and added light always leads to Christ and gives great joy.

They come into a house and not into a stable (cf. Lk 2:7). This is also an indication that quite some time has passed since the birth of the Lord Jesus. They see "the Child with Mary His mother" and worship the Child. Mary

is not an object of worship. The treasures they have brought are opened. They offer gifts to the Child. These gifts fit this Child and symbolically point to the glory of His Person and to both the excellence and end of His life on earth. Gold represents His Divine glory. The frankincense is the sweet-smelling savor that emanates from His life to His surroundings and ascends to God. The myrrh speaks of the suffering and death which He will undergo.

Christ is found in a house. We can apply this to God's house in this time, that is the church of God (1Tim 3:15). The Spirit always leads people who seek Him to the church. He is only to be found there. There He is the object of worship. The magi represent the nations. Christ is "the hope of glory" for the nations (Col 1:27). This scene also looks forward to the time after the church, when the nations come to honor Him (Psa 72:11).

After their tribute to the born King of the Jews, the magi receive direction from God not to return to Herod. Here too they are allow themselves to be led by what God says. That's why they don't go via Jerusalem again, but return to their country on another way.

Mt 2:13-18 | Flee to Egypt

*13 Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord *appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him." 14 So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. 15 He remained there until the death of Herod. [This was] to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON." 16 Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. 17 Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:*

*18 "A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH,
WEEPING AND GREAT MOURNING,
RACHEL WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN;*

*AND SHE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED,
BECAUSE THEY WERE NO MORE."*

Joseph receives from God – again in a dream (verse 13; Mt 1:20) – the command to flee to Egypt. He must remain there “until I tell you”. This is an important message for every believer. It means that he should only act when God says something. Here Joseph is still the person to whom God gives His commands.

Joseph is obedient and immediately, the very same night, does what God has said to him. Thus the Lord Jesus, while He is still only a Baby, must already flee. Angels, who have announced His birth, do not form an escort to protect Him. He is here in humility. Never has He used His power to protect Himself from evil. He flees or He hides Himself. He does not take a special place here among the children of men, but shares in their general fate. He undergoes every humiliation, for He does not want His people to suffer anything without His sharing in it.

Only when Herod has died does Joseph return. He does not challenge the danger. And when he returns, a prophetic word is fulfilled again. Again, we see how God uses the enemy to fulfil His Word. God knows how to link the actions of man and His own actions, which are so opposing to each other, to fulfil His plans. This is a great encouragement to all who belong to Him.

The prophetic word is a quotation from Hosea. It is a word that Hosea has spoken in view of Israel and the calling of the people out of slavery in Egypt. God calls Israel “My son” (Hos 11:1; Exo 4:22-23). Matthew now applies it to the Lord Jesus. This makes it clear that Christ wants to start His history on earth where His people started. He identifies Himself with them.

But how different is His path from theirs. Where the people have failed in their calling as sons, Christ will answer perfectly to this calling. Thus in Isaiah 49 He becomes the true Servant and in John 15 the true Vine – positions in which Israel once was, but did not live in accordance with them. He is the true Israel. In a broader sense, He begins the history of the first man, that is of all mankind, anew. He does so as the second Man and as the last Adam (1Cor 15:45-47) in relationship with God.

Herod is furious when he notices that he has been misled by the magi. In him we recognize the dragon that is looking for the male Child to devour it (Rev 12:3-5). His hatred of the born King is expressed in a terrible massacre. Innocent children fall prey to the hatred directed against Christ. Here we see that the slightest connection with a Christ Who is present makes satan active in his hatred. The children of two years and younger are so similar to Him that they share in the fate that is being devised for Him. God does not prevent Herod from becoming a child murderer. All these young children are saved from growing up to later murder the Lord Jesus with the people. They are in heaven.

With his massacre Herod fulfils a word from the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 31:15). Great is the pain on account of the death of these children. The children are attributed to Rachel, the wife of Jacob, the mother of Joseph and Benjamin. She is inconsolable because of this loss. It seems everything is over. But it does not get out of hand with God. He holds His protective hand over Him through and in Whom all His promises to His people will be fulfilled.

In the future, during the great tribulation, many who are connected with Him will also be killed and there will also be great mourning. Then the Lord Jesus will appear and bring salvation and lead His people into blessing.

Mt 2:19-23 | Back in Israel

*19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord *appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, 20 "Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead." 21 So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned [by God] in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee, 23 and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. [This was] to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: "He shall be called a Nazarene."*

When Herod, the child murderer, has died, Joseph is given the command to go back to Israel in another dream. God encourages him by telling him

that those who were seeking the death of the Child have died (cf. Exo 4:19). God calls the land “the land of Israel” because He has taken up the thread of it again by visiting it. This name recalls the promises given by God.

As always Joseph again obeys directly. But when he hears who Herod’s successor is, he becomes afraid. Then God meets him in his fear in another dream with a new instruction. God also meets us in our weaknesses when we are not at the level of His thoughts. This new instruction fits in with His Word and serves to fulfil it, because Joseph will live with the Lord Jesus and Mary in Nazareth, which lies in the regions of Galilee.

Now nowhere in the prophets is it written that Christ would live in Nazareth. Several prophets, however, have spoken about the fact that He would be despised. This is fulfilled from the start by living in Nazareth. After the rejected King – He had to flee – He is now the despised One by living in the most despised city in the most despised province (Jn 1:46).

By living in Nazareth he will be called Nazarene. This word is derived from the Hebrew word *nezer* meaning ‘sprout’ or ‘shoot’. This is the word that the prophet Isaiah uses for the Messiah to announce His birth as the descendant of Jesse, thus as the true David (Isa 11:1). Also in this sense, His living in Nazareth is a fulfilment of what was proclaimed by the prophets.

Matthew 3

Mt 3:1-4 | John the Baptist

*1 Now in those days John the Baptist *came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” 3 For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said,*

*“THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS,
‘MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD,
MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!’”*

4 Now John himself had a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.

Without any introduction, John the baptist appears on the scene. He comes with the sound of the footsteps of His Lord behind him. John lives in the wilderness and preaches in the wilderness, away from the residential area of the people. This clearly expresses God’s opinion about Jerusalem, the holy city, where the priests do service. John withdraws from all this. He has no part in it.

The expression “kingdom of heaven” comes from the Old Testament. In the New Testament this expression is only found in this Gospel. Matthew uses it more than thirty times. John the baptist uses this expression without any explanation. His hearers and readers of this Gospel are familiar with it from the book of Daniel. Daniel speaks in this way to Nebuchadnezzar about the God of heaven Who will establish a kingdom that will never be destroyed, that is the kingdom of heaven (Dan 2:44).

Other expressions are kingdom of God, kingdom of the Father, kingdom of the Son of Man, kingdom of the Son of His love, the eternal kingdom. They all refer to the reign of God, to “the days ... as long as the heavens [remain] above the earth” (Deu 11:21), those are the days when “[it is] Heaven [that] rules” (Dan 4:26).

As has been said, Matthew in the only one of the four evangelists who uses the expression ‘kingdom of heaven’. The other evangelists always speak of the ‘kingdom of God’. It concerns the same kingdom, but with a different

accent. With the 'kingdom of heaven' the emphasis is on the reign over the earth according to heavenly standards later in the millennium. With the 'kingdom of God' reference is made not only to a kingdom on earth, but also to the rule of the Lord Jesus over the hearts of His subjects now. The kingdom of heaven is more about the outward reign. The kingdom of God is more about the inner reign.

John announces the kingdom as "at hand" because the King is there (cf. Lk 17:21). Israel, however, rejects its King. This gives the kingdom a hidden character. This is what the Lord speaks about in Matthew 13. In his preaching John announces the kingdom of heaven. But before it can really come, there must first be repentance.

The prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled in him (Isa 40:3). John calls himself only "a voice", which means that his person does not matter. The quotation also makes it clear that it is Someone else Who will do the work. The prophecy of Isaiah is about *Yahweh*. Matthew applies this here to the Lord Jesus. It is one of many proofs that the Lord Jesus is *Yahweh*, the God of the covenant.

As for John's appearance, his clothing and his food fit his preaching. It is simple clothing and simple food. They also seem to refer to the fact that he does not accept anything from people. The explicit mention of the material of his clothing and belt seems to indicate that he did not receive it from people. They come from nature, creation, just like his food. In all respects, he goes his way separate from people because of their sinful state and in dependence on God.

Mt 3:5-6 | The Baptism of John

5 Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; 6 and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.

John preaches outside the religious center of those days, Jerusalem. The power of God, however, is with John in such a way that people flock to him. Crowds come to him from everywhere. They are attracted by his radical preaching. People are looking for the meaning of their life. They don't find it in the religious center Jerusalem, but also not in the countryside. The message of John offers hope.

John's baptism is not Christian baptism. Through Christian baptism a disciple is attached to a dead Christ. After baptism, the Christian follows a rejected Christ. The baptism of John attaches people to a Messiah living on earth. His baptism is connected with the coming of the Messiah Who will ascend the throne and establish the kingdom. The Lord Jesus joins himself by being baptized with this company (verse 13).

Mt 3:7-10 | Preaching of John

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; 9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. 10 The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

The religious leaders, the Pharisees and Sadducees, also come to the baptism of John. The Pharisees are orthodox. They add to the Word of God. They are the most influential and want to hold firmly to what they see as truth. The Sadducees are liberal. They break apart the Word of God and believe only what they can reason intellectually. John puts them all on the same level when he calls them a brood of vipers.

The religious leaders see the enormous power of John's preaching and also how crowds flock to him. They don't want to stay out of it. They think they can participate without conversion. They are only interested in their own honor. They want to keep their influence over the crowds.

John does not want to baptize them. He sees through their cunning intentions. By calling them 'brood of vipers' he declares outrightly that they are descendants of the devil. He asks them how they can imagine of escaping the coming wrath. This question must touch their conscience so that they will truly come to conversion.

John does not explain how a sinner can be saved or how God forgives sins. He simply points out that someone who says that he is in relationship with God must prove it by showing deeds that are in keeping with God. If there is true and living faith, this will be evident from the works (Jam 2:14).

He tells them that they don't have to point to their descent from Abraham either, because it's completely useless. God does not look at our parents or ancestors, but at our hearts. It is not our origin that counts for Him, but whether we have gone to the Lord Jesus in repentance for our sins. God can give life to dead stones. He did so spiritually, for believers are called "living stones" (1Pet 2:5).

The religious leaders must clearly think that judgment is near. The axe of judgment will soon cut down the tree of their pride, on which there is no fruit for God. Then that tree will be thrown into the fire of hell, so that they will be separated forever from the God with Whom they never shared part.

Mt 3:11-12 | John Announces Christ

11 "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

In his announcement of the Mighty John indicates that there is no comparison between him and the One Who comes after him. John makes himself nothing and Christ everything. In His presence John regards himself as nothing. The point is not that he would not feel at ease with Christ, but the glory of Christ is so great for him, that he himself disappears into nothingness. Christ's walk is so much more exalted than his walk. He does not dare to compare his walk with that of Christ.

The work of Christ is also so much more exalted than his work. He baptizes with water, but Christ will baptize them with the Holy Spirit and fire. The baptism of the Holy Spirit and baptism with fire are two different things that will happen at two different times. The baptism with the Holy Spirit has to do with the first coming of the Lord Jesus on earth, with His completed work on the cross and His glorification in heaven. The baptism of fire has to do with His second coming to earth, when He comes to judge. Between the two comings lies the time of grace.

Both events indicate the great characteristics of the two comings of Christ. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the power of God's blessing in view of

the kingdom of heaven as it is now, in the time of grace. The baptism of fire will accompany the kingdom of heaven when Christ returns to establish His kingdom on earth in majesty.

The coming of Christ will cause a separation between who are of Him, "His wheat", and who are not of Him, "the chaff". The picture of the threshing floor is used. There the wheat is separated from the chaff with the winnowing fork. As a result, complete cleaning takes place. The wheat is a picture of the believers. They have accepted Christ and He is their life. The chaff is a picture of the unbelievers. He will baptize His 'wheat' with the Holy Spirit and He will baptize the 'chaff' with fire. This will be fulfilled for Israel at the beginning of the millennium. A partial fulfilment of the baptism of the Holy Spirit took place at Pentecost. This is how the church came into being.

Mt 3:13-17 | The Baptism of the Lord Jesus

*13 Then Jesus *arrived from Galilee at the Jordan [coming] to John, to be baptized by him. 14 But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" 15 But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit [it] at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he *permitted Him. 16 After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove [and] lighting on Him, 17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."*

Here we find the first public activity of the Lord Jesus. Scripture does not say much about the time between His birth and His first public activity. Only Luke mentions something about Him when He is twelve years old (Lk 2:41-52). There it turns out that He is busy with the things of His Father and submissive to His earthly parents. This characterizes Him Who reveals God to men and at the same time perfectly presents Man to God. He lives, also in the years before His public activity, as God has meant that man shall live. In Him the word is true that God is well-pleased in man and indeed in this Man.

The Lord Jesus comes to John to be baptized by him. Baptism is the door through which He must enter as the Shepherd to begin His ministry (Jn 10:2). He does not come from Jerusalem. He never lived there, just like John. He wants to be baptized to identify himself with those who, through baptism, have indicated that they are looking forward to Him. By His baptism He recognizes them as His people.

John feels unworthy to perform this act on Christ. He wants it to happen the other way around. The Lord gently reprimands him. This must be done. John must permit it. In His grace He connects John with Himself when He says, "it is fitting for us." He says as it were: "In fulfilling the will of God, I have My part and you yours."

If the Lord Jesus is baptized, it is to fulfil "all righteousness", that is, to do what is right and to do it in all aspects in which God asks it of Him. If the people are baptized, it is under confession of their iniquity. The Lord Jesus has no sins to confess. He can say: "Which one of you convicts Me of sin?" (Jn 8:46). But because He has taken His place as Man, it is appropriate that He unites Himself with the pious who thus take their place before God. He does so in grace, as He does everything in grace. He thus fulfils "all" righteousness and not just what the law demands.

When Christ comes up from the water, the first great revelation of the Divine trinity takes place. Never before has heaven opened to let God's pleasure be heard about anything or anyone on earth. Now it is. Also for us the heaven is now open, the veil is torn. We are sealed and anointed just like Him (2Cor 1:21). The Father also acknowledges us as sons of His pleasure. The Lord Jesus is this in His own power and right, we have come into the relationship of sons to the Father through grace and the redemption that the Son has brought about.

Heavens open above Him. This is not to give him an object there, as was the case with Stephen (Acts 7:55-57). He Himself is the Object of the opened heavens. When heavens open, it is always to show Him and glorify Him (Jn 1:51; Rev 19:11).

Then we hear the wonderful testimony of God the Father: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." This testimony is the result of the fulfilment by Christ of all righteousness in the waters of the Jordan. At

the same time it is God's jealousy for the honor of His Son. He does not want the inappropriate idea to arise in any way among the bystanders that the Lord Jesus is a man like all those who have been baptized. He is the unique, sinless Son of God.

That He is the Son of David and the Son of Abraham (Mt 1:1) speaks of what He is officially. This is connected to the glory of the throne and the certainty of the promises. He is also the Son of the virgin (Mt 1:21), the Seed of the woman (Gen 3:15). This is His relationship to the human race. But the voice of the Father proclaims Him as His beloved Son, the object of His special pleasure.

He is the Son in His Manhood with the express intention of, by His death, bringing others into that holy relationship with the Father to share with Him in the Father's love. Here is a Man on earth, sealed by the Father, Who shows us what the place of the Christian is today on earth.

The Lord Jesus is the example to us in four ways with regard to the place He has by virtue of His personal dignity, which we have received and may share with Him through the redemption which He has secured for us:

1. Heavens are opened to us.
2. The Holy Spirit is given to us.
3. We have received our part in sonship.
4. We are objects of the Father's pleasure.

Matthew 4

Introduction

In Matthew 4 we see the temptation of our Lord. He Who is the born King must first be subject. His right to rule must be demonstrated in His joy to obey. He Who has the exclusive right to command, first takes the place of a servant. If God wants to have a redeemed creation that has enduring stability and of which every part will be without the stain of sin or shadow of imperfection, then He, Who will keep everything together, must be put to the test. The beginning and guarantee of that new creation is Christ. But He must be tested, and in a way no one else will ever know.

Mt 4:1-2 | Tempted by the Devil

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry.

Before the Lord is tempted, two things have been clearly established in the preceding verses (Mt 3:16-17): He is the Son of God and He is sealed as Man with the Holy Spirit. This also applies to the believer. Temptations are part of the Christian's life. Before we are confronted with them, we see how the Lord has gone before us in this.

Christ has to deal with three temptations. In the first temptation He is tempted as Man, in the second as Messiah and in the third as the Son of Man. The first temptation is about dependence on God, the second is about trust in God and the third is about worship and service for God (cf. 1Jn 2:16).

The Spirit, Who has just recently come upon Him, leads Him up into the wilderness into the devil's presence. The devil is not a 'bad principle', but is as much a person as the Lord Jesus. From Genesis 3 onwards he is used to deceiving people by addressing their lusts and pride. He does not find this with the Lord Jesus.

God has not placed any special protection around His Son, so that He would remain free from being tempted by the devil. Christ is tempted by the devil for the full period of forty days, that is, as long as He is in the wilderness. Only the last three temptations are recorded in the Bible.

In the temptations that the Lord Jesus undergoes, there are two kinds. The first kind of temptation is not general for man, but especially for Him. They are not described because they do not include lessons for us. The second kind is those which He goes through at the end of the forty days. These are the three temptations described from verse 3 onwards. Such temptations are also our portion.

The purpose of the temptations Christ goes through, is not to see if He can sin. He can't. With Him, the temptations prove that in the most extraordinary circumstances He does nothing other than obey and fully trust the Word of God. He overcomes where the first man in much more favorable circumstances has failed. For after all, Adam and Eve handed down the Word of God to the devil, while the Son of Man withstands through the Word of God.

Throughout the entire forty-day period, the Lord has fasted. When He speaks of fasting in one of the following chapters (Mt 6:16-18), He speaks out of experience. He is perfectly aware of the enormous power of the temptations of the devil and what is at stake. Everything shows that He is truly Man. Nor is he above the consequences of fasting. He becomes hungry. He goes through everything that can happen to a person.

Mt 4:3-4 | The First Temptation

3 And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'"

The first temptation of the enemy is on the terrain of bodily needs. Hunger is a bodily need. The devil proposes that the Lord satisfies His bodily needs by using the power He possesses to make bread from stones. It is an impressive thought to see that the Lord Jesus really has a need for something that He could otherwise provide for Himself with the power

He possesses. Here again we see the unfathomable mystery of His Person that He is completely Man and also truly God.

It is not a sin to be hungry, nor is it a sin to eat, nor is it a sin for the Lord to use His power. But He is the dependent Man. It would be a sin for Him if He provided His food without God having said it. The temptation here is to perform an act in independence from God. The world has been ruled since the fall by acts of this nature. They prove that the man who loses God becomes an egotist, someone who thinks only of himself.

With the words “if You are the Son of God”, the devil challenges Him to prove it by ordering the stones to become bread. But His Father did not tell Him to do so. Therefore He does not do it. This also applies to us. If we don’t have a clear instruction from God to do something, we should always wait for Him to give it. Faith, trust, proves itself by waiting for God to reveal His will.

The Lord has taken the place of a servant, and that is not the place to command. Personally He has the power to make bread from the stones. We do not have that power. However, we can also make bread from stone in a spiritual sense. We do so when we use the beautiful, attractive things in the wilderness of the world to satisfy our needs. That raises the question: What do we fill our mind with, with what food?

The Lord does not want to use His power for Himself, in independence from God. It is a constant feature of the work of the Holy Spirit in the children of God that they do not use miraculous powers for themselves or their friends. Paul did not use that power for himself or his fellow-workers.

The power of the Lord’s actions lies in the Word of God. With this He answers the devil, without entering into discussion with him. In His answer He shows that true life can only be found in what God has said (Deu 8:3). If we focus on this, we will be preserved from acting in our own power and the damaging acts that result from it.

Mt 4:5-7 | The Second Temptation

5 Then the devil *took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and *said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written,

'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU';

and

*'ON [their] HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP,
SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'"*

*7 Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT
PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'"*

The second temptation is not directed at the physical, but at the religious needs. For this the devil takes the Lord Jesus to Jerusalem, the holy city, to the most holy place in that city, the temple. He lets Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple. Then He does what the Lord has done. He cites something that is written. But when the devil cites the Word of God, it is always to misuse it and he always misquotes it.

The text quoted by the devil in order to seduce the Lord to commit a reckless act (Psa 91:11-12) refers to God's promise that He will protect the Messiah from disaster. By quoting this text, the devil says, as it were: "Here is a word from God for You." The distortion of the Word is that the devil omits the word "in all Your ways". Again the devil wants Him to do something without walking in the way of God.

But his guile goes even further. He wants Christ to challenge God to prove that He will preserve and protect the Messiah. This is evident from the Lord's answer, an answer that again consists of a quotation from Scripture (Deu 6:16). Here too He does not enter into discussion with the devil. In His answer, He indicates that He trusts in God unconditionally and that it is sin to ask in unbelief whether God is worthy of His trust. We distrust God if we want Him to prove His care through outward actions.

The first two temptations show two principles that lead to victory. The first principle is simple and absolute obedience. The second is complete trust in the way of obedience. To have the courage to obey, we need trust. But trust is found only in the way of obedience.

Mt 4:8-10 | The Third Temptation

*8 Again, the devil *took Him to a very high mountain and *showed Him all the
kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, "All these things*

*I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.” 10 Then Jesus *said to him, “Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.’”*

For the third temptation, the devil takes the Lord to a place from where he offers Him an overview of the whole world. When the devil shows something beautiful and impressive and also offers it, he does so to get someone in his grip. In a way, the kingdoms of this world do belong to the devil. Adam has lost authority over it and handed the world over to the devil. Therefore, since the fall of man, the devil has been “the god of this world [lit. age]” and “the ruler of the world” (2Cor 4:4; Jn 14:30). This situation will continue until the Lord Jesus comes back. Only then will His kingdom begin (Rev 11:15).

The temptation is that Christ can get the kingdoms without having to suffer for them. The devil shows Him the inheritance that awaits Him. He offers it on the condition that the Lord Jesus kneels before him. How many times have people kneeled for the devil for much less. The devil reveals himself as satan by stating outright that Christ can get “all these things” if He falls down and worships him. Satan places himself as an object of worship in the place of God. In exchange, he offers things from the area he rules over.

The Lord rejects him as “Satan”, which means ‘adversary’. He resists him. We must never allow anything or anyone to place themselves between our hearts and God and thus take the place of God. This is also what Peter hears when he wants to turn the Lord away from His pathway of obedience (Mt 16:22-23).

All quotations from the Word which the Lord uses to answer the devil, come from the book of Deuteronomy. In that book the responsibility of Israel is seen in connection with the possession of the land and the privileges of the nation. There we see that all blessings for the nation are based on obedience.

Mt 4:11 | The Devil Defeated

*11 Then the devil *left Him; and behold, angels came and [began] to minister to Him.*

The Lord has resisted the devil and defeated him with God's Word. The devil is the loser and leaves Him without having achieved any of the results he desired. He cannot get any hold on the Lord because He remains dependent, obedient, trusting and devoted in everything. Through this the Lord Jesus has bound the strong one. Now He can continue to go through the land to take away from the strong man his goods, that is to say, to set free from the devil those who are under his power (Mt 12:29).

The devil's place is directly taken by angels. How breathless they must have watched when their Creator was tempted by the devil in this way. How they would have loved to defend Him. One day they will wage war against the devil and his angels (Rev 12:7). This is not yet the case here. Now they come to the Lord to minister to Him, possibly with food that He did not want to take at the instigation of the devil.

Mt 4:12-17 | Start of Service in Galilee

12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; 13 and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. 14 [This was] to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:

*15 "THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI,
BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE
GENTILES—*

*16 "THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT
LIGHT,
AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF
DEATH,
UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED."*

*17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of
heaven is at hand."*

The imprisonment of John is the time for the Lord to begin His public ministry. The rejection of John casts the shadow of His own rejection forward. John is the forerunner of the Lord, both in his mission and in his rejection (Mt 17:12).

The area where He will carry out His ministry is outside Jerusalem and Judea. He goes to the north of the country. The north is a transit route for the nations. There live the poor and despised of the flock, the remnant, who are already clearly distinguished from the rulers of the people in Matthew 3-4.

The area where He is going is foretold by Isaiah (Isa 9:1-2). With His coming a great light shines for a people walking in darkness. For those in the land of the shadow of death a light dawns. With Him hope dawns in a hopeless situation.

He will live and work there. His preaching is the same as that of John (Mt 3:1). The voice of John has been silenced, but the Lord takes over the preaching and continues it more powerfully.

Mt 4:18-22 | Calling of the First Disciples

*18 Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19 And He *said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. 21 Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the [son] of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.*

The Lord calls people to Himself to learn from Him. He is the only One Who has this right. He calls them to Himself to follow Him completely in His ministry and temptations. This means that they connect themselves with Him and share in everything that is His portion. To do this, they have to give up everything else. When He calls, His rights go beyond those of nature. Only when His call goes out can a person leave his work and even his family. Such a calling is unique. For it is customary for someone to serve the Lord in his ordinary daily circumstances (1Cor 7:24).

It is always important that, as soon as His will is clear, we act "immediately". This is what both Peter and Andrew and James and John do. At the moment they are called, they are busy practicing their profession. The Lord Jesus does not call lazy people, but active people.

Their activities during their calling are symbolic for the work they will later do for the Lord. Peter and Andrew are busy casting a net into the sea. They are later used as fishers of men to bring people to Christ. James and John are busy mending their nets, that is, repairing them and thus putting them in order for the next catch. They are later used to put relations between believers in order. Peter and Andrew are more evangelists, James and John are more shepherds.

No human education makes someone fit to do the Lord's work. To go with Him through the land, He does not choose people in high positions, or people who are rich or learned (cf. Acts 4:13). The most important qualification is whether someone wants to be dependent on Him.

The people He gathers around Him represent the God-fearing remnant of Israel. The mass of the people does not want Him, but there are those who believe in Him. There are only a few, a remnant in the midst of the unbelieving mass. To Him they are the true Israel. He sees this in the disciples He gathers around Him.

Mt 4:23-25 | The Lord Teaches, Proclaims and Heals

23 Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. 24 The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. 25 Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and [the] Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and [from] beyond the Jordan.

The Lord's ministry consists of teaching, proclaiming the gospel and healing the sick. Healings are the power that accompany the proclamation. Through healings the general attention is firmly drawn to His entire service consisting of His teaching, His preaching and His works. In the healing of people lies the proof that the power of the kingdom of God is present in Him. It is the power of God that is revealed in goodness on earth. He proclaims the kingdom and pairs this with the evidence of the power that is able to establish that kingdom. We can see miracles as a bell that attracts a hearing, after which the message is brought.

Through His teachings and works many come to Him. In the following chapters, Matthew 5-7, He speaks to them about the principles of the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5

Introduction

In the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:1-7:29) the Lord Jesus depicts the character of the kingdom of heaven and those who have part in it. He also reveals the Father's Name. He teaches the characteristics of the kingdom because He loves those characteristics. He Himself is seen in them and finds His joy in exhibiting these characteristics and recognizing them in others.

The sermon on the mount describes how the true disciples of the kingdom of heaven should behave in that kingdom. This kingdom was announced by the Old Testament prophets. It is the kingdom under the kingship of God's Messiah. The throne of the Messiah stands then in Jerusalem from where He rules over Israel and from there over the whole world (Dan 2:44; 7:13-14).

But the prophets also teach that the King will be born in humility. We find this in the Gospels. He is a King, but in the Gospels He is still without subjects because His kingdom has not yet been established. Nevertheless, the kingdom is present, and that, in the person of the King (Lk 17:21).

Then He calls His disciples. A disciple is someone who follows the King in everything that He commands. Whoever follows Him, He teaches (Mt 5:2). The sermon on the mount is the doctrine of the Lord for His disciples who not only want to learn from Him, but also want to be like Him in His attitude (Mt 10:24-25). He teaches to believing followers, not to those who have no relationship with Him. First of all, one must become a disciple in the way that John the baptist indicated: through repentance and conversion with baptism as proof. Before the teaching of the sermon on the mount can be put into practice, an inner change is necessary.

The sermon on the mount is not a political program for the government, but is full of rules of conduct for the personal life of the disciple and for the relations between the disciples themselves. For the disciple, the sermon on the mount contains instruction in connection with the kingdom to which he must be obedient. The Teacher speaks with authority to every believer.

He is the Lord of every believer. Therefore those who are His disciples must follow Him.

The heart of the disciple is focused on the heavenly part of the kingdom. The kingdom is called the kingdom of heaven because it is governed by the standards that apply to heaven and because it is governed by a heavenly King.

There is always talk about the kingdom of heaven in a future sense, that is, as a kingdom yet to come. John the baptist and the Lord Jesus announced it as 'at hand' because the King presents Himself. But because the King is rejected, it is not then established on earth. Its public establishment has been postponed.

The kingdom of heaven has begun, but in a hidden way and after the Lord Jesus has returned to heaven. There He is the King, invisible to the world, Who rules over all who in faith have subjected themselves to Him. When He returns from heaven to earth, the kingdom of heaven will be established visibly on earth.

Subdivision of the sermon on the mountain:

- Matthew 5:3-12 Beatitudes
- Matthew 5:13-16 Salt and light
- Matthew 5:17-48 The authority of the law and examples of it
- Matthew 6:1-18 Practical righteousness
- Matthew 6:19-34 Store up treasures and worries
- Matthew 7:1-12 Principles of the government of God
- Matthew 7:13-27 False and true disciples

Mt 5:1-2 | On the Mountain

1 When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. 2 He opened His mouth and [began] to teach them, saying,

When the Lord sees the crowds, He goes up the mountain. He goes up the mountain – not to receive the law as Moses once did, but – to explain and deepen the law. When He sits down, His disciples come to Him. In

this attitude of peace He is going to teach them. The teaching He gives His disciples is meant for them. If they take this to heart, their behavior will be to the honor of their Master and also to the well-being of the crowds.

Mt 5:3-6 | 'Blessed' – First Group

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. 6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

First the Lord speaks of what kind of people enter the kingdom of heaven. To be successful in man's kingdom it is about a lot of self-confidence and perseverance. In the kingdom of heaven, which is not yet established in power and majesty, it is the opposite. It must have been a shock for the disciples to hear about suffering and persecution and sorrow. For their thought is that the Messiah will lead them to victory over all that is rebelling against Him.

The first group that the Lord calls blessed, is formed by people who are characterized by a certain outward behavior toward the world that surrounds them. In a word, they are characterized by *righteousness*.

1. "The poor in spirit" are those who are broken and contrite of heart and spirit, who no longer expect anything from themselves (Isa 57:15; 66:2). Theirs is the *kingdom* of heaven, not heaven. It is the earth under the rule of heaven. The Lord Jesus is the true 'Poor in spirit'. He never sought to be anything Himself.
2. "Those who mourn" do so about the things they see around them in the world in which they live. The comfort that will be their portion comes when the consequences of sin are gone. Someone who is mourning is more acutely aware of the state of the things around him. The Lord Jesus is the "Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isa 53:3). The division in Christianity is also a cause of mourning.
3. "The gentle" are those who, in a hostile world, prefer to suffer injustice rather than stand up for their right. Later they will reign with Christ over the earth where they are now being tried and suffer so

much injustice. The Lord Jesus is the Gentle par excellence. He presents Himself in this way after He sighed in the spirit (Mt 11:20-30). The gentle do not get irritated by the evil they witness, but they take refuge in God, the Lord of heaven and earth. With this they say that God has everything in His hand.

4. "Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" have an intense longing for that world that does not yet exist, but where righteousness will reign when the Lord Jesus reigns in righteousness. Righteousness in this world is yet to come, and that is what He desires, even more so than they do. "As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see [it and] be satisfied" (Isa 53:11a).

Mt 5:7-9 | 'Blessed' – Second Group

7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. 8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

The second group is formed of people who are characterized by a certain inner state. It is about the attitude that is revealed by the character traits that someone exhibits. In a word, they are characterized by *grace*.

1. "The merciful" have something of what God Himself is. God loves to see that those who are disciples of His Son show His mercy. By this the sinner is brought to God. Whoever proves this in the world will experience the preciousness of it anew. The Lord Jesus is the true merciful One.
2. "The pure in heart" respond to God's holiness. Only God is perfectly pure. This is visible in the life of the Lord Jesus and He is the life of His disciples. A person has a pure heart when there are no wrong motives in it. It is the absence of anything that would exclude God. Therefore they see God, they live in fellowship with Him.
3. "The peacemakers" resemble God Who is the great Peacemaker. The Lord Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Here again is the active side, just like with the first group this last one mentioned is also active. Peacemakers are committed to peace. They show the features of Him from Whom they were born and by Whom they were accepted as

sons. Being called “sons of God” means being recognized as sons in their relationship to God. The Lord Jesus as the Son also brings peace. Being called a son also means that it is someone who shows the features of his father. A good son resembles his father.

Mt 5:10-12 | Summary of Group 1 and Group 2

10 *“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 “Blessed are you when [people] insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Verse 10 summarizes the first group of verses 3-6, which is about righteousness. The Lord points out to His disciples that they should not look at who persecutes them, but at the reason of persecution and that is doing righteousness. Just as He does not lose the kingdom through persecution for the sake of righteousness, neither do His disciples. The kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

The verses 11-12 summarize the second group of verses 7-9, where it is about the inner features of Christ. Exhibiting His characteristics is to show a grace that goes out to others. Where these features are present, suffering for His sake is the result. Here the disciples are addressed directly themselves, “blessed are you”, and the blessing is made a personal matter and not a general one. The reward in this case is not connected with the kingdom of heaven, but with heaven itself.

The reproach for the sake of Christ Himself has a higher reward than the suffering for the sake of righteousness. God takes away those who suffer because of Christ from the earthly scene to be with Him in heaven.

Mt 5:13-16 | Salt and Light

13 *“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty [again]? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. 14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; 15 nor does [anyone] light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the*

house. 16 *Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

After the characteristics of the disciples, the Lord speaks of their place in the world, in which they are placed by God. He calls them “the salt of the earth”. The earth is the creation of God that He maintains despite the fall. Disciples of the Lord are responsible for showing what He meant by this in all earthly relationships that God has established. This concerns matters like marriage, family and work. In connection with this, the disciple should be the salt.

The characteristic feature of salt is that it prevents spoilage. For the disciple this means that he does not give in to worldly influences. When Christians are no longer salt, nothing remains visible of God’s original intentions. If the Christians are gone from the earth, everything will become normless.

The Lord also calls the disciples “the light of the world”. While the disciples do participate in earthly relations, they have no part in the world, they do not belong to it. They are in it, but then as light. The light stands opposite the world and shines in it. It must not be hidden.

Salt prevents something, *light* shows something. The danger of salt is that it loses its taste. The danger for light is that it is extinguished by a basket, that is to say that there is no testimony in the world because one is too busy with earthly things.

We let light shine, not so much through what we say, but through what we do. The “good works” here are not works of charity for others, but upright, honorable works. It is not about the effect of the works, but their nature. These good works have their source in the Father in heaven. They spread light and glorify Him. When people see these good works they will instead of saying “what a good person” glorify the Father of that person.

Mt 5:17-20 | The Law and the Prophets

17 *“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke [Lit one iota (Heb yodh) or one projection of a letter (serif)] shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others [to*

do] the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches [them], he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses [that] of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

What the Lord Jesus proclaims does not mean that the old is set aside. The Lord accomplishes in His own Person all that is written. He has fulfilled every requirement of the law. But He has done more. He has also shown the true meaning of everything written in the law and the prophets. He is the fulfilment of all this, for everything in it points to Him. Everything that is written will really happen. Respect for what God has said is expressed by doing what God has said. After that, what God has said can also be taught to others. But he who explains the smallest precept of God as of no significance and then teaches that to others, will not be counted in the kingdom.

"Your righteousness" is the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. It is their own righteousness, for which they already receive the reward in the form of appreciation by people. But their righteousness is not sufficient to enter the kingdom of heaven. The righteousness of the Pharisees, which consists of going to the temple every day, doing long prayers and the like, has no substance for God. With all this outward display there is no sense of sin before God. And the latter is necessary to enter the kingdom of heaven.

The "surpassing" righteousness is the recognition of God's righteous judgment on sins. Whoever acknowledges that God is righteous when He would exercise this judgment upon him, takes his true place as a convinced sinner before God. Such a person may enter the kingdom of heaven.

Mt 5:21-26 | Murder and Anger

21 "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty [enough to go] into the fiery hell. 23 Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against

you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. 25 Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. 26 Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent.

The Lord is going to explain the deeper, actual meaning of the law. He does so through five examples. Three of them are about the nature of sin: violence (verses 21-26), lusts (verses 27-32), and lies (verses 33-37). The other two are about the nature of God: love (verses 38-48). In these examples the Lord demonstrates the depth of the law and shows that the law of the ten commandments blends into a higher law. He indicates what the law does not allow and also what the higher law is. Thus He contrasts the negative commandment not to kill to the positive doing good to others. Finally, He shows what the Pharisees have added. When He says “but I say to you”, it indicates a deepening, a refining or a refutation.

The Lord begins with the sixth commandment which God has given “you shall not commit murder” with the addition of men “whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court”. With this addition, murder is turned into a case that a local court can deal with. The Lord Jesus contrasts the levity of the Pharisees with a more serious view of the law. In His teaching He applies the murder of someone to cursing. In cursing, the state of the heart is revealed. As the cursing becomes more intense, He attaches heavier penalties to it.

Christ makes it clear that it is not only about the public act, but just as much about the condition of the heart. Therefore, He places in the same category of murder every kind of violence, feeling and expression, all contempt and hatred that expresses the evil mind of the heart.

After these manifestations that reveal the attitude of the heart, He speaks of presenting an offering. God can only accept an offering from someone who lives in peace with his neighbor. But if he has done something to his neighbor or said something to his neighbor that makes his neighbor have something against him, he must first be reconciled to his neighbor. Only after the reconciliation can he approach God and God can accept his

offering. It is important to be reconciled quickly with the other party. If reconciliation is not important to someone, that attitude will later lead to his fall.

The Lord Jesus also speaks prophetically about what awaits the people when they are not friends with Him. He is their opponent, for they treat Him with utter disrespect. They will not accept Him and will even reject and kill Him. They will not escape their punishment, nor will they receive relief from it, but they will have to undergo it fully.

Mt 5:27-32 | Adultery and Divorce

27 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; 28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell. 31 "It was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE'; 32 but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for [the] reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

The second commandment that the Lord cites and elaborates is the seventh commandment of the law, "you shall not commit adultery". He makes it clear that someone is guilty not only by the act of adultery, but already by looking at a woman with lust for her. With this He shows the germ and that is the wicked, adulterous heart.

In order to escape the judgment of hell which is the penalty for such acts, He points to the need for radical self-judgment. No sacrifice can be too great when it serves the deliverance from hell that awaits at the end of an evil path. We must not bring ourselves into temptation or expose ourselves to danger that would cause us to sin and fall. Anything that can be a reason for sin must be removed from our lives or our homes without excuse. The eye is symbolic of what we see, the hand of what we do. We must

absolutely avoid looking at things that lead us to sinful thoughts. It is also imperative that we avoid situations that could lead us to wrong conduct.

With the words “it was said” (verse 31), the Lord introduces a saying added to the law by men. The law does mention a certificate of divorce (Deu 24:1-4). The point there is that in the case such a certificate of divorce is handed over, there is no way back. The intention is that someone thinks twice before giving such a certificate of divorce. The Israelites, however, had changed it in: ‘You can divorce as long as you give a certificate of divorce.’ This implies a weakening of marriage as instituted by God.

In contrast to this saying added by men, the Lord places His “but I say to you”. Through this recurring “but I say to you” He shows that the ordinances given by Moses do not express the whole will of God. What He says is not a contradiction of Moses. He does not take away what Moses said, but augments it and gives it its full meaning. Thus He states that it is impossible to divorce. Whoever divorces encourages adultery. This applies both to the woman who is sent away when she marries again and to the man who marries a woman who is sent away. For God, marriage is an unbreakable covenant. He hates divorce (Mal 2:16).

The only situation in which it is permissible for someone to send away his wife is in the case of unchastity in other words when she has committed fornication. Please note, this is not: because of adultery, but: out of cause of fornication. The situation the Lord means here is a situation as we found with Joseph and Mary (Mt 1:18-19). Joseph and Mary were betrothed (Mt 1:18). No official wedding ceremony had yet taken place. Yet the Holy Spirit speaks about Joseph as the husband of Mary (Mt 1:19) and the angel of the Lord speaks to Joseph about Mary as his wife (Mt 1:20).

This indicates that the status of being betrothed is almost equal to that of a marriage. If, when betrothed, one of the two has sexual intercourse with a third person, it is not adultery, but fornication. In that case, the Lord here gives the opportunity to divorce his wife. Joseph wanted to do the same with Mary (Mt 1:19). He is not being reproved for this by the angel in the Name of God. When Joseph hears what really happened, he takes Mary as his wife.

Mt 5:33-37 | The Oath

33 "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.' 34 But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. 36 Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' [or] 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil.

The oath to which the Lord Jesus refers here relates to the communication between people in everyday life. Many have the habit of reinforcing their words by swearing an oath when their honesty is questioned. It may also involve the ratification of a promise.

However, people sometimes say more than they mean or can live up to. A false oath is an oath that is not kept consciously or unconsciously. A false oath is an overconfidently pronounced oath that reveals a great lack of self-knowledge. Much pomp and ceremony is used to announce intentions, but in practice nothing is done about them. One's own possibilities are overestimated or hypocritically advertised and others experience the adverse impact of this. The Lord shows how misplaced every form of self-confidence is.

This is not about an oath in front of the government. Taking such an oath is nothing more than the recognition of God's authority to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth before Him and with His help. The Lord Jesus is silent on all accusations made by the High Priest. But when he adjures Him by the living God he responds.

Introduced with "but I say to you", the Lord impresses upon the heart of His disciples that it is better not to make an oath at all and thus refrain from using swear words. When the Jews make an oath, they invoke all kinds of higher things. With this they claim that a higher authority stands behind their words and they can therefore be trusted in what they say. But such a claim is extremely misplaced and misleading. We must not lower God and everything connected to Him to our level. He expects us to be reliable. If we say 'yes', we also mean 'yes' and act accordingly. The same applies to saying 'no'.

A person who endorses almost every statement with an oath cannot be trusted in his ordinary statements. If you are reliable, you don't have to emphasize what you say with all kinds of power terms. Such emphasizes do not come from God, but are out of the evil one, that is satan.

Mt 5:38-42 | Repay

38 *"You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.'* 39 *But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. 41 Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.*

What the law demands is always just. Therefore, there is nothing wrong with "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth". [It should be noted that this must be applied by the competent court. It does not apply to the sphere of personal retaliation.] That is what they heard. But grace goes much further. The Lord points this out when He says "but I say unto you". In what He says, He demonstrates the spirit in which His disciples should act, as He does perfectly.

It means that we do not defend ourselves against an angry neighbor and that we allow ourselves to be humiliated not just a little, but deeply. Nor do we insist on our rights, but we give up more than is required of us. We go further than the distance we are forced to go. We are ready to give and to lend when that is asked of us.

Just as the Lord Jesus has revealed the character of violence and corruption in the previous verses, so He shows here the appeal made to the mind of the Christian's heart. It must be about real need and not about granting a request that meets worldly desires. The Christian ought to go further than he is obliged and not be known as someone who always tries to get as much out of a case as possible.

Mt 5:43-48 | Love Your Enemies

43 *"You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.'* 44 *But I say to you, love your enemies and pray*

for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on [the] evil and [the] good, and sends rain on [the] righteous and [the] unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing [than others]? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

The first part of what they have heard, “you shall love your neighbor”, is written in the law (Lev 19:18b). For the Pharisees this means in practice that they only love their party members, because only them they see as their neighbors. Also disciples of the Lord are in danger of limiting love of neighbor to those with whom they agree. The second part, “hate your enemy”, is a self-made addition.

Introduced with the familiar words “but I say to you” the Lord goes deeper into what has been said. Then He gives it its true meaning and content. He shows that ‘your enemy’ is also a neighbor who we should love. In the parable of the good Samaritan He Himself is the example in it (Lk 10:29-37). Where there is need, the heart of the Lord goes out to it no matter how they treated Him before. All the ungratefulness He receives, even rejection and death, cannot stop Him from acting according to His nature of perfect love and giving goodness. He does this because the Father is like that. And He wants to glorify Him. Especially towards one’s neighbor there is a reflection of the Father by acting in dignity as sons of the Father.

God is not presented here as a Lawgiver, but as a Father. Thus God is seen in a new light. God as Father dominates the teaching of the Lord here. We should prove ourselves in a practical way as sons of our heavenly Father. A son is perfect when he is like his father. Then it is not a question of how the other looks at me (does he love me?) or who the other is for me (is he my brother?). That’s how people in the world view these things. It is about showing all people, even our enemies, who our heavenly Father is. The whole behavior of the disciples must point to their Father in heaven.

Matthew 6

Mt 6:1 | Righteousness

1 *“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.*

This chapter is no longer about the Christian principle in contrast to the law as in Matthew 5, but about our Father with Whom we have to do in secret. The expression “your Father” is used here more than ten times. The disciples are brought into a personal connection with the Father. He understands us, sees everything that happens in and around us, listens to us and gives us advice. Everything shows that He has the deepest concern for us.

The previous chapter deals with the *nature* of righteousness. This chapter is about *doing* righteousness. With this, the Lord points out the great danger that we will do righteousness before the eyes of men in order to obtain their appreciation and recognition. That is nothing but hypocrisy.

The Lord goes into three forms of righteousness which are easily practiced in order to garner the glory of men. He speaks of doing righteousness in the forms of *giving* (verses 2-4), *prayer* (verses 5-15) and *fasting* (verses 16-18). In outward display these forms can impress people, but not God. God seeks inward truth. We receive the reward that the Father pays out in the kingdom of peace. We lose that when we do things before the eyes of people.

Giving is about our attitude towards our fellow human beings, prayer is about our attitude toward God, and fasting is about ourselves. It is as by grace that teaches us that we “live sensibly, righteously and godly” (Tit 2:12). ‘Sensibly’ is about our inner attitude, we are “righteous” towards our fellowmen and we show “godliness” towards God.

Mt 6:2-4 | Giving

2 *“So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored*

by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees [what is done] in secret will reward you.

The Lord time and again uses the words “I say to you” also in this chapter. He speaks with authority and does not teach them as their scribes.

The Pharisees esteem their generosity highly. They do this in the synagogues, where they teach, and also in public. The Lord calls them “hypocrites”. These people have no eye for God. They are only concerned about the approval and praise of their fellow human beings. Well, they receive it and therewith they get their reward at the same time. They no longer need to expect deferred or future reward.

After the Lord has pointed out the wrong form of giving, He shows what the right way is. With giving the point is that it happens before the Father’s eye. Even though no one knows about it, the Father sees it, appreciates it and will reward it.

Nor should the left hand know what the right hand is doing. That means that we should not give in order to give ourselves a good feeling about it. We won’t tell others, but we are proud of ourselves for giving something. Everything must be done to and before the eye of the Father and not before that of people, not even before our own eye. What happens without people knowing it, will be openly rewarded in the future day.

Mt 6:5-8 | Prayer

5 “When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 6 But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees [what is done] in secret will reward you. 7 “And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. 8 So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

God abhors a prayer that serves no other purpose than to give others a ‘prayer demonstration’. In such a prayer, the prayer is addressed to God,

but not so that God hears it, but so that others hear it. God does not even listen to it. That prayer is hypocrisy because it gives the impression that it is being made to Him, while it is done to impress people.

The demonstrations are given in buildings and in public. All those who have no relationship with God themselves admire these demonstrations. That admiration is the reward for the one who 'prays'. God's reward passes them by. God's reward is ready for those who do not seek honor from people, but who seek real contact with Him. Contact with God and speaking to Him is not a show. It is a personal and delicate matter. That is why we need to seek solitude. The chance of being disturbed from the outside must also be minimized: the door must be locked. For the time in which we live, it also means switching off the smartphone and similar devices so that we can pray undisturbed.

Another important point is not to use meaningless repetition. The Lord means by this the case that a prayer is made as long as possible by repetition of words. That is a Gentile custom. An example of this is the praying of the 'rosary' in the roman catholic church. This does not mean that we should not pray for a long time. However, no one needs to know the duration and intensity of our prayer life. It is therefore good to pray briefly and powerfully in public. We do not pray to make known to God things He does not yet know. He knows everything long before we ask Him anything. We pray to get rid of burdens.

Mt 6:9-15 | The 'Our Father'

9 *"Pray, then, in this way:*

'Our Father who is in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

10 *'Your kingdom come.*

Your will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven.

11 *'Give us this day our daily bread.*

12 *'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

13 *'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

14 For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

In His teaching on prayer, the Lord now indicates how they can pray. By this he does not mean to give a 'standard prayer' that needs to be prayed over and over again. Then the effect could be precisely that which He has just said it should not be. In this prayer he indicates to whom they may address themselves and what the content of their prayer should be.

In the address "our Father who is in heaven", lies distance. The disciple on earth speaks to the Father in heaven. This shows that it is not primarily intended for Christians. The Christian has free access to God his Father in heaven. There is no distance. There is such a distance between the earthly people of God and God in heaven. This makes this prayer a prayer that is prayed with a view to the coming of the kingdom of peace, while the circumstances are still opposed to it. Although this prayer is mainly meant for the remnant of Israel, we can learn a lot from it.

The announcement of the kingdom of peace by John the baptist and the Lord Himself leads disciples to long for the establishment of His kingdom. For this they have to overcome the difficulties of a hostile world. They must be preserved for the snares of the enemy, while it is necessary to do the will of the Father.

The prayer contains six petitions. First come three petitions that have to do with God. It relates to His *Name*, His *kingdom*, and His *will*. Then come three petitions that have to do with us. It is about our *bread*, our *debts*, and our *salvation* from temptation and *deliverance* from evil. The heavenly Father and His claims are first and foremost. Our needs come second.

The true disciple will long for the Name of his Father, who is still so often blasphemed and dishonored, to be hallowed everywhere on earth. When the Lord Jesus will reign, the holiness of the Father's Name will be recognized and spoken with respect by everyone. Disciples find their greatest joy in the fact that their Father, Who is still doing everything in secret, will be openly praised and magnified.

If the Father's Name is sanctified everywhere, the will of the Father will also be done everywhere. This will be the situation when "Your kingdom",

the kingdom of peace, has come. Then there will also be complete obedience and “Your will” will be done on earth as it has always been done in heaven.

But it’s not that time yet. The disciple is still dependent on the care of his Father, while he is surrounded by enemies. Especially in the great tribulation, which immediately precedes the establishment of the kingdom of peace, there will be a great lack of most of daily needs. The Lord says here that every day they may call upon their Father to give them what they need.

They will also be aware that the need they are in is the result of their sins. They ask forgiveness and do so in the spirit of forgiveness that they have shown to their persecutors. At the same time, they acknowledge their weakness to withstand temptation. The Lord says that they may pray if their Father would prevent them from coming into temptation, where they might deny Him. They may at the same time ask their Father to deliver them from the evil one.

In the final words of His teaching about prayer, the Lord returns to forgiveness. The word “for” in verse 14 indicates a clear connection to the foregoing. It is necessary to have the *mind* of forgiveness to have the *consciousness* of forgiveness. If a disciple is not willing to forgive others the wrong they have done to him, the Father cannot show that willingness either. By the lack of willingness to forgive, access to the Father in prayer is blocked.

Mt 6:16-18 | Fasting

16 “Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites [do], for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face 18 so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees [what is done] in secret will reward you.

Fasting appears several times in the Old Testament (Ezra 8:21; Neh 9:1; Isa 58:1-14). It also appears in the New Testament letters that describe the life of the church. It is usually associated with prayer (Acts 14:23). Also in this

chapter it follows directly from prayer. While prayer concerns the spiritual side of man, fasting concerns the physical side. By fasting one feels with his body what occupies him in his mind and soul.

Fasting accompanies humility and is also an expression of sorrow. When someone fasts, he denies himself the enjoyment of earthly things that in themselves he is permitted to enjoy. Whoever fasts, denies himself certain earthly things for a higher purpose during the time of fasting.

Fasting is not a goal in itself. This is how the Pharisees fast. By showing a gloomy face, even neglecting their appearance, they know how to win the appreciation of people. They want people to see how good and pious they live and how they are saddened by the spiritual state of God's people. The Lord Jesus sees through the true nature of this performance. He calls them "hypocrites" and says that they already have their reward.

You don't notice real fasting with anyone. It is, like prayer, something between the Father and the disciple. The Father will reward it if someone sympathizes with Him about the situation of His people. Fasting happens for Him and not for others.

Mt 6:19-21 | Treasures in Heaven

19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The last part of this chapter (verses 19-34) is about earthly possessions and the necessary things of life. The Lord gives the necessary exhortations because of the deep tendency in every human being to chase earthly treasures. The admonition not to gather treasures on earth is in contrast to the exhortation to give, which the Lord speaks of at the beginning of this chapter.

There are two reasons for not setting the heart on earthly possessions. Those reasons relate to the two ways in which we can lose our treasures. First of all, they can be spoiled by forces of nature that we cannot control. Secondly, violent people can rob them of us. We can still do our best to

defend ourselves against both, but the durability date of our possessions cannot be guaranteed.

The Lord points out other treasures that are not perishable and cannot be stolen from us. These are the treasures in heaven. These treasures are connected with Him, “in Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”, that is Himself (Col 2:3). What we collect by occupying ourselves with the things that are above (Col 3:1-2), is of eternal, indestructible value.

If we really know the Father in heaven, we have our treasure in heaven and our heart is there too. We only have one heart and that is with the object that appreciates the heart the most.

Mt 6:22-23 | The Lamp of the Body

22 *“The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!*

To estimate the value of the treasure in heaven, we need a clear, or single, eye. Our eye is a lamp. The eye itself is not a source of light, but it catches the light and passes it on to the body. Then the members know what they have to do. In view of the treasure in heaven, we can pray the prayer that Paul also prayed. He prayed for the believers at Ephesus for enlightened eyes of the heart (Eph 1:18), so that they might know the riches of heaven.

Nominal Christians, those who say they have a connection with the Lord Jesus, but do not have Him as their life, boast of having light. But their eye is bad. They have no treasure in heaven, but gather treasures on earth. The light they supposedly possess is in reality darkness. Whoever presumes to possess light is in the greatest possible darkness. Such a person completely shuts himself off from God’s light.

Mt 6:24 | God or Wealth

24 *“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.*

It is not possible to collect treasures in heaven if our eye floats back and forth between the treasures of heaven and the treasures of earth. God and mammon are two masters who want to be served. [Wealth: Gr mamonas, for Aram mamon (mammon); i.e. wealth, etc., personified as an object of worship.] God wants us to serve Him and He is entitled to it. Mammon, the god of money and wealth, wants to entice us to serve him. It is impossible to serve both at the same time.

Many Christians believe it can be done and try it too. The Lord Jesus says here that this is not possible. God and mammon exclude each other completely, they are completely opposed to each other. Whoever says that he serves God, while his life shows that he lives for earthly things, denies his relationship to God. In practice, earthly things will gain more and more ground and so life for the glory of God will lose more and more ground.

Mt 6:25-34 | Worries

25 *“For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, [as to] what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, [as to] what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and [yet] your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? 27 And who of you by being worried can add a [single] hour to his life? 28 And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is [alive] today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, [will He] not much more [clothe] you? You of little faith! 31 Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ 32 For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

These verses are not about the dangers of wealth, but about the worries of life. We can connect this with the petition “give us this day our daily bread” (verse 11). The worries of life can take as much of our time as col-

lecting treasures. The danger of worries does not mean that we should not take care of our family, for example, but that we are worrying about our family and mull over it. We may put the worries of life in second place in the confidence that the Lord will provide what we need. He also provides everything that is needed for nature, doesn't He?

The Lord invites us simply to look at the birds. They all receive their livelihood because our heavenly Father feeds them. We may know that we far exceed the birds in importance. If we are aware of this, the concern for food will disappear. The same goes for the length of our lives, i.e. our lifespan, and our clothes. In order that we might not exaggerate our worry for it, He invites us to look at the lilies and the grass. When we see how God deals with them and what happens to them when they are out of bloom, the burden for these things can fall away from us. The Lord reassures His disciple, he does not have to worry about food or drink or clothing.

The people of the world have nothing else to worry about. They have no treasure in heaven and no Father in heaven and live only for earthly pleasure. It is about the focus on another world. In that light, the importance of food and drink and clothing is diminishing. To make the right choice, the eye must be focused on what is invisible, eternal and heavenly. Otherwise the choice is made for what is visible, temporary and earthly.

A disciple of the Lord may know that His heavenly Father knows that he needs and will take care of all those visible, temporary, earthly things. The first concern of a disciple can therefore be – and should be, for that is his task – for the kingdom of God and His righteousness. The search for the kingdom of God means putting oneself entirely at its service. It is to recognize the lordship of the Lord Jesus over all areas of life. It is doing what He says and saying what He wants and going where He wants us to go. The search for God's righteousness is the search for the straight path that God shows us to walk and that Christ has gone before us.

If we serve God Who is our heavenly Father, we fall under His watchful and kind care. Our heavenly Father knows all our needs and cares about them. We can therefore be completely free of anxious worries and have complete confidence in His loving care.

The Lord says once again that we do not need to be worried, not even for tomorrow. It also makes no sense to worry about what may come tomorrow. We have enough of the evil of the day we are experiencing now. We don't need to draw toward us now, the worries that may eventually arise tomorrow. When tomorrow comes, the worry may already have disappeared. And if worry is still there, then God is there too.

Matthew 7

Mt 7:1-6 | Judging Others

1 “Do not judge so that you will not be judged. 2 For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 3 Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye. 6 “Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

In the previous chapter we have the Lord’s teaching about bringing His disciples into a relationship with the Father in heaven. He wants the Father to fill all of their thinking, whether it be for giving, prayer, fasting, or their relationship to possessions and all the necessities of life. In this chapter the Lord teaches His disciples about the relationship to their brothers and even to wicked people.

This chapter is about the reign of God in the life of the disciple. The ‘government of God’ means that a person is responsible for what he does and that God always connects consequences for him and often for others to his actions or words.

If the Lord says here “do not judge”, it has nothing to do with what is evident, but with what is hidden. It concerns the warning to guard against the spirit of criticism in ourselves, the tendency to suggest evil motives in others in what is not evident. That is not to say that the Lord means to weaken the necessary judgment of evil. If there is public evil in the church, the church *must* judge it (1Cor 5:12-13).

If we presume a judgment where it is not allowed (1Cor 4:5), we will have to deal with the government of God. God will then judge and measure us

according to the standards we have set for others. Then we will experience how much we have defrauded others.

This wrong spirit of judgment is also reflected in the extent of the evil we think we perceive in others, while we are blind to our own much greater wrongs. We make a big fuss about that little speck in our brother's eye, that speck is enlarged, while the log in our own eye is trivialized. We worry when someone doesn't see a minor matter of the truth, while we don't realize that we ourselves disregard large parts of the truth.

If there is sincere care for each other, we will want to help another person to get rid of a speck out of his eye. That's why we are members of the same body. But it has to be done in the right way. These are hypocritical judgments, judgment without self-judgment, doing wrong with a particular evil and then still condemning another for that very same evil.

Verse 6 seems to deal with a completely different subject than the previous verses. Yet there is a connection. In verses 1-5, the Lord warns that we should not judge the motives of the heart of our fellow disciples. They are hidden from us. Verse 6 is about judging people who present themselves as Christians, but whose mouths and deeds show that they are trampling the precious things of the Lord Jesus under their feet. Of that, He says strongly that we have to judge that.

"Dogs" and "swine" refers to people in Christianity for whom the preciousness of God's truth has no meaning and value whatsoever. We have to pass a sharp judgment on such people. We must not give them anything of what God has intended only for His people and what is precious to them. Not only will they trample that precious thing into the mud, but they will also drag and tear to pieces us who gave it (cf. 2Pet 2:22).

"Dogs" and "swine" do not refer to sinners in general, and "what is holy" and "pearls" do not refer to the gospel. Bringing the gospel is not pearls before swine. The gospel is meant especially for all sinners, even the most 'swinish' of them.

Mt 7:7-12 | Ask, Seek, Knock

7 *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and*

to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! 12 "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

The Lord gives great encouragement to put into practice all the teaching He has given. Once we have heard the teaching, we feel powerless to follow it. But here the Lord gives the tools: ask, seek, knock. He invites us to make unlimited and continuous use of it. If we really do, we can be sure to be heard. He assures us with the word "for" (verse 8) that He will respond. 'Ask' is the expression of a desire. 'Seek' indicates that the desire is not within reach, but that we have to make an effort to get what we want. With 'knock' the emphasis is on the one asking being insistent with God and also that a door must be opened, which can be applied to the taking away of an obstacle.

The limit to the giving of God is determined by our faith. God is a willing and abundant Giver. His fullness is inexhaustible. His ability to give is unlimited. He says: "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it" (Psa 81:10c). Yet God does not give everything we ask. He only gives what is good. If we ask the Father something, He will not give us something worthless like a stone or dangerous like a snake. His standard is not inferior to that of an earthly father.

Verse 12 is a summary of verses 1-11 and, in fact, of the whole Old Testament in so far as it speaks of relations with fellow men. Whatever someone else does, my concern is to do him what I want him to do to me. Then I act as a child of my heavenly Father.

It does not say: 'What you *don't* want someone does to you, *don't* do it to someone else'. That is a negative approach to the other. The Lord presents it positively. This is how it fits in well with what precedes. If the Father gives so generously to us, we will also give generously to others. We can therefore also see these words of the Lord as a summary of Christendom in its expression to our fellow human beings.

Mt 7:13-14 | Two Gates, Two Ways

13 "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 14 For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Here the Lord speaks over the heads of the disciples to the crowds. He offers them the choice between the narrow and the wide gate, between entering life or being lost. The gate is narrow because someone can only enter through it if he does not want to bring anything of himself. The gate is not too narrow for someone who humbles himself before God and becomes small.

The gate is too narrow for someone who thinks he can enter through it on the basis of his own good works. Those works make someone big. People with works of their own righteousness enter through the wide gate. Many choose this easy gate and the equally easy way to live a pleasant life. The end of that road, however, is destruction.

The narrow gate is only discovered and entered by a few. This does not mean that God's grace is narrow. God's grace is rich and free and available to everyone. But few want to appeal to grace. Only those who see that they cannot be before God and confess their sins to Him enter. They choose the way of life. That is a narrow way. The crowd is not to be found there, but that way leads to eternal life with God.

Mt 7:15-20 | Recognize False Confessors

15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn [bushes] nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 So then, you will know them by their fruits.

The Lord warns of false prophets. False prophets make the narrow gate wide and the narrow road wide. They present themselves as disciples, but in reality bring destruction. They want to tear the true disciples to pieces.

The distinction between the real and the false prophet can be seen in the fruit. The fruit does not consist solely of gross wickedness. False prophets do not always come up with obvious evil teachings. The effect of the teachings, which are their fruits, shows what kind of prophets we are dealing with. It is about what a doctrine works out in the life of the disciple. The touchstone of a doctrine is whether it makes a disciple a more faithful follower of the Lord or whether it separates him from the Lord.

It's like with a tree. The health of the tree can be seen in the fruit it produces. It is impossible to be deceived in this. It is also clear what happens to a tree that does not produce good fruit. You don't leave it as it is, imagine you accidentally eat from it. This can be harmful and even fatal. That is why such a tree must be cut down and thrown into the fire.

The same goes for people who bring teaching that lead God's people away from God. God's people are called to produce good fruit for Him. By giving in to the false prophets no good fruit is produced. They must therefore be judged strictly. Let us therefore pay attention to the fruit of a certain doctrine, because that's how we recognize the kind of prophets we're dealing with!

Mt 7:21-23 | The Judgment of False Confessors

*21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven [will enter].
22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'*

It's not about what someone says, but what he does. Someone can explicitly confess that Jesus is "Lord" and even mention the word "Lord" twice. But if he does not accomplish God's will in subjection to the Scriptures, the Lord will reject him. He calls such people "you who practice lawlessness", they are people who do not recognize any authority, and certainly not that of God.

False confessors acknowledge the authority of the Lord with their mouths, but in practice they do not act accordingly. Judas is a terrible example

of such people. He undoubtedly spoke and did impressive things in the Name of the Lord, but there was no inner attachment to Him. He never repented and therefore had no new life.

The Lord looks forward here through the ages to the last judgment. He will openly say of all those who confessed Him only with their lips that He never knew them. Of course He knew them perfectly. That's how He arrives at this perfectly righteous condemnation. The fact that He never knew them means that there has never been a relationship between Him and them recognized by Him because they have not repented. Their own appreciation of their service will give way to His condemnation of it.

Mt 7:24-27 | Two Foundations

24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and [yet] it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. 26 Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall."

In these verses, the Lord Jesus makes the difference clear between someone who is wise and someone who is foolish. These are the final words of the sermon on the mount. Of course, these concluding and summarizing words do not only apply to what He said in the sermon on the mount. They apply to the whole Word of God.

Who is wise and who is foolish? A wise man is one who hears the words of the Lord Jesus and does them. A foolish man is one who hears the words of the Lord Jesus and does not do them. The difference is not in hearing and not hearing. Both the wise and the fool hear the Word of God. The big difference is doing or not doing. The Lord illustrates this difference with the example of building a house. The difference is not in the houses. Both will have been built with sound materials. The big difference is the foundation on which the house is built.

In the parable, the Lord shows that a test will show whether someone is wise or foolish. The test will show whether someone hears and does and

is therefore a wise man, or whether someone hears and does not do and is therefore a fool. The test is performed in different ways.

There is the “rain”. In this we can see a sudden trial, like in the life of Job. One rain has only just finished its devastating work, and the next rain falls down in all its intensity upon Job’s house of life (Job 1:13-19). Yet the house of his life remains standing. This is because he does not give up his trust in God (Job 2:10).

There may also be “floods”. That speaks of continuing and increasing pressure. David knew this, for example in the long time he was hunted by Saul who wanted to kill him. Sometimes it became so heavy that he would almost give up courage (Psa 69:1-3,15). But he did not give up his trust in God either (Psa 69:30-36).

And then “the winds”. We can think of all kinds of “wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14). Timothy is warned of “deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons” (1Tim 4:1) who do their utmost to enter into the lives of men to erode and destroy their faith. This happens frequently in Christianity. Paul tells Timothy that the Word is trustworthy and that he must place his hope in the living God (1Tim 4:9-10).

All these elements go against someone’s house of life and will clearly show on what foundation it is built: on the rock or on the sand. No one who claims to hear escapes the test.

The Lord Jesus uses the word “slammed” for the test (verse 25). Here we hear how much the enemy, with the effort of all his strength, is doing his utmost to make this house fall. What is the result? It doesn’t fall!

The fool has also heard the words of the Lord (verse 27). Only, he does not do them. He doesn’t build on the rock, but on something else. Whatever it may be, it is sand and therefore offers no strength at all. That makes the man foolish. The test brings this to light. The house does not just fall, its fall is even “great”.

What is the house of our life built on? Are we wise or foolish? No one will say of himself that he is foolish. But the test comes and the proof of what we are will be provided unambiguously. It’s about *believing* what God says, *accepting* what God says, and *doing* what God says. We cannot

manage it with less. We observe that a lot is being built on the wrong foundation. Many listen to God's Word, but do what they think is best with it. That is building on sand, where the fall is inevitable and great.

Mt 7:28-29 | The Crowds Are Amazed

28 When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; 29 for He was teaching them as [one] having authority, and not as their scribes.

Although the Lord has taught His disciples, the crowds also have listened. What they hear amazes them. That is no wonder, because it is a voice from a different sphere than that of earth. The Teacher lives the Word out as an example. That gives Him authority. He is what He says. In Him the teaching is illustrated. He is the perfect Teacher Who teaches His disciples, that is, followers who honor Him, their Teacher, and want to be as He is. They not only listen to Him, but also imitate Him.

The authority with which He proclaims these things amazes the crowds. They notice the difference between the way He teaches and the way their scribes do so. Their scribes are the people who say and do not do (Mt 23:4b). He speaks with authority, without saying why He does so. He commands, without declaring His right to it. He teaches in a way that is completely different from the way others do it. While He honors and fulfills the Holy Scriptures, He does not quote a former source of authority to underline what He says. He teaches in a completely unique way from which it becomes clear that He is what He says (Jn 8:25).

Matthew 8

Mt 8:1 | Large Crowds Follow Him

| 1 *When Jesus came down from the mountain, large crowds followed Him.*

In the previous chapters (Matthew 5-7) the Lord has preached which principles govern the coming kingdom. He presented to His disciples – and over their heads to the crowds (Mt 5:1-2) – the constitution of that kingdom. In it He exposed the heart of man in his inner motives and called upon His followers to show the *features* of the King in their lives. This has amazed the crowds (Mt 7:28) and now they follow Him. In the next two chapters (Matthew 8-9) we see the *signs* of the King or the kingdom in which He shows works of His power.

The stories in these chapters are not in chronological order. Mark gives that order in his Gospel. Here the events are ordered in a way that show that the promised Messiah is present. The people must be able to recognize Him through this. He is Immanuel, God with us, Who does good to His people. In Him a God of grace and mercy makes Himself known. In all of the events we learn more and more about the Lord Jesus Himself. In every event the glory of His Person shines.

From the ranking of the first three events we learn the layout of God's plan with Him and His people. The cleansing of the leper (verses 2-4) represents the faithful remnant of Israel that believes in Him now that He is on earth, however weak that faith may be. Because His people reject Him, we see in the Roman centurion that the way is open for the introduction of the Gentiles (verses 5-13). In the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, we see that He has returned again to Israel, which is seen in the house, and the remnant is able to serve Him (verses 14-15).

Mt 8:2-4 | Cleansing of a leper

| 2 *And a leper came to Him and bowed down before Him, and said, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."* 3 *Jesus stretched out His hand and*

*touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. 4 And Jesus *said to him, "See that you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest and present the offering that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."*

The first work of His power that Matthew describes is the cleansing of a leper. While the crowd will have shrunk back in horror as the leper approached, the Lord does not walk away in horror. The man is convinced of the power of the Lord Jesus, but not so much of His grace. However, the Lord receives him full of grace. He acts directly by stretching out His hand, touching Him and speaking the word of power to cleanse. On His word of power, the leper is cleansed. Someone who touches a leper becomes himself unclean, but the blessed Redeemer comes so close to man, that He can remove the uncleanness without being defiled.

In Leviticus we have ceremonies for cleansing (Lev 14:1-32), but not for healing. Leprosy can only be healed by God (cf. 2Kgs 5:7). The Lord Jesus is God.

He is also the Lawgiver. Therefore, He tells the cleansed one to go to the priest to fulfil the cleansing regulations written down by Moses. The deeper reason for this is that for the religious class the cleansing of the man must be a clear indication that God is present among them. The priest who had previously declared him unclean will now see that the man has been healed, and only God can have done that. Since the Lord Jesus did the cleansing, the priest should come to the conclusion that God is present in Him among his people.

As it is with leprosy so it is with sin. Leprosy is a picture of the outwardly breaking out, pernicious power of sin that is also contagious for others. Leprosy, like sin, makes someone repulsive, unfit to live for God's glory and the blessing of others. Miriam, Gehazi and Uzziah (or Azariah) became lepers as a visible proof of the pride and greed that was in their hearts (Num 12:10-15; 2Kgs 5:27; 15:5; 2Chr 26:16-21).

No one can take away sin except the Son of God (1Jn 3:5). Sin is an obstacle to functioning as a disciple. The Lord wants to take away every hindrance with us, so that we can follow Him.

Mt 8:5-13 | The Centurion of Capernaum

*5 And when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him, 6 and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented." 7 Jesus *said to him, "I will come and heal him." 8 But the centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does [it]." 10 Now when Jesus heard [this], He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. 11 I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline [at the table] with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; 12 but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." 13 And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed that [very] moment.*

The main character in this event is a Gentile centurion who appears to have a remarkable faith in the Lord Jesus. His faith became public because one of his servants was lying paralyzed at home in severe pain. The centurion seeks the Lord and pleads with Him for his servant. The servant's situation illustrates that sin can totally paralyze someone and cause him enormous pain. As in the previous event, here too there is no man who can offer a solution. The centurion realizes that only the Lord Jesus can help. The servant can't do anything at all. In this way, we can also run to Christ and implore Him for the benefit of others who are unable to do so themselves.

The Lord answers sympathetically to the centurion's appeal. He wants to come and heal him. Then it turns out that the centurion has a special view of himself and of the Lord. In comparison with the Lord, he feels unworthy of Him taking a step through his door. At the same time, he sees the great power of the Lord in His Word. He appeals to that. He does not need to come, because He is also able to heal through His word full of power (Psa 107:20). He does not need to be physically present, for He is the Omnipresent. While He is talking to the centurion, He is also with his servant.

In what the centurion says of himself, it turns out that on the one hand he is subject to others and, on the other hand others are subject to him. Those others who are subject to him, he may command something to be done with a word and they obey Him. He also recognizes this with the Lord Jesus. He too is under the authority of Another, God, and He can command others and is obeyed.

What the centurion says impresses the Lord Jesus. This is a mystery that makes the glory of His Person greater and greater. This faith of the centurion is brought about in him by Christ Himself. At the same time, He sees the faith of the centurion as his. His amazement is mainly caused by the fact that he is a Gentile centurion and not someone from His own people. He even has to conclude that He has not found such great faith in Israel.

The faith of the Gentile centurion is characteristic of all those who believe and do not belong to Israel. Israel will only believe when they see the Messiah and He touches them. That touch is there with the leper (verse 3) and also in the next story, with Peter's mother-in-law (verse 15). The faith of the gentiles is characterized by faith in His Word without Him being physically present. By this faith many from the ends of the earth will share in the glorious blessings of the kingdom of heaven, together with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Lord personally guarantees this with the statement "truly I say to you".

The same "truly I say to you" also applies to the reverse. As surely as the believing Gentiles will participate in the kingdom, so surely will those for whom it was originally meant have no part in it because of their unbelief. Many of the poor Gentiles will come into the kingdom of heaven to recline at the table with the fathers who are venerated by the Jewish people as the first fathers of the heirs of the promise.

The children of the kingdom, on the other hand, will be in outer darkness. Instead of being led into the light and the blessing they will be cast out into a totally opposite place. In the outer darkness, they will weep on account of the suffering and will gnash their teeth because of their remorse for the blessing they have forfeited.

Mt 8:14-15 | Peter's Mother-In-Law Healed

14 When Jesus came into Peter's home, He saw his mother-in-law lying sick in bed with a fever. 15 He touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she got up and served Him.

The third case of healing takes place in a house. It is the house of Peter. The Lord is a Guest there. Where He is, sickness and death cannot continue to exist. So shall it be when He reigns on earth (Isa 35:10b). He sees the need. We do not read that He speaks a word, but that He touches her hand. The healing follows immediately and completely. A time of recovery is not necessary.

Matthew does not recount that the Lord is asked to heal. We do read that in the Gospel according to Mark (Mk 1:30). Here healing is an act that results from His presence. We have here again a proof that He is the Messiah "Who heals all your diseases" (Psa 103:3b).

Fever is a disease that makes someone restless. There is a lot of activity, but it is uncontrolled and the only result is that man is getting weaker and weaker. He is not able to give any help to others. If the Lord has healed her, that changes completely. She can stand up and serve Him.

He also wants to set us free from all meaningless pursuits that only consume our strength without anything happening that is to His honor. To do this, He must touch our hand, just like with her. The hand is the symbol of activity, of being busy. If He is the power behind our activities and not some or other consuming fire within us, we are able to serve Him.

Mt 8:16-17 | Many Healed

16 When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill. 17 [This was] to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: "HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES."

The Lord remains busy until the evening for those in need. There are "many who were demon-possessed" and that in the land of God. The people must have greatly fallen away. At the word of His power the evil spirits depart. There is no resistance here. Besides the spiritual suffering through

demons, there is also a lot of physical suffering. He also heals those who suffer in this way. All these things indicate that instead of being blessed through obedience, the people have brought a curse upon themselves through disobedience. But Christ is present to take away the consequences of the curse from people who come to Him in faith.

The quotation from the prophet Isaiah shows how and in which spirit the Lord accomplishes the healing. While He helps the people, He feels all their needs and illnesses at their deepest. He carries the burden of them in His spirit, while He gets rid of them by His power. The miracle shows His Divine power, but there is also the Divine sympathy that enters into the depths of the need of those He comes to help.

Taking the weaknesses and carrying away the diseases does not refer to the cross, but to His life on earth. The quotation from Isaiah does not say that the Lord carried away the diseases on the cross and that a believer should therefore no longer be ill. Just as the Lord sympathizes with weaknesses, He sympathizes in cases of disease.

He cannot sympathize with sins. For that He had to go into death. He cannot identify himself with someone who sinned and thus support such a person in that path. He can identify himself with someone who is ill to support such a person in his suffering. He identifies Himself with someone who is ill in the same way as with someone who is imprisoned for His Name (Mt 25:36-40).

Mt 8:18-22 | Follow the Lord

*18 Now when Jesus saw a crowd around Him, He gave orders to depart to the other side [of the sea]. 19 Then a scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." 20 Jesus *said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air [have] nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." 21 Another of the disciples said to Him, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." 22 But Jesus *said to him, "Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead."*

A crowd gathers around the Lord. They are all attracted by His good works. But He knows their hearts and knows that they only want to benefit from His goodness. The proofs of His goodness have been provided and

now it is time to leave that place. He orders His disciples to go to the other side the sea. There He must also do His work.

Then a scribe separates himself from the crowd. He enthusiastically enlists himself with the “Master” and indicates that he will follow Him wherever He goes. It shows that he values himself highly. Knowing the Scriptures – after all, he is a scribe – and the desire to follow the Lord is not sufficient to actually be able to follow Him. The Lord says what following Him means. In order to really follow Him it is necessary that one’s own interests and self-confidence are recognized and judged. He also says that to following Him not honor, but reproach is connected.

The Lord knows what is in his heart. This is a carnal Jew who thinks that by following Him he will get a good place with the Messiah. Someone who offers himself without being called, thinks that it is all equally beautiful, but it has no grip in his heart. Soon other circumstances will arise that pull his heart to other things and finally he sinks back to his own level.

Whoever offers himself to follow the Lord, that is to say, without being called, will be told what the portion of Him he wants to follow is. While He has given the foxes and the birds a place of rest, He is the homeless Son of Man. Foxes and birds of the air are not the sweetest animals of the creation. They symbolize cunning and wickedness, but as creatures they are still under God’s care.

Here the Lord calls Himself for the first time “Son of Man”. This title speaks either of His rejection or of His glory. Here this title speaks of His rejection.

A case other than that of the scribe is that of a disciple who “first” wants to do something else before he can follow the Lord. When the Lord calls, there appear to be immediate reservations against a direct and complete following of Him. This disciple first wants to do something that is right in itself. He shows respect for his father. But in this case, if the Lord has called, His claims must take precedence over everything, including that of family ties.

This doesn’t mean a denial of family ties. God wants us to respect them. The Lord’s call does not conflict with this either, but goes beyond it. His answer shows that this disciple used the obligation to his parents as an

excuse not to follow Him straight away. This obligation forms a hindrance between Christ and his heart.

The word of the Lord “allow the dead to bury their own dead” means that this disciple can leave the burying of his father to others who are not in relationship with the Lord.

Mt 8:23-27 | The Storm on the Sea

*23 When He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. 24 And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus Himself was asleep. 25 And they came to [Him] and woke Him, saying, “Save [us], Lord; we are perishing!” 26 He *said to them, “Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?” Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm. 27 The men were amazed, and said, “What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?”*

Now comes the portion of the Lord’s true followers. The disciples who follow Him on board the ship have acknowledged His claims. They have left everything and follow Him. Now it will turn out that this does not mean that everything is easy. Being with the Lord does not mean that we are exempt from all sorts of trials. The opposite is true. Whoever follows Him as a disciple will face enmity. The elements of nature do their best to frighten us, and in the following story (verses 28-34) we encounter the enmity of men. Both events merely serve to impress us as disciples of the power of the Lord, which He shows just then for us.

We recognize the great storm on the sea in our lives. We find ourselves in situations where it seems as if we perish. Then we cry: ‘Lord, there is a great storm and the ship is being covered with the waves. It seems as if You are sleeping. We know it is not the case, but please come to our aid. Please show us that You are concerned about us! Lord, we are about to die! There is no strength in us to cope with the difficulties and needs, the sin that has become manifest.’

Then He intervenes in His grace for us. He does so with a soft reproach about our little faith. When we think about it, we understand it. How could a ship perish when He is on board? He is always in the Father’s path and He is the Lord of all things. With Him we are always and everywhere safe.

Even if life is taken from us, the enemy cannot harm our soul. If the waves flood our lives, we may trust in this promise: “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you” (Isa 43:2a).

After His soft reproach “He got up”. That is impressive. He, the Almighty God, gets up and takes action. We become afraid when we only look at the enemies, but when we look at Him, there is peace and confidence.

This fourth case of His power – after the healing of the leper, the servant of the centurion and the mother-in-law of Peter – shows His exaltedness over the power of satan who incites the nations to hatred against Him and His own. For Him that power means nothing. He can still the storm. Only when the disciples call to Him in fear He gets up and subject the forces of nature to His command. The winds and the sea become still at the word of their Creator (Psa 65:7; 89:8-9; 106:9; 107:23-29).

Mt 8:28-34 | Healing of Two Demoniacs

28 When He came to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs. [They were] so extremely violent that no one could pass by that way. 29 And they cried out, saying, “What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?” 30 Now there was a herd of many swine feeding at a distance from them. 31 The demons [began] to entreat Him, saying, “If You [are going to] cast us out, send us into the herd of swine.” 32 And He said to them, “Go!” And they came out and went into the swine, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the waters. 33 The herdsmen ran away, and went to the city and reported everything, including what had happened to the demoniacs. 34 And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they implored Him to leave their region.

The Lord had ordered to depart to the other side (verse 18). So He arrives there, with His disciples. The trip was not a quiet one. The area they are now entering is not quiet either. Demons who have moved in to two people terrorize the area. The home of these people is the terrain of death. They come from there, as if attracted by the power of Christ.

They cannot remain hidden. The presence of the Lord Jesus calls them to reveal themselves. When other people came, they also appeared, but that was to frighten them. Now they themselves are frightened. They know the Son of God and acknowledge His power to judge them and throw them into eternal pain. Their fate is known to them. They also know that the time for this has not yet arrived, just as satan also knows that he still has time, even if it is short (Rev 12:12).

To give a clear testimony of the Lord's power over the enemy, there are *two* demoniacs, according to the principle that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every matter will be confirmed (2Cor 13:1). Mark and Luke occupy themselves with one of them and tell more details of the work of the evil one and of the work of the Lord in that one demoniac (Mk 5:1-20; Lk 8:26-39). Evil spirits want to frighten man for their power, but they can't do anything if they are not feared. Only faith can take away this fear for his power from man.

The demons know His will. Without the Lord having said a word, they know that He will drive them out. They are illegal possessors of these people. The demons know Him and know that they have no power to resist His word. There is not one thought of any opposition against Him. When tempted in the wilderness He defeated their chief, satan.

They point out to Him a herd of many swine feeding at a distance from them. Just like demon-possession in the land of God, the presence of a herd of unclean animals is a reproach to the land of God. If Israel had walked in the ways of the law, that herd of unclean animals would not have been there. The swine are a picture of Israel.

The Lord says only one word, the command "Go!" Without any thought or expression of opposition to Him, the demons obey and go out of the men and into the swine. When they have entered the swine, they show how much they are after destruction. All the swine rush down the steep bank into the sea. The demons are used in this way to carry out God's judgment on uncleanness and to cleanse His land.

The herdsmen were unable to save the herd. Powerless, they had to watch their herd perish. They have also seen the liberation of the demoniacs. Everything they have seen, they are going to report in the city. What follows

is that the whole city comes out to the Lord Jesus. But when they see Him, ... they implore Him to leave their region. If Divine power drives out the power of satan, the Divine presence that is revealed there is unbearable for man. Man does not want God revealed in goodness.

For them, the presence of demons and swine is more pleasant than the presence of the Son of God. He has no stately form or majesty for them to be attracted to Him (Isa 53:2). Through Him they have lost their source of income. Therefore they want Him to leave, out of their area, out of their life.

Matthew 9

Mt 9:1-8 | The Healing of a Paralytic

1 Getting into a boat, Jesus crossed over [the sea] and came to His own city. 2 And they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, "Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven." 3 And some of the scribes said to themselves, "This [fellow] blasphemes." 4 And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, "Why are you thinking evil in your hearts? 5 Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, and walk'? 6 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" —then He *said to the paralytic, "Get up, pick up your bed and go home." 7 And he got up and went home. 8 But when the crowds saw [this], they were awestruck, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

While in the previous chapter *the dignity of the Person of Christ* comes more to the fore, in this chapter we see more the *characteristics of His service*. Here too, in each of the events the reaction of the religious leaders to the presence of the Lord and to what He does becomes visible.

After the Lord has been declared an unwanted Person by the people of Gerasa, He leaves there. He gets into a boat and goes to the other side and comes to Capernaum, where He lives (Mt 4:13). There they know Him. There He performed His miracles and they saw Him more than anywhere else. One of these miracles, the healing of a paralytic, is described here. In the deliverance of the demoniacs in the previous chapter we see His power over the devil and His angels. In the healing of the paralytic we see how He breaks the power of sin, forgives sins, and takes away the consequences of sins.

The paralytic is brought to Him by four friends. He sees their faith, both that of the friends and that of the paralytic. He responds to that. His first words, however, do not relate to the body of the paralytic, but to his soul. With the words "have good courage" the Lord encourages him. Perhaps the paralytic was desperate. The words 'take courage' or 'have good cour-

age' appear seven times in the New Testament (Mt 9:2,22; 14:27; Mk 6:50; 10:49; Jn 16:33; Acts 23:11).

After these words, the Lord deals with the cause of all sickness and pain: sin. He knows the sins that burden the paralytic. He must first be freed from this before he can get up and walk. First the conscience must be relieved of its burden, then there is power to live for the glory of God. The words "your sins are forgiven", must have been an enormous relief for the paralytic. A burden has fallen off his shoulders. He could not live on with this burden. It pushed him down, paralyzed him. The Lord delivers him from it; He relieves him of that burden. On the cross He will take that burden upon Himself. In view of what He will do on the cross, He can forgive the paralytic his sins.

What sounds like music to the ears of the paralytic, sounds like blasphemy to the ears of some of the religious leaders. It is precisely these leaders in whom, in this chapter and the following chapters, feelings of hatred are rising as a result of all the gracious works carried out by the Lord. They do not express their accusation of blasphemy out loud, but He sees their thoughts and the evil they think in their hearts. He is God to Whom all things are naked and open, He searches every man (Heb 4:12-13; Psa 139:1b).

He asks the leaders what is easier: to forgive sins or to heal? They do not answer. The answer is that both things are equally easy for God and equally impossible for man. The Lord does not wait for an answer either, but provides proof that He has the power to forgive sins by healing the paralytic.

He heals with a word of power, without prayer to God. He Himself is God. He is also the Son of Man. As such He forgives sins. As the Son of Man, He is the Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus (1Tim 2:5). Yet He can only do that because He is also God. He also forgives sins "on earth". The earth is the area where sins are forgiven, not heaven or hell. A person must confess his sins on earth during his life in order to receive forgiveness of his sins.

By both – first – forgiving sins and – then – healing, the Lord Jesus proves that He is *Yahweh*, the God of the covenant with His people Who came to

them as Messiah (Psa 103:3). Through the word of Christ, the man receives strength to rise up and go to his home.

The crowds see what happened. They see only the outer miracle. This leads them to glorify God. There is also fear. What they have seen does not lead them to bow down before Christ to accept Him as their Messiah with confession of their sins. They see that He is Man and they also recognize the power of God in Him as Man. But they don't know how to unite these two thoughts in His Person. They see in Him only an instrument of God's power, no more.

Mt 9:9-13 | The Calling of Matthew

*9 As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth; and He *said to him, "Follow Me!" And he got up and followed Him. 10 Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining [at the table] in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw [this], they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?" 12 But when Jesus heard [this], He said, "[It is] not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

As the Lord goes on, He passes by a tax collector's booth. In the tax collector's booth is Matthew. He is a tax collector (Lk 5:27), that is a tax officer in the service of the Romans, the occupying power. The fact that he is in the tax collector's booth means that the counter is open to people who have to pay their tax. When we think of tax officials, we usually do not do so with feelings of affection. For a man like Matthew, people don't have those feelings either, and with him it goes much further. He is rather a hated man because he works for the occupier. He is not waiting for the arrival of the Messiah, because he is conspiring with the enemy. In his case, we now see how the Lord can free someone from such a situation.

He is liberated from this situation by the mighty voice of God's King. Only two words – and Matthew's life takes a totally different turn and gets a completely different purpose. The power of the Lord's call is so great and

the attractiveness of His Person so irresistible that it breaks the spell of money. The power of the Lord's Word has caused the paralytic to stand up and go to his home (verses 7-8). That same power of His word makes Matthew stand up and follow Him.

The first consequence of the Lord's calling in Matthew's life is that he receives Him and his disciples hospitably in his own home. As a good disciple of his Lord, he has also invited many fellow tax collectors and other sinners. Instead of collecting money from others, he now spends his own money in offering an opportunity to meet the Lord. The tax collectors and sinners come with a desire in their hearts to get what Matthew has also received: deliverance from their sins and peace for their conscience.

That is not to the liking of the Pharisees. The conduct of the Lord is not in keeping with their views on separation. If He really came from God, He would be careful not to mix with such people, they think. They do not criticize the Lord, but His disciples. That is not a good way of doing things. We too must be careful not to criticize someone else to others behind the person's back. Often the expression of criticism is a proof of the absence of mercy. That is the case with the Pharisees. They are completely alien to the mercy of God present in Christ.

The Lord does not leave the answer to their question to His disciples. Perhaps His disciples were embarrassed. In any case He has heard what the Pharisees have said about Him to His disciples and He answers. The opposition of the Pharisees gives Him the opportunity to explain the purpose of His service. He has come to those who are sick, that is to say here, those who are sinners, to heal them, that is to say, to set them free from the burden of their sins.

Then He gives the Pharisees an order. They have not yet understood anything about what God wants. If the event in Matthew's house would have been an exam, they would have failed completely. Their remark and attitude have made it clear that they know nothing of God. In their pride they believe that God must be very satisfied with their strict way of life. The Lord gives them, as it were, a second chance when He says that they must leave and go and find out what God really means by the word from the book of the prophet Hosea: "I desire compassion, and not sacrifice"

(verse 13; Hos 6:6; cf. 1Sam 15:22). Then they will come to the discovery that they themselves are lost sinners who need the mercy of God.

The Lord concludes His words to them by pointing to Himself as the fulfillment of that word from Hosea 6 (Hos 6:6). He did not come to receive sacrifices from the righteous, but to prove His mercy to sinners. If He had come to call the righteous, the Pharisees would have come to Him in large numbers. Now, as an expression of the fact that He came to call sinners, He also called Matthew.

Mt 9:14-15 | Fasting

*14 Then the disciples of John *came to Him, asking, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" 15 And Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast."*

In connection to the confrontation with the Pharisees, disciples of John come to the Lord with a question about fasting. There were regular fasts (Zec 8:19). They adhered strictly to this, as did the disciples of the Pharisees. By naming themselves in the same breath as the disciples of the Pharisees, they show by which spirit they allow themselves to be guided.

The fact that they are still disciples of John does not mean that John did his best to keep them with him. Some of his disciples have left him to follow the Lord (Jn 1:35-37). That is how John wanted it to be. But these people hold on to what John taught, despite the fact that the Lord has come. It is difficult for them to say goodbye to external customs, as it is difficult for anyone who grew up in a system of laws and regulations.

In addition, there is another characteristic. Legal people not only impose a yoke on themselves, but also want to impose it on others. They condemn others for freedoms they do not afford themselves from their legal attitude to life. This attitude characterizes the disciples of John. That's why they come with their question to the Lord. They do not understand why His disciples do not fast.

Another reason for their question is that they don't know the Bridegroom. When the Lord speaks of the Bridegroom in answer to their question, He

means Himself. He calls His disciples the attendants of the bridegroom. He points out that there will come a time when the Bridegroom will have been taken away from them. By this He means the time that will come after His rejection by His people and His ascension.

Mt 9:16-17 | The New and the Old

16 But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. 17 Nor do [people] put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved."

Then the Lord clarifies through two examples the difference between the age of the law, that is the time before His coming, and the age of grace, that is the time after His coming. In these examples He makes it clear that the requirements of the law cannot be mixed with grace.

He uses two different pictures. In the picture of the garment it is about Christ bringing an outwardly new system, a new order of affairs. To enter this new order of things, that is His kingdom, it is necessary to obey the gospel He proclaims. Therefore, there is a call to repentance (Mt 4:17). It is impossible to participate in the kingdom by keeping the law or adhering to legal principles. This is the way the Pharisees try to enter the kingdom.

The Lord shows that the old way, the keeping the law, and the new way, living out of grace, cannot go together. If the patch of unshrunk cloth, that is the gospel, is sewn on an old garment, that is the law, the result will be that both will rip. Yet it is precisely this that we see happening in large parts of Christianity. An attempt has been made to attach the new to the old by maintaining many forms of Judaism in Christianity and adding to that certain Christian truths. We recognize this for example in a separate priestly class, a literal altar, sacred clothing, candles and all kinds of other external things to which a certain spiritual value is attributed. Such external things make the external appearance of Christianity a false representation of what it should be.

In addition to the *external appearance*, the *content* of the new cannot be reconciled with the content of the old. That is represented in the picture of

the wineskins. Within Christendom as it is in God's mind, there are new people who are filled with a new joy. The old, the old man, has no place here.

The Lord Jesus brings true joy, He makes the wedding a feast (Jn 2:1-10). One can only share in that joy, if he himself is renewed, if he is a new man in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. Then such a person experiences "joy in the Holy Spirit", which is one of the characteristics of the kingdom of God at this time (Rom 14:17).

Mt 9:18-19 | An Official Comes to the Lord

18 While He was saying these things to them, a [synagogue] official came and bowed down before Him, and said, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live." 19 Jesus got up and [began] to follow him, and [so did] His disciples.

The opening words of this section "while He was saying these things to them" indicate that there is a connection with what went before. The story that comes now, is in a way an illustration of the previous principle. In that, the Lord speaks of Himself as the Bridegroom and about the law. He does not name the bride. The reason for this is in this section. The bride is Israel. The daughter of the official is a picture of this. However, the daughter has died, indicating that the bride is dead. The Lord comes to a people who are dead, who have no connection with Him.

Yet there is faith that He can bring the daughter to life. We see that in the father's request. He is an official of the synagogue. His daughter grew up, so to speak, with the smell of the synagogue and with the law. But those favorable circumstances have not kept her alive. She died. The girl is a picture of Israel under the law. The law promises life to the Israelites if they keep the law. But they have not kept the law and they cannot. That means death.

The Lord is called to come. He goes with the official to raise the girl, while His disciples go with Him. He could have raised the daughter by a word at a distance like He did to the servant of the centurion (Mt 8:8,13). But that was a Roman centurion. This is someone from the people. It is a feature

that the Messiah always touches someone when there is talk of God's earthly people and his relationship to the Messiah. It is about His personal presence with His people. In events that speak of His dealings with the nations, we often find that He is absent and that He brings change through the word of His power.

Mt 9:20-22 | Healing a Woman From a Hemorrhage

20 And a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years, came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak; 21 for she was saying to herself, "If I only touch His garment, I will get well." 22 But Jesus turning and seeing her said, "Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well." At once the woman was made well.

While the Lord is on the way to bring the girl to life, a woman touches Him in faith in order to get well. And she is healed. Here we see the following picture: Christ has come to raise up the dead Israel, something He will do later in the full sense. He is not now present on earth, but does work in His people. In that sense He is still on the way to that people to raise them up. Anyone from that people who believes on Him in the meantime, the time in which we now live, in faith, will be healed.

Sincere and true faith is always noticed by the Lord Jesus. Never has He become annoyed at such interruptions on His journey. In faith, the woman touches the fringe of His cloak. The fringe speaks of His humiliation. Despite His humiliation, the woman sees in Him the Immanuel, God with us.

Because of her illness, the woman has always been deprived of the peace offering. She was unclean. During the whole period of her blood flow she has never been able to have fellowship with God's people in the service of God. Now she sees the Lord Jesus. Her faith knows that He can heal her. While the people outwardly observe the service at the altar and she stands outside it, there is within her faith present in Him Who is God revealed in the flesh. She sees in Him the possibility of being healed of her ailment. The Lord does not put her to shame. He gives her courage and does according to her faith. There will always be a blessing from Him for the individual among the mass that has faith.

Mt 9:23-26 | The Girl Resurrected

23 When Jesus came into the official's house, and saw the flute-players and the crowd in noisy disorder, 24 He said, "Leave; for the girl has not died, but is asleep." And they [began] laughing at Him. 25 But when the crowd had been sent out, He entered and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. 26 This news spread throughout all that land.

The Lord comes into the house of the official. There are all kinds of people there who express the hopelessness of the situation. With the command "leave", the Lord puts these Jewish mourning practices aside. For Him death is nothing more than sleep. When He says that, people laugh at Him. If there is no faith, outward mourning quickly turns into real mockery. The Lord does not react to this, but sends the crowd out. They are incapable of being witnesses to the resurrection.

Then He enters the girl's room and takes her by the hand. The power of His life flows into her from the inexhaustible source that He is and she stands up. Every touch of Him has an effect, just like every word He speaks. In this way He calls to life the young man of Nain and the adult man Lazarus (Lk 7:14; Jn 11:43-44).

The resurrection is a sensation. It is known everywhere that the girl has been raised. But there is no revival among the people to go to the Messiah.

What Christ does with the girl, He will do with Israel, after the rapture of the church, the period of faith. He will make Israel alive through His Spirit. Ezekiel describes this impressively in the picture of the valley with the dry bones (Eze 37:1-10).

Mt 9:27-31 | Healing of Two Blind Men

*27 As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" 28 When He entered the house, the blind men came up to Him, and Jesus *said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They *said to Him, "Yes, Lord." 29 Then He touched their eyes, saying, "It shall be done to you according to your faith." 30 And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them: "See that no one knows [about this]!" 31 But they went out and spread the news about Him throughout all that land.*

The Lord moves on again. Two blind men follow Him. Just as we have seen *two* demoniacs before (Mt 8:28), so there are *two* blind people here. The Jew Matthew, who writes this Gospel, wants to give his peers an adequate testimony (Deu 19:15) of the Savior's miracles. In the miracles which Matthew reports, the way Christ acts in grace with His people is shown time and again.

The blind men call upon His mercy while calling upon Him as the "Son of David". The latter means that they acknowledge in Him the Messiah of Whom they know He will open eyes of blind people (Isa 35:5; 42:7). They do not ask to have their eyes opened. That is what they mean, but even more so they realize that they need His mercy to get out of their miserable condition.

The Lord does not respond to their request for help along the way. He does not do this until He has come into the house, and the blind men have come to Him. With His question "do you believe that I am able to do this?" He asks about their faith in His ability to open their eyes. They answer His question with a resounding "yes". By adding "Lord" to it they acknowledge His authority. On the basis of this confession He touches their eyes. His touch again shows that we can see a picture of Israel in the two blind men, who through His presence will be restored in their relationship with Him. Then He speaks a word of authority with the result that their eyes are opened.

He forbids them sternly of telling someone something of what He has done for them. He does not want to become known for His merciful miracles. That attracts people, but does not change hearts. However, the healed men cannot keep it to themselves and against the Lord's command they testify of Him everywhere.

Mt 9:32-34 | Healing a Mute Demoniac

32 *As they were going out, a mute, demon-possessed man was brought to Him.*
33 *After the demon was cast out, the mute man spoke; and the crowds were amazed, [and were] saying, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel."*
34 *But the Pharisees were saying, "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons."*

After the healed blind men have gone outside, the Lord is confronted with a new case of need. Someone or a few people – people without names, but known to God – bring a mute man to Him. The inability to speak is caused by a demon. Without being asked, Christ casts out the demon. Even though we cannot express ourselves, when we come to the Lord Jesus, He knows the desires of our hearts. He also knows the cause of our need and can remove it.

The effect of the miracle can be seen in three ways. First of all, we read that the mute man speaks. He will no doubt have expressed his thanks to the Lord. Secondly, we read about the effect of the miracle on the crowds. They are amazed. They note that they have witnessed something that has never been shown in Israel before. As always, it remains at that.

The third effect we see in the Pharisees. The Pharisees are jealous of the Lord's glory which is revealed among those on whom they wish to exert their influence. They have the nerve to attribute this miracle to the ruler of the demons, that is to the devil himself. They can't deny that there is a superhuman power at work, but they don't want to attribute that power to God as if God were with Him.

As declared opponents of the Lord, they resort to the most audacious accusation imaginable: they accuse Him of being led by the devil. Further on, the Lord Jesus will say that by doing so they are guilty of a sin for which there is no forgiveness (Mt 12:31).

In the three miracles the Lord has just performed – the resurrection of the dead child, the healing of the blind men and the healing of a mute man – is a beautiful and important spiritual sequence. First it is necessary to receive *life*. The result is that we gain *insight* into the things of God. Finally, it will lead us to *bear witness* to everything God has shown us.

Mt 9:35-38 | The Lord Feels Compassion

35 Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. 36 Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then He *said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but

the workers are few. 38 Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

The blasphemous opposition of the religious leaders does not in any way interrupt the blessed course of the Lord. He doesn't skip a town or village. Everywhere He goes, He teaches, proclaims, and heals. He does so with great concern and compassion because He knows how much these sheep of God have been exposed to dangers, to leaders without mercy. He sees them as distressed and dispirited sheep without a shepherd, at the mercy of cruel wolves (Eze 34:1-6). At the same time, He sees them as a plentiful harvest. Who is willing to go to these sheep to tell them about the true Shepherd? There were few of them then, and today is no different. But there is a way out: prayer.

The Lord says to His disciples – and to us if we confess to be His disciples – that they must pray to “the Lord of the harvest” that He will send workers into His harvest. The Lord of the harvest is the Lord Jesus Himself. We see that directly in the next chapter (Mt 10:5). Praying for it is one thing, making ourselves available to be sent out is another. If we pray for it, there is a good chance that He will send us out. Not the need, but only the Lord determines whether we should go, where we should go and when, and what we should do.

Matthew 10

Mt 10:1-4 | The Twelve Disciples

1 Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. 2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him.

This chapter connects directly to the last verse of the previous chapter. It shows the heart of the Lord, moved with compassion over His poor people. This leads Him to send out the twelve disciples.

The Lord calls “His” twelve disciples. They are His. There are twelve, in accordance with the twelve tribes of Israel to whom they are sent. The Lord not only has the power to perform miracles Himself, but can also give that power to others (cf. Acts 8:18-19). He gives them power in the spiritual and the physical realm. In this way they will present a powerful testimony of Him Who has come.

These are the powers of the age to come (Heb 6:5) that is the millennial kingdom of peace. Then satan will be bound and man set free by Christ. What He and His disciples do, are partial deliverances: for the kingdom of peace is not come. These exorcisms and healings prove that He Who came to establish this kingdom is present.

The disciples are called “apostles” in verse 2, which means “sent ones”. In the previous chapters they go with the Lord as followers and pupils, now they go before Him as ambassadors. They are heralds of the King, they announce His coming.

The names of the disciples are mentioned. We already know something about some disciples and we will hear more about them. We sometimes hear something about other disciples and from a few we hear nothing else and we only know the name. The Lord knows what each one of His does.

He determines whether a service has more recognition or not. Everything that He has commissioned that is done, He will reward according to the faithfulness with which the task is carried out and not to the fame that someone has had.

Brothers are also sent out. The natural ties are not denied. It is a special joy to serve the Lord with a brother or sister. Matthew calls himself in this list “the tax collector”. He doesn’t dress it up in any way, but openly discloses what he was. Judas is also mentioned. He will not sit on any of the twelve thrones, but he is sent out. It is not yet the time of the kingdom of peace. It is still possible that false servants are in the company of the real servants. If the disciples are listed, his name is always mentioned last with the addition of “the one who betrayed Him”.

Mt 10:5-10 | The Twelve Sent Out

5 These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: “Do not go in [the] way of [the] Gentiles, and do not enter [any] city of the Samaritans; 6 but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ 8 Heal [the] sick, raise [the] dead, cleanse [the] lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give. 9 Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, 10 or a bag for [your] journey, or even two coats, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support.

At the end of the previous chapter the Lord says to His disciples that they must pray that workers will be sent out. Here it appears that they themselves are the answer to their prayer. When we pray for something, it is often the case that the Lord says, ‘Go and do what you prayed for.’

Verses 5-15 are about the mission of the twelve disciples in the time when the Lord Jesus is on earth. The assignment He gives makes it clear that He presents Himself as the Messiah to His people. He limits the mission of His disciples to the house of Israel. We see in this mission His unchanged grace, for He sends out His disciples after He is rejected by Israel. He Himself sends out, which means that He is the Lord of the harvest of whom He has said that they must pray to Him.

He decides where they should and should not go. He determines the area of their service. Their service is limited to Israel, which makes it clear that

the gospel for our time is not preached under this command. The “lost sheep” are not the scattered sheep of Israel among the nations, nor are they backslidden believers who belong to the church. They are the spiritually lost sheep of Israel in the land of Israel. As far as we know, the disciples have never been outside Israel during the life of the Lord Jesus.

The Lord not only determines the area of their service, He also determines their message. It consists of seven words. It is the message that John preached (Mt 3:2) and that He also preached Himself (Mt 4:17). It means that the people are still given the opportunity to enter the kingdom of heaven. The disciples are given the power to accompany their preaching with special signs. These signs are an underlining of their preaching. From this people can see that the coming of the Messiah is announced. The disciples are the heralds.

Today we do not look forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus to establish the kingdom of heaven, but to His coming to take the believers to Himself (1Thes 4:15-18). Nor do we preach the gospel of the kingdom, but the gospel of the grace of God. Our preaching is not accompanied by miracles either. Miracles belong to the apostles and the apostolic period.

The Lord’s command not to provide themselves with money and all kinds of means of existence is also specific to the twelve. The disciples must also, as far as their needs are concerned, be entirely dependent on Him Who sent them. They may go trusting in the King Whose kingdom they must proclaim and Who, from the inexhaustible sources at His disposal, will provide everything they need.

Immanuel is present. The miracles are for the world a proof of the power of their Master. The fact that they themselves lack nothing will be the proof for their own hearts. This instruction shall be withdrawn before their time of service that begins following the going back to the Father of the Lord (Lk 22:35-37).

Mt 10:11-15 | The Field of Work

11 And whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it, and stay at his house until you leave [that city]. 12 As you enter the house, give it your greeting. 13 If the house is worthy, give it your [blessing of] peace. But

if it is not worthy, take back your [blessing of] peace. 14 Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet. 15 Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for [the] land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.

When the disciples go somewhere, they have to inquire if anyone is worth their entering in. Their inquiry must show that they want to enter in with people with whom they find the characteristics of the real disciple. Whoever is worth it is he who fears God, and shows it by taking up His servants in his house.

The house they come to should be approached positively with a greeting of blessing. Any contact with someone starts with a benevolent attitude towards that other person. If that attitude means acceptance of the disciple, then the disciple wishes that house the peace that is his own possession. If, however, the host subsequently reveals himself as an adversary, for example, under pressure from his family, he makes himself unworthy of the presence of a disciple of the Lord.

They don't have to beg if people want to accept them and their words. If there is no opening for the word announced so benevolently at first, it will testify against them. The nature of the message is, that whoever rejects it, will not get a share in it and must be marked as an enemy.

The Lord concludes this section with the serious words "truly, I say to you" to underline the seriousness of the rejection of His servants. He who rejects his servants shall suffer a heavier judgment than Sodom and Gomorrah. These cities have sinned heavily against God and have brought God's judgment upon them. God turned these cities upside down (Gen 19:24-25). Yet their sins are not as bad as rejecting the messengers and the message that come to His people on behalf of the Lord Jesus. His people have a much greater responsibility because God has made His thoughts known to them.

Mt 10:16-20 | Handed Over to Testify

16 "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. 17 But beware of men, for they will hand you over to [the] courts and scourge you in their synagogues; 18 and you will even

be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. 19 But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. 20 For it is not you who speak, but [it is] the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

From verse 16 onwards it is about the end times. By painting this situation, the Lord points forward to the remnant of the future. The principle also applies to us. A sheep among wolves is the epitome of defenselessness against cruelty. That is why it is important to follow the right path of behavior: being watchful, shrewd, yet innocent, without deceit.

The Lord warns His disciples of the dangers that accompany their service. They will have the same position as their Master and will have to reveal the same features: shrewdness and innocence. These virtues are only to be found among those who through the Spirit of the Lord are wise in what is good and innocent in relation to evil (Rom 16:19).

People are the greatest danger, not the circumstances. Disciples of the Lord are an object of hatred because they denounce sin. Religious people in particular will manifest themselves in their cruelty by scourging the disciples, and that in places, synagogues, where God's law is taught (cf. Acts 26:11). While man will manifest himself in all his wickedness, his conduct shall turn against him as a testimony (Psa 76:10).

It will be a Divine means to present the gospel of the kingdom to kings and other dignitaries. Their testimony will sound in the ears of these highly-esteemed people without any adaptation of the character of the gospel to the world. There will be no mixing of the customs of the people of God with the customs or greatness of the world. Such circumstances will make their testimony more remarkable than if they allied with the great persons of the earth. The events will lead to the message being heard far beyond Israel's borders.

All this will come upon them "for My sake", that is because of their connection with Him. He also has a word of encouragement for them. They don't have to worry themselves with the question of what they should say. The words will be given to them. They will not speak in their own power, but in their speech the Spirit of their Father will be revealed.

As in the sermon on the mount, here too the connection with their Father is the basis of their qualification for the service they have to perform. That thought gives peace and confidence. The Father is closely involved in what happens to them, it concerns Him.

Mt 10:21-23 | Endurance to the End

21 "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father [his] child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. 22 You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. 23 "But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish [going through] the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.

Going out for the Lord Jesus will influence the closest family ties in a way that reveals the worst enmity. Brothers who have often gone through thick and thin together come to stand opposite one another. If one of the brothers makes a choice for the Lord Jesus, which is expressed by taking up one of His disciples, then it will have as a consequence that the other brother's brotherly love turns into hatred. Taking up one of the disciples of the Lord will be seen as betrayal to the family. If a child chooses the side of the disciples, a father, who should protect his child, will surrender it to death. Conversely, children will trample on parental love and parental authority. They will even kill their parents if they join the disciples of the Lord Jesus.

Disciples are hated because they bear the Name of the Lord Jesus. All these persecutions and this hatred will reveal the true disciple, as well as the false. The false disciple will fall away; the true disciple shall endure to the end and be saved. He shall attain salvation, that is to say, he shall enter the kingdom of peace. "The end" is the coming of the Son of Man (verse 23), that is, His second coming (Mt 24:3,6,13-14) to establish His kingdom. That kingdom has been announced by John, the Lord has announced it, and the disciples have announced it. However, it was not established because the King of the kingdom was rejected and thereby the kingdom that they announced.

The task of the disciples was therefore not fully fulfilled in the time of the Lord Jesus. This task will be fulfilled just before His second coming. This

will happen under great tribulation and persecution. The Lord speaks of a time of great tribulation (Mt 24:21). While the disciples are so busy fulfilling the task He gave His disciples when He was with them on earth, He will appear as the Son of Man. This character of “the Son of Man” indicates a power and glory greater than that of His revelation as the Son of David, as Messiah. The latter He is primarily for Israel, while He will reign over all creation as Son of Man.

The apostles’ mission is abruptly interrupted by the rejection of the Messiah and, as a result, the destruction of Jerusalem. The time that follows is that of the church. When the church has been raptured, the mission will be continued. The interval of the church is not taken into account here. The Lord speaks of the apostles’ mission as something that continues, while He passes over the present time of the church.

Mt 10:24-25 | Disciple-Teacher; Slave-Master

24 “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. 25 It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more [will they malign] the members of his household!

A “disciple” is a pupil who learns from his “teacher” how to behave in all aspects of life. He strives to resemble his teacher, to match him in everything, to become like him. For a disciple of the Lord Jesus, it is perfectly enough to be allowed to resemble his Teacher. The “disciple”-“teacher” relationship is about following the example of the teacher. The “slave”-“master” relationship is about the slave being subject to the authority of his master and doing what he says.

In both these relationships we see the connectedness of the disciple and slave to the Lord Jesus as his Teacher and Master. The Lord joins him in His grace to Himself. As a result, the disciple and slave also shares in the destiny of his Teacher and Master. If we are faithful followers of the Lord Jesus, we must count on the world to treat us as it has treated Him (Jn 15:18). We are not above Him.

How the world, and especially the religious world, has dealt with Him, He puts forward in the third relationship, in that of “head of the

house"—"members of his household". The Lord Jesus is the Head of the house. The disciples are members of that household. The religious leaders called Him "Beelzebul", which is a name for satan. The Lord says to His disciples that they will suffer even more of these slanders.

Mt 10:26-31 | Encouragements

26 "Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. 27 What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear [whispered] in [your] ear, proclaim upon the housetops. 28 Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And [yet] not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.

After His warnings to His disciples about the persecution to come, the Lord encourages them. The first encouragement is that all the slander that will be spread about them will at one time be brought to light. Then it will become clear that it really was slander. All who have spread these slanders, and all who have believed them, suffer the just punishment for it. We will in some cases already now, but certainly then, know the hidden reasons of the enmity of the people. It is also a great encouragement to know that the Lord was the First to enter the path of rejection.

Our performance should be very different from the underhand slandering of our opponents. The Lord instructs us to pass on loud and clear to others what He says to us personally in our private relationship with Him.

A second encouragement not to be afraid is our Father's care. We should not be afraid of the people. They can do no more than kill the body. The killing of the soul is beyond their reach. The destruction of both body and soul in hell belongs only to God Who alone has the power to do so. We are not dealing with people, but with God. Someone who was well aware of this is the man of God John Knox (1514-1572). On his tombstone, it reads: 'Here lies one who feared God so much that he never feared the face of any man'.

For the faithful follower of the Lord Jesus, God is a Father. His concern extends to little animals that are barely meaningful to man and to things that man does not think about at all, such as the number of hairs on his head. If God's concern goes out to those things that are so completely unimportant to man, how much more does God's concern go out to those who are connected to His Son and share in His fate on earth. Sparrows don't worry and hair even less and God takes care of it. For God disciples surpass many sparrows. That's why they don't have to worry about whether or not God thinks of them when they encounter the hostility of the world.

Mt 10:32-33 | Confessing or Denying

32 *“Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. 33 But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.*

A third encouragement is reward. Disciples of the Lord Jesus confess Him before the people, despite the hatred and mockery this entails. He rewards this by confessing them before His Father. This recognition by the Lord before the Father goes beyond the honor of people many times over.

But whoever denies Him before men will be denied by him before His Father. People who confess only with their mouths that they know the Lord, and call Him “Lord, Lord” (Mt 7:21), arrive in situations where they deny Him. He will also deny them. The consequences of this are terrible. They will be denied by Him *forever* (verse 33; Mt 7:22-23).

Peter's denial is of a different nature. It is a shameful act. Against his better judgment, he denies that he knows the Lord (Mt 26:69-74). We know for sure that Peter is a believer, for he has confessed this sin and the Lord has forgiven him. This sin can be committed by any believer. If that happens, the Lord must deny that believer, just as He also had to deny Peter.

From the moment that Peter denied the Lord Jesus, the Lord told His Father that He did not know Peter. This does not mean that the Lord did not keep His eye on Peter. We know that He brought him to repentance (Lk 22:61). But until the moment of repentance the Lord denied before His Father that He knew Peter. This denial by the Lord also means that Peter lost the blessing and reward he would have received if he had not denied

the Lord. The denial of the Lord has consequences for the present and for the future.

Mt 10:34-39 | No Peace, but a Sword

34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; 36 and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD. 37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

The Lord does not paint a bright future for His disciples on earth. He has not come to bring peace on the earth. He even says that twice. Certainly He originally came to bring peace. So it was proclaimed at His birth (Lk 2:14). Because of the rebellion of man who went so far as to reject the Prince of Peace, that peace could not be established on earth. Peace is there only for those who confess their sins. Peace comes in their hearts. At the same time, there is a separation between them and their unbelieving environment which persists in sin. New life is hated by the unbelievers just as the Lord Jesus was and is hated.

The sword of division brings separation in family relationships and between housemates. It causes situations that reveal whether there is real love for the Lord Jesus. The choices that are made will show whether the love for Him transcends any earthly love. He cannot be satisfied with second place. To Him belongs the place that surpasses everything and everyone. He who doesn't want to give that to Him, but lets love for a family member predominate, is not worthy of Him. Christ must be more precious to His own than father or mother or even own life. The love for our own life can rob Christ of His place much more than the love for our family.

We are also not worthy of Him if we do not follow Him in His way of rejection. In our hearts we may want to give Christ the first place, but an open confession should also accompany that. This is seen in the taking up

of our cross, that is, the taking of the place of contempt in the world. The cross is the place where Christ died as the despised One. There we lost our life, that life we lived for ourselves, and found new life.

Mt 10:40-42 | Reward for Imitation

40 "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. 41 He who receives a prophet in [the] name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. 42 And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."

The possession of new life has brought us into a new company. That new company consists of people who also have that new life. When we receive them, we receive Him and through Him we receive the Father. One blessing results from the other and brings us to the source of all blessings.

The disciples are sent out as prophets. Everywhere in Israel they bring the Word of God. He who does not reject one of them as a prophet of God, but receives him, will receive the same reward as the prophet. The same goes for those who will receive a righteous person precisely because he is a righteous person. A righteous person is one who lives in accordance with God's Word.

The Lord mentions a third category to which His disciples are compared: "These little ones." His disciples are the insignificant of the world, the 'little ones' that are not counted. Whoever provides refreshment for such disregarded messengers, precisely because they are disrespected, receives the reinforced assurance from the Lord – "truly I say to you" – that he shall not lose his reward. It is about the motive, not about a good deed out of pity or just to do good and to think that God will be satisfied with it.

A prophet *speaks* the Word of God, a righteous man *lives* the Word of God, a little one reveals the *mind* of the Word of God. These three persons with these characteristics are hated, persecuted and not counted by the world. All three features have the greatest meaning for God, for they are the features of His Son. When He sees these features in disciples, He is reminded

of His Son. All those disciples will be rewarded by Him for this, as will those who make themselves one with these disciples.

Matthew 11

Mt 11:1 | The Lord Teaches and Preaches

1 When Jesus had finished giving instructions to His twelve disciples, He departed from there to teach and preach in their cities.

This chapter is a transition from the testimony to Israel to a new state of affairs that the Lord is about to introduce. This transition begins with the story of John the baptist in prison. Just as John went before the Lord in His service, so he goes before Him in His rejection. What happens to John is a precursor of what the Lord will undergo. But before that, He continues to teach and preach the Word. The sending out of the twelve does not mean that He will now stop His own service.

Mt 11:2-6 | The Question of John

2 Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent [word] by his disciples 3 and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?" 4 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: 5 [the] BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and [the] lame walk, [the] lepers are cleansed and [the] deaf hear, [the] dead are raised up, and [the] POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. 6 And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."

When John hears in prison what Christ is doing, doubts arise in his heart. Despite his prophetic gifts, Jewish expectations and concepts remain in his heart. It is therefore understandable that John, when he hears about all that the Lord Jesus does for others, wonders why He does not use His miracle power for his benefit, His predecessor. Christ is there, setting all kinds of unworthy persons free from all kinds of diseases and plagues, but evidently does not think of him.

This confuses him and leads him to the question he lets his disciples ask. Sending his disciples to the Lord shows that he has complete faith in the word of the Lord as Prophet, but that he is ignorant of His Person.

His question shows doubt as to whether Christ is the promised Messiah Whom he announced. His question stems from a misrepresentation of the coming and service of the Messiah. Our doubts also often arise from a misrepresentation of the Lord and how He acts. We imagine a certain pattern of action and get confused when things go differently. We then think we can dictate to God how He should act, when we don't know His plans or haven't properly examined them.

There comes no word of reproach from the Lord's lips. Full of love and grace, He answers His forerunner's question. John's disciples should go and tell him what they have heard (His word) and seen (His works). He sums it up for them. This summary shows that He uses His power to relieve people's needs and not to drive away the occupying power, the Romans.

He has never used His power for Himself, but always in grace and mercy for others. What He does and says is the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah 35 (Isa 35:5-6). From His deeds one can see that He is the Messiah. Nowhere in the Old Testament are the eyes of the blind opened. That only happens when He is here.

The Lord concludes His answer for John with a gentle reproof. He calls them "happy" who do not take offence at His humiliation and the lack of external glory and do not reject Him for it. That is what John is in danger of, although he certainly did not reject the Lord. He, "God revealed in the flesh" (1Tim 3:16), did not come to seek the glory of the kingship, but for the redemption of suffering people. John did not think about that.

Mt 11:7-11 | Testimony about John

7 As these men were going [away], Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft [clothing]? Those who wear soft [clothing] are in kings' palaces! 9 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. 10 This is the one about whom it is written,

*'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU,
WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.'*

11 Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen [anyone] greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

After His words *for* John, the Lord turns to the crowds to speak *about* John. For John, the Lord has words that support his weak faith. To the crowds, He speaks of John as a prophet without equal. He presents him before the crowds and asks them what opinion they have formed about him. After his expression of weakness, they could compare him to a reed shaken by the wind, a man without strength. It could also be that John does not meet their expectations in another way, because he is averse to all that is great and ostentatious.

Or would there also be in the crowd those who see John as a prophet? These are closest to the truth, but they are also far away. John is not just a prophet. He is a prophet who immediately preceded the coming of the Messiah as a herald to announce Him as the coming Messiah. The Messiah was not only announced by the prophets, but also by John the baptist.

Malachi says of him that he is the angel or messenger who “will prepare the way before Me” (Mal 3:1). By “Me” the LORD, *Yahweh*, is meant. The Lord Jesus says here in His quotation of this verse: “I send My messenger ahead of You.” It is therefore clear that He is the announced *Yahweh*. John is the messenger sent out by *Yahweh* to prepare the way for *Yahweh* Who came in humility as the Messiah. To prepare the way means to prepare the hearts of the people to receive the Messiah. He did so through his preaching of repentance and conversion.

Gabriel already said of him when announcing his birth: “For he will be great in the sight of the Lord” (Lk 1:15a). Now the Lord calls him the greatest born of women because of his direct connection to the Messiah and because he is His forerunner and he has announced Him. Of course that is without taking Himself into account. He does not compare John to Himself, but to all the other people who have been born up to that point.

He adds at the same time: “The one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” This means that a new state of affairs begins after John. The difference is not in what someone is in himself, but in the position that someone occupies. It is about the kingdom of heaven. John announced

this, but he did not go into it, because it only comes after the Lord Jesus has been rejected and has returned to heaven. The kingdom has its origin in heaven, but its sphere of activity is on earth. This applies both now and in the future when Christ reigns on earth.

The fact that the “least” in the kingdom is greater than John the baptist has to do with the rejection of Christ and His completed work. This was unknown to the believers in the Old Testament. The “least” is clothed with privileges that no believer in the Old Testament possessed. This has to do with God’s appreciation of the completed work of His Son. Whoever is connected to it – and that holds true for the members of the church of the living God – receives this fantastic position.

Mt 11:12-15 | The Days of John the Baptist

12 From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. 13 For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. 14 And if you are willing to accept [it], John himself is Elijah who was to come. 15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

The kingdom of heaven was announced by John, but it hasn’t come because the King of that kingdom was not accepted. The preaching of John and of the Lord Jesus revealed the evil heart of man and brought his sin to light. Man, and especially religious man, does not want to repent.

The kingdom of heaven has in this time, the time of Christ’s rejection, another form. Now that He has not been able to openly establish the kingdom – although this will certainly happen in the future – violence is needed to enter it. The violence or the power by which this happens lies in faith. It is the violence or the power of faith that is needed to enter the kingdom. If the kingdom is public in an observable, outward form, that violence of faith is not necessary.

With John then a period is closed, namely the period of all prophets and the law. During that whole period, the kingdom of heaven has been proclaimed over and over again. This has happened in promises God has made in the law each time and in the confirmation of those promises by the prophets who have constantly referred to them. The law also lays down

the principles of the kingdom, which are the rules that apply in that kingdom and by which it is governed.

As for John, the Lord calls him “Elijah who was to come”. Malachi announced Elijah (Mal 4:5). Elijah is the prophet who brought God’s people back to the law and thereby opened the way to blessing. Elijah is the forerunner of Elisha, the man of grace. John is Elijah spiritually. He preached penance to prepare the people to receive the Messiah. But whoever did not see John as the Elijah who was to come, also remained blind to Him Who John announced. The Lord therefore says: “If you are willing to accept [it].” There is faith needed to accept that.

The people as a whole did not do so. That’s why Elijah needs to come again. This happens at the coming of the two witnesses in Jerusalem in the end times of which he is one (Rev 11:3-6). Not that he is one of those witnesses in person, but that one of those witnesses has his characteristics.

The Lord’s message about John can only be understood by those who have ears to hear, that is, the attentive, listening believer. The expression “he who has ears to hear” is used when the mass has fallen away and the individual believer in the mass is addressed. The Lord’s words reveal the unbelief of the crowd on the one hand, and the faith of a remnant on the other. His words pass the unbelievers by, while the believer is encouraged by them.

Mt 11:16-19 | Playing the Flute and Singing a Dirge

16 “But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other [children], 17 and say, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’ 18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon!’ 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

The Lord compares the unbelieving generation with petulant children who cannot be persuaded to respond to what they hear. Neither the attractiveness of grace, come in Christ with His pleasant-sounding notes, nor the threat of righteousness, come in John with his dirge, has any influence on

them. The cause of their passivity lies in their false judgment both about John and about Him.

John is demon-possessed according to them, he has a demon. They come to this statement because of his austere way of life, which by the way fits perfectly with the message that he brought. Their judgment of the Lord Jesus, Who as the Son of Man does not fast but simply eats and drinks, is just as foolish. They blaspheme Him by saying that He is a gluttonous man and a drunkard. They do this because they are full of gluttony and alcoholism themselves. But they are right in saying that He is a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

In all the works which He does, His perfect wisdom is manifested. His wisdom is justified in His dealings with tax collectors and sinners. That wisdom is justified means that wisdom is vindicated by the way wisdom is used and in what it does.

Mt 11:20-24 | 'Woe' to the Cities of Galilee

20 Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. 21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in [the] day of judgment than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. 24 Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in [the] day of judgment, than for you."

If the Lord is going to make reproaches, they are perfectly justified. Every person who has not repented will be reproached of not having repented. Not repenting is a sign of reluctance. The reproach that one person receives may be heavier than the reproach that another person receives. This has to do with the degree of culpability. A judge who trespasses the law that he himself must apply is guiltier than someone who ignorantly trespasses the law.

This is the case with the cities in which the Lord Jesus has shown Who He is in the clearest way. If these cities, despite the multitude of evidence, reject Him, they are guiltier than cities in which He has not revealed Himself in this way. Those pagan cities will also receive the judgment that they deserve because of their immoral behavior. Yet their judgment will be lighter than that of the cities where Christ has given such a clear testimony of Himself and have nevertheless rejected Him.

We might wonder why God did not give such a testimony to the pagan cities the Lord mentions here, for then they would have repented. The answer is that Tyre and Sidon, and Sodom and Gomorrah, according to the wisdom of God, had a testimony of His revelation that was perfectly appropriate for them. They have seen God's testimony in creation (Rom 1:19-20), but they have not bowed before him. They have acted according to their corrupt nature, and have not taken any notice of His revelation in creation. They will be judged on the basis of this rejection of God's testimony. Thus, each people is subjected to a test of their obedience to God in a way that perfectly fits their responsibility.

Something special is said about Capernaum. That city has rejected an even greater privilege than all the cities of Israel. The Lord Jesus lived there. They have experienced Him daily. The city is elevated to heaven by His presence, for in the Son of God heaven has come to them. But in reality they will not come into heaven. The opposite is the case. They will be descend to Hades. They have done nothing with the enormous privilege that God lived among them. It has had no effect on them.

Mt 11:25-27 | Yes, Father

25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from [the] wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. 26 Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. 27 All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal [Him]."

After speaking a 'woe' about the cities in which He has worked in this way, we might think that the Lord is discouraged. He expressed Himself

in this way prophetically in Isaiah 49 (Isa 49:4). It all seemed to be in vain. We also read God's answer. He says that it is not in vain, but that a greater blessing will come from His rejection, not only for Israel, but for all nations (Isa 49:5-6). And here we read the Lord's answer to His rejection by the people.

He praises the Father as the "Lord of heaven and of earth". By this He says that everything in heaven and on earth is under His authority. There is nothing that is outside of His control, but everything serves His purpose. Only the little children, the believers who have no high thoughts about themselves, see this.

The wise and intelligent of the world have no understanding of this. It is hidden from them. Profound thinkers, the wise men, do not come to the thought that God is fulfilling His plans in this way. They look for solutions in man. If man starts to behave differently, they think it will be okay. Clear thinkers, the wise, seek the solution in the environment, nature. If only they can influence the environment, they think it will then be fine.

There is, however, no place for the Father with these profound and clear thinkers, let alone for a "yes, Father". And that is precisely what gives the solution to every disappointment. In this "yes, Father" we hear not so much resignation, but acceptance and full agreement. It is not a question of whether it can be done differently, but the certainty that only in this way it is good. In addition, there is the awareness of the Father's good pleasure. He does not only do good, He does so on the basis of His pleasure, His joy.

By trusting His Father with the awareness that the Father acts from and with a view to His well-being, the Lord Jesus sees the whole extent of the glory that will follow His rejection. The throne of Israel was refused Him, the Jews rejected Him, the leaders despised Him. But what will He receive? "All things" – that is much more than what has been promised to David and Solomon.

He is rejected as Messiah. But what will be revealed? That He is the eternal Son of the Father, Who is fully known by none but the Father. The promises are not being fulfilled at the moment. But what does He do? He reveals the Father, for He knows the Father. He wants to share this knowledge

with the believers. He thereby brings them to a deeper knowledge of God than was possible before that time.

Mt 11:28-30 | Come to Me

28 *“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”*

The Lord Jesus wants to bring us into fellowship with His Father. He wants to take away the weariness and the burdens that are preventing it. People who are tired of living in misery and being burdened by sins, those on whom the burden of sins weighs heavily and who are aware of it, may come to the Lord Jesus.

He addresses this word not only to the Jews, but to “all”. The enjoyment of this great privilege is for anyone who comes to Him. He makes no prerequisites. He gives rest to all who come, for He has taken the burden of sins upon Himself at Golgotha. This is how He takes the burden of sins away from those who become disciples of the kingdom and introduces them into fellowship with His Father.

But there is more. Once you are a disciple, you must learn how to live life as a disciple. This can only be learned from the Lord Jesus. For this to happen, the yoke of full submission to the Father must be taken up, as He did. We see that when He praises the Father even when experiencing the greatest rejection. This does not depress Him, but He accepts it from the Father’s hand. He is meek and humble in all circumstances. He has never reproached the Father.

Whatever the circumstances, He takes everything from the Father’s hand. His teaching is based on this. Those who come receive the revelation of the Father and learn in Him how to subject themselves to what the Father brings on their path. They learn how to accept any circumstance as coming from His hand.

If it is difficult for us to carry the yoke of the Lord Jesus, it is because we are not humble. If we react rebelliously, it is because we are not meek. We have to learn constantly to surrender everything to the Father.

Grace doesn't leave it to man to do what he wants. Grace enables the heart which accepts grace, to desire to do the will of God. Then man finds peace. The peace which the Lord *gives* is the result of coming to Him and concerns the *sinner*. The peace that *is found* is the result of following the Lord and concerns the *believer*.

The Lord teaches them in a new way. Learning from Him is also looking at Him and learning from the abundance of examples that He gives. Gentleness and humility of heart are necessary if a place of dependence is to be taken and preserved.

Rest for the soul has already been presented by Jeremiah as the result of a faithful walk on the old paths (Jer 6:16), but no one has entered that rest. The only way to achieve rest for the soul is now revealed by the Son. Someone gets that rest when he want to take the yoke that He offers. His yoke stands in contrast to the heavy and oppressive yoke of the law. His yoke is not pinching, but easy, and His burden is not oppressive, but light. He helps carry.

Matthew 12

Introduction

The glory of the Lord Jesus as the Son of God is seen especially in the Gospel according to John. But that glory also has an important place in this Gospel. We see that in this chapter. Against the dark background of hatred, contempt and rejection His perfections shine in the brightest way. Here is

1. the Son the Man Who reveals the Father (Mt 11:27),
2. the Messiah Who is greater than the temple in connection with Israel (verse 6),
3. the Son of Man Who is Lord of the Sabbath in connection with mankind (verse 8),
4. He Who is greater than Jonah in resurrection power (verse 41) and
5. He Who is greater than Solomon in connection with all the glories of the kingdom (verse 42).

Mt 12:1-8 | Picking Heads of Grain on the Sabbath

1 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads [of grain] and eat. 2 But when the Pharisees saw [this], they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath." 3 But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, 4 how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? 5 Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? 6 But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. 7 But if you had known what this means, 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,' you would not have condemned the innocent. 8 For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

This chapter is a turning point. A phase is closed. The hearts of the leaders here are becoming completely revealed. The chapter begins with two

stories that take place on a Sabbath that makes clear what the leaders are all about. They have laden the commandment of the Sabbath with their own commandments and laws. God intended the Sabbath to be a day of blessing, of rest, of stopping working for one day. But legalistic people have no eye for the blessing. They deny the disciples the enjoyment of what God has given.

It does not matter to the Pharisees that the disciples act entirely in accordance with the law (Deu 23:25). Pharisees are people for whom it is only important that the appearance looks good. And if they have prescribed anything for that appearance, then people must abide by it. They address the Lord about the conduct of His disciples. The Lord stands up for His disciples. He grants them God's blessing.

His answer is not only a reference to what God has allowed in the law, where He has made no exception for the Sabbath. The Lord gives the Pharisees a deep lesson. In His answer he asks them about something David does when he is hungry, and those who are with him (1Sam 21:1-6). On that occasion David does something that he is not allowed to do, because eating the showbread is only permitted for the priests (Lev 24:5-9). However, he is not blamed for it. David is the anointed king, but he is on the run from Saul. He is not recognized as king by his people. That is the position of the Lord Jesus at that moment.

When God's anointed king David is on the run from his own people, the foundation of God's people is taken away. What the loaves represent has lost its meaning. They no longer represent God's people according to the meaning it has for God. To then hold on to an outward ritual and to let God's anointed die of hunger for its benefit would be pure formalism. That is not what God meant by His institution of the showbread. When His anointed king is persecuted, the showbread become ordinary loaves of bread and can be consumed by those who need them.

In this example the Lord shows the sin and total decline of Israel. The true king, David, is despised and persecuted because of the king who the people themselves wanted. It is like this again. The sin of Israel deconsecrates the holy bread. God does not want to accept anything as holy from a people living in sin. If the disciples of the true King are hungry just like

the men of David, they may eat lawfully of what God offers, even on the Sabbath.

The Lord Jesus presents another example that completely sets aside their reasoning about profaning the Sabbath. He points to the priests who do the much-needed work in the temple on the Sabbath day. This includes at least the sacrifice prescribed for the Sabbath (Num 28:9-10) and also the daily burnt offering, which cannot be skipped on the Sabbath (Exo 29:38). These sacrifices are necessary so that God can continue to dwell among a sinful people. On the Sabbath the priests have to work even harder than on other days. They have no rest on the Sabbath.

God does not act according to strict rules. The priests are allowed to do a lot of this work on the Sabbath, because it is related to the service of God. The Sabbath is the centerpiece of the old covenant, there is nothing so characteristic as the Sabbath.

Both examples make it clear that Israel is made up of sinners. In one case, it is apparent by the persecution of the anointed king, through which the showbread become common loaves of bread. In the other case, it is apparent by the sacrifices that must necessarily take place, even if it is Sabbath.

After the Lord has shown that God will not be bound by His precepts when His people have left Him, He points to Himself as greater than the temple. He is not only the Anointed of God Whom they persecute. He is God Himself, Who determines the service in the temple. *He* determines how God should be served and not the formalistic Pharisees. With formalistic people it is only about the outward appearance, with God it is first and foremost about what is inward.

The Pharisees have condemned the innocent disciples because they know nothing about mercy. Legalistic people are never merciful, but oppress the poor and impose burdens on others. They only look at the sacrifice and not at the heart. Mercy comes from the heart and that's what God looks at.

Just as the Lord is greater than the temple, so He is also Lord of the Sabbath. This means that the Sabbath has no binding power over Him. He is its Master and can dispose of it as He pleases. He established the Sabbath and is therefore not subject to it. The Sabbath is a picture of the kingdom of

peace. Then He will reign over all the earth as the great King. Then it will be seen that He is, as the Son of Man, Lord of all the earth.

Mt 12:9-14 | Healing a Withered Hand

*9 Departing from there, He went into their synagogue. 10 And a man [was there] whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse Him. 11 And He said to them, "What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? 12 How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." 13 Then He *said to the man, "Stretch out your hand!" He stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, [as to] how they might destroy Him.*

After his journey through the fields, the Lord enters their synagogue and another story on the Sabbath follows. The previous one concerns His Person and the authority He has over the Sabbath. This is about His work, the work of mercy, for which the Sabbath is particularly suitable. He shows that the Sabbath is a day of blessing.

In their synagogue is a man with a withered hand. The poor man can't pick any ears of corn and rub them in his hands because of his withered hand. He cannot make use the blessing of the Sabbath. The man does not ask to be healed, but the Lord knows his unspoken question.

The Pharisees are also present in the synagogue. They are keen observers. They see someone with a handicap and they see Someone Who they know as the Merciful One. In their malicious perceptiveness they rightly assume that the Lord wants to heal the man. In their foolish consideration they believe that this is an excellent opportunity to ask Him a trick question. The Lord lets them ask their question. It gives Him the opportunity to demonstrate His glory and their hypocrisy. In this way they themselves fall into the trap they have set for Him.

They ask Him whether it is lawful to do good and bless on the Sabbath. What a question! The question alone makes it clear how narrow and legalistic they think. This is made even clearer by the example the Lord presents them. It shows that they do not suffer from their conscience on the Sabbath

when it is to their own advantage. Then they will make an exception. Healing on the Sabbath, however, does not occur in their thinking and in their rules. They have no rules for it, that is why it is not allowed.

The Lord exposes the folly of legalistic thinking. His conclusion must have been razor-sharp to their ears. Then He turns to the man. He himself has to do something. He must stretch out his hand toward the Lord and take the blessing. He does what the Lord says, and the blessing flows into him. Neither the clear word of the Lord nor His act of healing bring the Pharisees to repentance. On the contrary. The proof of grace makes them go out. They can no longer remain in the presence of so much grace and truth.

When they are outside, outside of the atmosphere where grace is displayed, they start plotting plans of murder. Those who consciously withdraw from the presence of Christ will increasingly reveal themselves as adversaries. What the Pharisees have just heard and seen, they have experienced as a defeat. It is. But instead of accepting it, they feel all the more threatened that they will lose their status among the people. And they absolutely don't want to lose that. In order to preserve themselves, they seek ways to get rid of God revealed in goodness!

Can hatred go beyond the desire to limit the hand of God, that is stretched out in goodness to men, to a statute and to kill the Son of God for doing good? When the Lord has healed the withered hand, they deliberate about how they can destroy Him. He seeks life, they seek death.

Mt 12:15-21 | Behold, My Servant

15 But Jesus, aware of [this], withdrew from there. Many followed Him, and He healed them all, 16 and warned them not to tell who He was. 17 [This was] to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:

*18 "BEHOLD, MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN;
MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL is WELL-PLEASED;
I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM,
AND HE SHALL PROCLAIM JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES.*

*19 "HE WILL NOT QUARREL, NOR CRY OUT;
NOR WILL ANYONE HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS.*

20 "A BATTERED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF,
AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT,
UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY.

21 "AND IN HIS NAME THE GENTILES WILL HOPE."

The secret deliberations of the Pharisees are known to the Omniscient. That is why He departs from there. His departure does not go unnoticed. Many crowds follow Him. Toward them, He continues to act in grace and heals all who need healing. He warns them that they will not tell Who He is. He doesn't want, through His deeds, to win the popularity of the people that Pharisees love so much.

He is always busy before the eye of His Father Who sees in secret. He does not seek honor from people. By acting in this way He fulfils the prophecy of Isaiah who has announced Him as such. The LORD, *Yahweh*, spoke to Isaiah about His chosen Servant (Isa 42:1-4), that is the Lord Jesus. He even calls this Servant "My Beloved". Between *Yahweh* and the Servant there is not only a relationship of obedience, but also of love.

The Lord Jesus knows the love the Father has for Him. This makes His service for Him a true joy, even though it is also met with murder plans among the leaders and incomprehension among the crowds. He knows the pleasure that *Yahweh* has found in Him through His life, which is fully devoted to Him. This has been clear from the outset. Therefore *Yahweh* put His Spirit upon Him (Mt 3:16).

Here we see the joy of the triune God: the Father puts His Spirit upon His Son. On the basis of this pleasure and the Spirit which the Father has given him, Christ has the right to proclaim judgment, not only over Israel but over all nations. It points to His dominion over all nations as a result of the rejection by His people.

As far as his conduct at the moment is concerned, it is completely different. He is now still the Man in humiliation. He goes His way in humility, without wanting to cause a stir. He is not crying for attention. It is completely different. He has paid attention to all those who are at the point of breaking or extinguishing.

There is nothing of value in "a battered reed" (Isa 36:6). "A battered reed" is reminiscent of the broken heart that has been trampled underfoot by

rough handling. But from this battered reed he is able to make a musical instrument or a yardstick for the new Jerusalem (Rev 21:15). He has come for those who are broken-hearted (Isa 61:1). He imposes no iron rod upon them, but grants them the golden scepter of His grace. He Himself is broken or battered (Isa 53:5,10; Gen 3:15).

“A smoldering wick” hardly gives any light or warmth and is no longer able to light another wick. Often the love in our hearts burns so weakly that only He Who knows all things also knows that there is still a glimmer of love present (Jn 21:17b).

Here we see His loving care for us now and that may encourage us. If we sometimes feel like a battered reed, only suitable to be completely broken, or we feel that our light is so poorly lit, let us think of His desires for us. We may go to Him to be renewed in grace and restored in strength.

Only when He has fully accomplished His work of humiliation will He not only proclaim the judgment, but also execute it. A perfect victory will be the glorious and perfect result of His work in humiliation. The nations who are spared will hope in His Name. Both the remnant of Israel and the spared nations will recognize that all blessing depends on Him and on their attitude toward Him. This situation will arise when He comes to earth for the second time. Then He does not come in humiliation as the first time, but in power and majesty.

Mt 12:22-27 | The Lord Jesus and Beelzebul

22 Then a demon-possessed man [who was] blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw. 23 All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, “This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?” 24 But when the Pharisees heard [this], they said, “This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.” 25 And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, “Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand. 26 If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? 27 If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast [them] out? For this reason they will be your judges.

The man brought to the Lord is miserable. He is demon-possessed. This demon has him in his power to the extent that he sees nothing and cannot say anything. He does not know where he is and cannot call for help. Fortunately, the Lord is there with His mercy, and there are people who bring the man to Him. He answers their faith with healing. In this man we can see a picture of the situation in which Israel finds itself. As a whole, the nation is blind to the glory of Christ and does not come to Him to confess Him as their Messiah.

The crowds are deeply impressed by this healing. They even express the suspicion that He may be the Son of David. They don't go any further, their hearts haven't truly been touched. When the Pharisees hear this statement, they want to prevent the crowds from even thinking in that direction. They want to nip this suspicion in the bud and accuse the Lord in the most blasphemous way possible.

There is no coarser and more offensive accusation imaginable than to accuse Him of performing His miracles of grace in the power of the ruler of demons, that is satan himself. At the same time it makes clear the complete unwillingness of the Pharisees to see anything of God in Him. It is impossible to deny that God is at work in Christ among His people in goodness and grace. For them it is not a matter of error, but the denial of the undeniable. They resist against their better judgment. Knowingly and willingly they reject Him.

The Lord has not responded to a similar, previous blasphemy (Mt 9:34). Now he deals with it. With an example from daily life He appeals to the sober mind and thus proves the total absurdity of their statement. He shows with His argument that they have no understanding. Every right-minded person knows that it is impossible to maintain something that is internally divided, regardless of whether it is a kingdom or a house. Inner division means downfall and no success. The conclusion is clear. It is impossible for Him to drive out the demons through Beelzebul.

He gives a second argument for their nonsensical claim. He states that argument as a question. Their sons are busy casting out demons. If they are consistent, they should say that their sons also do it through satan. Of course they will never want to say that. Well, says the Lord, then your

sons will be your judges. The conduct of their sons will denounce their blasphemy, and will be a witness that they have blasphemed Him.

Mt 12:28-32 | Blasphemy Against the Spirit

28 But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong [man]? And then he will plunder his house. 30 He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters. 31 "Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. 32 Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the [age] to come.

The Lord tells them the true origin of His actions. He acts through the Spirit of God. This means that the kingdom of God has come to them. Of course they do not want to acknowledge that, but the fact remains. In Christ God is busy establishing His kingdom. Therefore He goes into the house of the strong, that is the devil, and robs him of his household goods, that is people who find themselves in his power. The Lord bound the strong man when He defeated him in the wilderness with God's Word (Mt 4:1-11). Then He went through the land, doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil (Acts 10:38). On the cross He will bruise the devil's head.

With regard to His performance against the kingdom of satan and the plunder of his house, one can only be a follower or an opponent. Neutrality is impossible. He who does not put himself unambiguously by His side, is against Him. He is busy gathering for the kingdom of heaven. He who is not engaged with Him in this, is engaged in the opposite, the scattering, and reveals himself as an opponent of the kingdom.

The seriousness of the sin of the Pharisees is so great because they know that the Lord is good and works through the Holy Spirit, but despite all the evidence attribute His work to satan. They are thus guilty of the unforgivable sin of "the blasphemy against the Spirit". This sin is different from any other sin. For any other sin, forgiveness is possible. Even those who

resist the Lord Jesus as the Son of Man can count on forgiveness if that sin is confessed.

Every sin that a man does is a sin against the triune God, so against the Father as well as against the Son and the Holy Spirit. What makes the blasphemy against the Spirit so special? This sin is special because it is about the expression of the Spirit in the Person of Christ on earth. It is impossible to inadvertently attribute something Christ does to satan. Whoever says of the Holy Spirit, Who is expressed perfectly in Christ, He is satan, does so consciously.

What Christ does is always perfect through the Spirit. He is the Sinless One. In His whole life and His whole being there is nothing of sin or the sinful flesh present. Everything is pure by the Spirit. Someone can be blind to the glory of the Lord Jesus. But if anyone consciously attributes His actions, which He does through the Spirit, to satan there is a hardening of a heart that lives in rebellion against Him and that absolutely does not want to bow before Him.

The fact that the blasphemy against the Spirit is specifically to do with Christ, and then also with His personal presence on earth, is apparent from the words that this sin is not forgiven “either in this age or in the [age] to come”. In both cases, this age and the age to come, it is a period that Christ is on earth. This is so at His first coming and His second coming. Therefore it is not possible to commit this sin now, in the present time when the Lord Jesus is not on earth.

Mt 12:33-37 | The Tree and Its Fruit

33 *“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. 35 The good man brings out of [his] good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of [his] evil treasure what is evil. 36 But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. 37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”*

The Lord takes an example from nature. Everyone knows that a good tree only produces good fruit. But if a tree is bad, it cannot produce good fruit, but only bad fruit. The tree produces fruit in accordance with its nature. The Pharisees are a bad tree. They are a “brood of vipers” (verse 34; Mt 3:7; 23:33), that is, they are bred by satan. They are children of the devil; the devil is their father (Jn 8:44; 1Jn 3:8a). It is therefore impossible for them to speak good things. They bring forth bad fruit, in accordance with the bad tree that they are. In their hearts is an abundance of corruption and that comes out of their mouths.

The Lord further applies the general principle of the tree and its fruit to man. The good man is the man who through repentance and faith has new life and in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. That good man brings forth good things from the treasure of new life and the Holy Spirit, such as life and peace (Rom 8:6). The evil man is full of the flesh and of himself. He brings forth from the evil treasure of the flesh the works of the flesh (Gal 5:19-21).

Words are not value-free, because they are connected to the heart. Words express what is in man. The Lord Jesus is the Word of God, that is, the perfect expression of Who God is. He has always only spoken what the Father told Him to speak (Jn 12:50). He has never spoken a meaningless word. Believers sometimes speak meaningless words, words without use and meaning. This is particularly true for what is called speaking in tongues. That shows how we are inside. We must also confess that.

Unbelievers do not at all wonder what God wants them to say. They speak meaningless words. They will have to account for this in the day of judgment, before the great white throne, before Him Who sits on the throne, that is Christ (Rev 20:11-12). They will not be able to avoid it by saying, for example, that they meant it all slightly differently, because He perfectly knows the motives that governed the heart when those words were spoken.

The words of the mouth reveal the condition of the heart. Words give expression to feelings and show us who someone is, just as their behavior shows it in a different way. Words are so important that every human being will be justified or condemned on the basis of his words (cf. Rom

10:9-10). The Lord will make a complete statement about the use of words because He knows the source from which they come.

Mt 12:38-42 | The Request for a Sign

38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." 39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and [yet] no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; 40 for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. 42 [The] Queen of [the] South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

The incorrigible wickedness and hardening of the religious leaders is apparent from their insolence in asking Him for a sign in response to what the Lord has said. As if they would then believe! In His answer, the Lord makes it clear to them what they are, and that they will therefore receive a special sign. He calls them an "evil and adulterous generation" or species. In their hearts, inwardly, they are "evil". In their outward relationships they are "adulterous" because their whole behavior is worldly (cf. Jam 4:4). The only sign they receive from Him is "the sign of Jonah the prophet". What happened to Jonah will happen to Him. He will also be in the tomb for three days, just as Jonah was in the water-tomb for three days.

Three times there is talk of a sign in connection with the Lord Jesus. The first sign is that of His birth (Lk 2:12). The third sign is that of the Son of Man Who comes in His glory (Mt 24:30). Between these two events is this sign of Jonah that speaks of His death and resurrection. These are the three signs that must bring people to faith. If these are not enough for someone, they will not come to faith through a thousand other signs.

Then the Lord refers to the men of Nineveh. After his 'resurrection' Jonah went from the water-tomb to Nineveh and preached there. Thus, after

His resurrection and ascension, the Lord Jesus will allow the gospel to be preached to all nations. This means that Israel loses its special position as God's people. The pagan Ninevites repented at Jonah's preaching, while God's people rejected Him Who is more than Jonah.

The Lord adds another example. He points to the Queen of the South. She did not belong to God's people. As someone from the nations she had heard of Solomon's wisdom and had come to him from far away to hear his wisdom. What she did is in stark contrast to the religious leaders who want to kill Him Who is more than Solomon. Like the men of Nineveh, on the day of judgment she will condemn the generation that reject the Lord Jesus.

Mt 12:43-45 | The Return of the Unclean Spirit

43 "Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find [it]. 44 Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came'; and when it comes, it finds [it] unoccupied, swept, and put in order. 45 Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation."

The Lord points to a situation in which a person is delivered from an unclean spirit. That unclean spirit seeks another dwelling place, but does not find it. In reality, He is talking about Israel and its future. The situation of Israel at the time of the Lord Jesus is not that the people as a whole turn to idols. There is no idolatry (Hos 3:4), but there is also no life from God or with God present. Man, the house, has remained empty. This is why the unclean spirit, when it comes back, can take up residence again.

It is also a house that is not full of cobwebs, but that is swept and put in order. It's not a ruin, it's maintained to a very high standard. Yet it is empty. It speaks of the hollow religion with outward behavior and a beautiful appearance, but without life from and for God. In that house there is no place for the Holy Spirit.

Because there are no other inhabitants, the unclean spirit sees its chance to invite other spirits to come and live there. A fullness, "seven", of wick-

ed spirits of an even more corrupt nature than this unclean spirit comes along. This causes a situation in the house, in that person, which is worse than before.

Israel, which was free from idolatry, did not accept the Lord Jesus. This has left the people empty and they can become a place where the most wicked of spirits move in. This will happen when the antichrist reigns over “this evil generation” and determines the service in the temple (2Thes 2:3-4). He will put there the idolatrous image of the beast out of the sea, so that all who are on earth will worship the image of the beast (Rev 13:14-15).

Also in every person’s life it is important that there is no vacuum. Otherwise the devil will come to fill the void. From a spiritual point of view, this can also be seen now. People who live without God, but want to be spiritually active, are an easy prey for all kinds of teachings of demons.

Mt 12:46-50 | The Mother and Brothers of the Lord

46 While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. 47 Someone said to Him, “Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You.” 48 But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, “Who is My mother and who are My brothers?” 49 And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, “Behold My mother and My brothers! 50 For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.”

While the Lord is engaged in His service, His mother and His brothers want to speak to Him. Why would they want to speak to Him? Would they say to Him that He ought not to speak such harsh words? His reaction shows that they did not come to express their support for His words.

Evidently his family cannot come to Him because he is surrounded by a crowd. Therefore, they pass their request on until someone close to Him can tell Him that His family wants to speak to Him. The Lord addresses the man who brings Him the request, and asks who His mother and His brothers are. With this question He indicates that the time of the natural bond between Him and His people, that is Israel according to the flesh, is over.

His real relatives are His disciples. They have joined Him and follow Him and learn from Him. The only family members He can recognize are those who do the will of His Father in heaven. He recognizes exclusively the bond that is formed by the Word of God that someone receives in the heart and subsequently obeys.

Matthew 13

Introduction

In this long chapter with its many parables we see Lord Jesus as the King-Prophet. In what He says, we see His Divine glory. No created being can see the coming ages and give a detailed description of future events. In the parables of this chapter, the Lord connects His second coming with His first and gives insight into the characteristic features of the time between the two comings. He Who has the heart of every human being under control, is the only One able to describe the future. In His prophetic discourse we see the great Immanuel.

He opens His heart to His own and tells of the hidden working of God's wisdom through Divine ways from the beginning of the world. He Who created the world has also planned the course of the ages. The incomprehensible greatness of the galaxies with its innumerable suns and systems shows His creation power. The ages, in which moral life is unfolded, show His wisdom and where He is working towards.

Here, at the turning point of the ages, a point of passing into another age, in His Manhood, is the One Who has planned all of this. He Himself is the great Center of the universe and the course of ages. Everything is made by Him (Jn 1:1-3; Heb 1:1-2). In Divine favor, He shares with His disciples old and new things from His treasure.

Mt 13:1-2 | Out of the House, by the Sea

1 That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. 2 And large crowds gathered to Him, so He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach.

This verse is the introduction to a chapter full of teaching about the change resulting from the Lord's rejection. The first words, "that day", characterize that rejection, for on 'that day' the hatred of the religious leaders has risen to its climax by the accusations we heard in the previous chapter.

On "that day", the Lord takes another place. He goes "out of the house" and sits "by the sea". The house is a symbol of Israel, often referred to as

“the house of Israel” (Jer 31:27,31,33). The sea represents the nations who are often likened to the sea (Isa 17:12; Rev 17:15). This change of environment shows that the Lord, after His rejection by Israel, addresses Himself to the nations.

There is another change in this chapter that is the result of His rejection. He is going to use a new form of teaching. This new form is the use of parables. He is rejected and therefore now absent from the earth. That’s why the kingdom could not be established in the manner that the prophets proclaimed. He is in heaven. As a result, the kingdom of heaven has adopted a character that is completely new and about which the prophets in the Old Testament were not able to write. That new character is that the kingdom of heaven, instead of being openly established on earth, is now being established in secret.

This new character, hidden in the Old Testament, will be presented by the Lord in seven parables. Seven is the number of perfection. In these seven parables He gives a complete picture of the kingdom in its hidden form. The first four parables belong together, as do the last three. The first four show the outward form of the kingdom. It has become a great system in which good and evil go hand in hand. The last three show the inward form. They show that there are valuable persons present in the kingdom.

The Lord gives His teaching from the sea to the crowds standing on the beach. This emphasizes that there is a distance between Him and the people. This is symbolic for the place He occupies in heaven after His rejection and the relationship to His earthly people. From heaven He proclaims the gospel among the nations, but without forgetting His people. In the first days of Christendom we see that first the Jew, and only then the Greek, gets to hear the gospel. We see this in Paul’s ministry in the book of Acts. The bond between Christ and the nation of Israel has been broken, but His teaching to them continues.

Mt 13:3-9 | The Parable of the Sower

3 And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, “Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 and as he sowed, some [seeds] fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 Others fell on the rocky places, where they did

*not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. 6 But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. 7 Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. 8 And others fell on the good soil and *yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. 9 He who has ears, let him hear."*

Now He is rejected, not only does the nature of His teaching change, but also the nature of His service. He came to seek fruit in His vineyard Israel (Isa 5:1-7), but that fruit is not there because of the unfaithfulness of the people. Now that He has been rejected, His service no longer consists in *seeking* fruit, but in *producing* it. This is expressed in the first parable. This first parable is the starting point for all other parables. He shows that the kingdom is established as a result of sowing the Word of the kingdom and not as the fruit of obedience to the law of Moses.

The seed that the sower sows ends up on different types of soil:

- The first type of soil is actually not even soil, but the public road that runs along the soil. Seed that ends up there, "beside the road", cannot take root and becomes a prey for the birds. This seed disappears completely.
- Other seed ends up on "rocky places". There the seed can take root, but because of the many stones there is hardly any soil. The seed has too little soil to grow well. It shoots up too fast in the little bit of earth it has at its disposal. Because of the speed at which the seed shoots up, it doesn't get a chance to really take root. When the sun rises, it turns out that the seed has no root and withers. Nothing remains of this seed either.
- A third type of soil is good in itself, but there are also a lot of weeds, which leaves no room for the seed to grow. It falls "among the thorns", which overgrow and suffocate the seed. Neither does this seed produce any fruit.
- There is also seed that falls "on the good soil". There it can grow freely and produce fruit. There is seed that produces one hundred percent fruit, but there is also seed that still experiences some or even considerable impediment to growth. This seed does not give one

hundred percent, but only sixty percent, or even less, thirty percent fruit.

The Lord concludes the parable with the familiar words “he who has ears, let him hear”. With this He points out the responsibility of those listening to act upon what has been heard.

Mt 13:10-17 | Why Parables?

10 And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” 11 Jesus answered them, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. 12 For whoever has, to him [more] shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. 13 Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says,

*‘YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND;
YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE;
15 FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL,
WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR,
AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES,
OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES,
HEAR WITH THEIR EARS,
AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN,
AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.’*

16 But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. 17 For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see [it], and to hear what you hear, and did not hear [it].

The disciples ask the Lord why He uses parables. With their question they make it clear that they are true subjects of the King. They want to know why He uses this form of teaching. In His answer, the Lord makes a definite distinction between the unbelieving mass of the people and the small number of believers, also referred to as ‘the faithful remnant’. It is the distinction between those who are outside and those who are inside.

The people, who have seen the clearest evidence that He is the Messiah, are under the judgment of blindness announced by the prophet Isaiah. Those who stand outside cannot know the meaning, nor do they have the right to understand the meaning. They fall under the judgment of the hardening because they have hardened their hearts.

The Lord speaks in the plural, the mysteries, because there are several things that are hidden. First, the King is hidden, and second, His reign is hidden, for His enemies are not yet openly subject to Him. His reign only takes place in the hearts of His disciples. Because His reign is not yet public, those who are not disciples can still take their course, without a King Who exercises judgment immediately. The evil one still gets free reign.

A third mystery is the fact that the hidden form that the kingdom of heaven will take as a result of the Lord's rejection was not previously revealed to the prophets. The prophets constantly prophesied of a kingdom that will be established in power and majesty. But now it will only take that form after the return of the Lord, that is, after His return to the earth where the glory of the Messiah on earth will be visible to all. Now His glory is still hidden from the world.

The disciples have accepted Him. That's why He provides them with the truth to guide them further. By knowing the truth they will even receive an abundance of spiritual blessings. Israel, on the other hand, does not accept Christ. That's why they will lose what they have, namely a living Christ in their midst and the blessings that are connected with Him. The decisive distinction lies in having or not having the Son. "He who has the Son has the life" (1Jn 5:12a). He who has the Son, will grow in the knowledge of His Person and enjoy blessing in abundance (Jn 10:10). "He who does not have the Son of God" (1Jn 5:12b), will lose all that he presumptuously thinks to possess.

The Lord speaks to the latter in parables. They see the Messiah and hear Him speak, but they are blind to Who He really is and they do not listen to what He says. To them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which says that they will hear, but not understand, and look, but not see (Isa 6:9-10; Jn 12:40; Acts 28:25-27). They hear the words, but do not understand their content or meaning. They look, but see nothing special.

The reason for that is the condition of their heart. Their hearts have become dull. A dull heart is a heart that is well pleased with itself. When the self is paramount and self-interest is served, there is no ear and eye for the Lord Jesus. They have closed their hearts to Him. Their ears have become hard of hearing and they have closed their eyes, for they do not want to see and hear and understand and repent and be made healthy by Him. There is nothing through which He can make their dull hearts healthy.

How different is it with the true disciple. The Lord calls him “blessed” because he sees by grace what the unbelievers around him do not see, and because he sees what the believers of the former dispensation did not see either. For the unbelievers He has no glory, and for the believers of old it was unimaginable that He would be rejected.

How much did many prophets and righteous people in earlier times desire to see what the disciples see: the Christ. They have desired to hear His voice, but this they were not permitted. This great privilege has fallen to the disciples who now see and hear Him. The true disciple who is with the Lord Jesus sees and hears a rejected King, and also sees His inner glory (Jn 1:14).

Mt 13:18-23 | Explanation of the Parable of the Sower

18 “Hear then the parable of the sower. 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil [one] comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. 20 The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no [firm] root in himself, but is [only] temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. 22 And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 23 And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.”

After his teaching on the use of parables, the Lord explains the parable of the sower to His disciples, “hear then”, even though the crowds are

present (verse 36). With the call “hear then the parable of the sower” He calls His disciples to listen attentively.

The sower is the Lord Jesus. In a literal sense, this is not correct. For the seed is sown in the field of the world (verse 38), while the Lord Jesus during His life on earth has never been outside Israel and gone to the nations. Only after His death, resurrection, and ascension did His apostles begin to fulfil the commission to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19). Yet in a spiritual sense he is the Sower, for He sows through His apostles (cf. Eph 2:17). So will everyone who is now a disciple comply in sowing.

The Lord makes it clear in the explanation that not everyone who hears the Word accepts it immediately. Only in one of the four places where the seed ends up is the fruit produced.

- The explanation is constantly about hearing the Word. Matthew speaks of the seed as the “Word of the kingdom” and of the “hearing” and “understanding” of the Word (verses 19,23). This fits with his Gospel, because it is about the kingdom and the making of disciples who submit to the authority of the King.

The greatest impediments to spiritual understanding are religious prejudices. Religious prejudices are hardened ground. In “the one on whom seed was sown beside the road” we can see the Pharisee. The Pharisee completely rejects the Word of the kingdom. He does not enter the kingdom because he does not want to bow before the Lord of the kingdom.

The first to prevent the seed from springing up is the devil. The Word is sown in the heart, but the enemy can easily take it away because there is no connection between the heart and God. This does not make the recipient any less guilty, because what was sown in the heart was adapted to the needs of that heart.

- In the second case we see that not the seed, but “the one on whom” is sown on the rocky places (verses 20-21). The seed is identified with the recipient. He is someone who hears the Word and immediately accepts it with joy. That means he has no sense of sin. The first thing the Word does is a work in the conscience that leads to sorrow because it reveals man to himself. There can never be a real work of

God without a sense of sin. The soil has not been ploughed over and therefore there can be no root. A conscience affected by the Word sees itself in the presence of God. If the conscience is not touched, there is no root.

The Word is received for the joy it gives, but when trial comes, it is let go. The obstacle to bear fruit is the superficiality and selfishness with which the Word is received. Whoever only wants to experience 'pleasure' from the Word is revealed as an unbeliever as soon as there is trial in his life of pleasure.

- The third obstacle to the fruit-bearing of the seed consists of the things of the world (verse 22). This is not about sins, but about ordinary earthly things. Worries are part of the earthly existence. Wealth does not have to be wrong either. But both the unpleasant and the pleasant things can ensure that there is no fruit from the preaching. People who are absorbed in their worries or in their wealth are infertile ground for the gospel. The outer circumstances are so choking that the received seed does not bear fruit.
- Only in the fourth case is there fruit. Fruit is the result of seed sown on the good soil (verse 23). The good soil is he who not only hears the Word, but also understands it. Whoever understands the Word, comprehends it, knows that through the Word he is placed in the presence of God, for God reveals Himself in the Word. The Word creates new life for everyone who hears and understands. This new life is the Lord Jesus. From Him – He is the new life of the believer – comes forth fruit for God.

Yet we see that even if the seed bears fruit there are different results. The factors that, in previous cases, completely prevented the seed from bearing fruit, still play a role in some respects. Religious habits (1), the laziness of the flesh (2) and being consumed by earthly things (3) can be the cause that not a hundred percent fruit is produced.

Mt 13:24-30 | Parable of the Tares and the Wheat

24 Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and

*went away. 26 But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. 27 The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' 28 And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves *said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' 29 But he *said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn."'"*

In the parable of the tares – which is a weed that looks a lot like wheat – and the five subsequent parables we find symbolic representations of the kingdom. They are about the time while the King is rejected and is therefore a time characterized by the absence of the King. It is the kingdom in its new form, it receives a new character by which it was not previously known. Therefore the Lord Jesus says: “The kingdom of heaven has become like” (Darby translation). The phrase “has become like” indicates the change after the original intention of the kingdom could not be realized because of the rejection of the King.

The parable of the tares among the wheat and the next two parables represent the kingdom in its outer form in the world. They are addressed to the disciples and the crowds. The last three parables show the kingdom according to the appreciation of the Holy Spirit, as God sees it. They contain the thoughts and counsels of God. These last three, together with the explanation of the second parable, are addressed only to the disciples.

Just as in the first parable, the sower is “a man”, that is the Lord Jesus. He sows good seed and sows in “His” field, for the field belongs to Him. This sowing did not actually begin until after He was rejected. His followers sowed first in Jerusalem, then in Samaria, and then to the remotest part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

The Lord does this sowing work through people. These people are characterized by weakness and even carelessness. This gives the enemy opportunity to sow weeds. Falling asleep also has to do with not looking forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus. We see that all ten virgins fall asleep when the bridegroom is delaying (Mt 25:5; cf. Eph 5:14). This gives the enemy

the opportunity to sow weeds. This is sown in words that sound evangelical and authentic, but in which another meaning is hidden. Outwardly it seems Christian, but God knows the inside. Satan is the great imitator of God (cf. 2Tim 3:8; Rev 13:11). He sowed his false teachings among Christians through false teachers and their supporters.

A tare is, as said, a weed that looks a lot like wheat. Satan works with what seems to be truth, but is a lie. His refined way of working is to mix truth and lies, so that they are hard or impossible to distinguish from each other. If we are not vigilant, the tare can be sown and grow.

When the fruit appears, the slaves notice that weeds are shooting up between the good seed. They ask the Lord of the House – also a picture of the Lord Jesus – about it, to which he answers that this is the work of an enemy. Then the slaves propose to gather the weeds. That is not a good proposal. The owner of the house rejects their proposal and gives the reason why. He knows that his slaves will be mistaken in their judgment of what is wheat and what is weeds. They have not been able to prevent the work of that enemy, nor are they able to undo the results of the work of that enemy.

In the picture the proposal of the slaves comes down to purging Christianity of weeds. But that is not the work of the slaves. It is a work of judgment about what is not of God. This judgment belongs to Him alone because only He can only carry it out according to the perfect knowledge He has of everything and according to His power from which no one can escape. Therefore the Lord Jesus says that the kingdom on earth, as it is in the hands of man, must remain a mixed system until “the harvest”.

The “time of the harvest” indicates a certain period of time in which the events associated with the harvest, namely its final phase, will take place. In that phase the weeds manifest themselves more and more clearly. The Lord will execute judgment through the angels of His power. After the binding of the weeds He gathers the wheat into His barn. The wheat is not tied in bundles. This is the end of the outward appearance of the kingdom on earth.

The binding in bundles is the preparation for judgment, in which we can perhaps see the merging of all kinds of churches and currents, ecumenism.

In the explanation of the parable, the Lord explains this in more detail (verses 36-43). The gathering of the wheat, of which there is no mention of preparation, is the gathering of His people, where perhaps we can see the rapture of the church to heaven. The Lord also explains this in more detail in the explanation.

The growing up together until the harvest applies to the kingdom of heaven or Christianity, not to the church. In the (local) church evil must be cleaned out or removed (1Cor 5:7,13). If a church does not want that, we must cleanse ourselves from that church (2Tim 2:19-22).

Mt 13:31-32 | Parable of the Mustard Seed

31 He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; 32 and this is smaller than all [other] seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES."

The mustard seed is a tiny seed and represents the seed of the Christian church sown by the Lord. The seed is now not the person as in the previous parable, but the whole. In the next parable, that of the leaven, we see the same thing, because there too it is about the big picture and not about the individual. The Lord never intended this mustard seed to grow out of its strength. Yet it becomes a tree. A tree speaks of power. Assyria and Nebuchadnezzar are compared with them (Isa 10:18-19; Eze 31:1-18; Dan 4:10-11,26).

This parable shows that evil will not just be a mixture with a false confession, like the previous one about the tares, but something completely different will follow. The kingdom of heaven begins small and humble in the world. But it will take on great dimensions on earth. It will have its roots deep in man's institutions and elevate itself to a colossal system with powerful influence on the earth. In church history this happened when Constantine adopted Christianity and the world became Christian.

This third parable represents the development of the kingdom into an impressive phenomenon in people's eyes. However, this realm will also provide shelter for evil instruments, for in this chapter the birds repre-

sent instruments of evil (verses 4,19; cf. Rev 18:2). It is the work of satan through human instruments.

Mt 13:33 | Parable of the Leaven

33 He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened."

This is not about mixing good and bad seed, not even a small seed that becomes a big tree. This fourth parable teaches that the kingdom will be corrupted through and through by false doctrine. In Scripture, leaven is a picture of sin. Leaven is not a picture of the gospel that will win the world over to Christ, as is sometimes completely wrongly claimed. The Lord speaks as a prophet. He knows how the kingdom, seen from the side of man, will go.

The kingdom will not only be a great power, one from a mustard seed grown from its strength, but it will also have the character of a doctrinal system that will spread far and include all those who come into its sphere of influence. Leaven does not speak of faith or life, but of error or pernicious doctrine that has permeated Christianity.

We see that in the six cases where leaven is spoken of:

1. The leaven of the Pharisees is hypocrisy (Lk 12:1; Mt 16:6).
2. The leaven of the Sadducees, which is connected by the Lord to the leaven of the Pharisees (Mt 16:6). The Sadducees are the rationalists, people who only believe what they can reason, with which they can agree with. They are full of unbelief and biblical criticism.
3. The leaven of the Herodians, which is also connected by the Lord to the leaven of the Pharisees (Mk 8:15). The Herodians are a political party that believe that politics and religion should be linked. It is the leaven of the conformance to the world.
4. The leaven of harlotry (1Cor 5:1,6-7). This is loose morality, immorality.
5. The leaven of legalism (Gal 5:9). This is religious performance, subjecting oneself and/or others to certain commandments, in order to gain respect before God and people.

6. The leaven of idolatry (Mt 13:33). We see that in the woman and the three measures of flour.

In the book of Revelation the roman catholic church is presented as a woman, a harlot (Rev 17:1-6). She herself is corrupt and does corrupt things. She moderates herself to the position of the true church, but her intentions are corrupt. We see that in her actions. In the good teaching about Christ that is presented in the three measures of flour, which we can connect with the meal offering (Lev 2:1-16) as a picture of Christ, she does false teaching. She mixes the evil and the good with each other, making the good corrupt. This is something that we see becoming clearer and clearer in Christianity today.

Mt 13:34-35 | Use of Parables

34 All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable. 35 [This was] to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

*"I WILL OPEN MY MOUTH IN PARABLES;
I WILL UTTER THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE
WORLD."*

The Lord's teaching to many ends with the parable of the leaven. He speaks in parables because they do not accept Him. By using parables, He fulfills what the prophet Asaph said (Psa 78:2). Asaph predicted that He would speak in parables.

Asaph also said that He would proclaim things that have been "hidden since the foundation of the world". From the foundation of the world it has been hidden that the kingdom of heaven would take a hidden form before this same kingdom would be established in public power and majesty. That hidden form has everything to do with the King of that kingdom's rejection and the place that this King now occupies. He is hidden in God (Col 3:3).

The expression "since the foundation of the world" refers to Israel. In connection with the church it is rather "before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4).

Mt 13:36-39 | Explanation of the Parable of the Tares

36 Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." 37 And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, 38 and the field is the world; and [as for] the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil [one]; 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels.

The Lord lets the crowds go and comes into the house. He has spoken and directed the first four parables to the crowds. These parables are about the form that the kingdom of heaven will take in the world, in which good and evil will be mixed. Now He continues with just His disciples. The following three parables are about the true core of the kingdom and it is intended for the true sons of the kingdom.

In the house His disciples come to Him to ask Him for the explanation of the parable of the tares. They have asked Him before why He uses parables (verse 10). Now they want to know the explanation of the likeness used. Their question shows the confidence they have in Him that He will give the explanation. Even the disciples cannot grasp the parable without explanation. In the seclusion of the house the Lord declares the true character and purpose of the kingdom of heaven and what has worth for Him in it.

This explanation can only be understood by the spiritually-minded person. The multitudes cannot grasp the true thoughts of God in connection with the kingdom. Also in the following three parables the Lord speaks only to His disciples. They see more on the inward, more hidden side of the kingdom of heaven, that is as God sees it.

That's why these three parables are of special importance to the faithful follower of the Lord Jesus. These are the family secrets and that's why the Lord goes with them into the house. In the great impressive whole there is found something of value to God. How valuable that is, is demonstrated by the parables of the treasure and the pearl.

The Lord answers His disciples' question willingly and explains who sows the good seed, what the field is, who the good seed is, what the tares represent, who the enemy is, what the harvest represents, and who the reapers are. He then paints what will happen in the end of the age.

As with the parable of the sower at the beginning of this chapter, sowing indicates the Lord's activity of Himself producing fruit after Israel's failure to produce fruit for God. He Himself, as the Son of Man, sows the Word in the field of the world to, in this way, establish the kingdom of heaven.

In the explanation He identifies the seed with the sons of the kingdom: the good seed, *these are* the sons of the kingdom. What the seed produces is to his senses no different than the seed that has been sown. By rejecting their King, the Jews lost their right to the kingdom. Natural birth no longer gives right to the kingdom. From the moment the King is in heaven, one becomes a son of the kingdom only if he has received new life through the Word (Jn 3:5).

But the Son of Man is not the only sower. The devil, "the enemy", also acts as a sower. His sons, the sons of the evil one, "the tares", are found among the sons of the kingdom. The devil is mixing. The terrain where he does that is the world. The enemy brings all kinds of persons – they are the fruit of the false teachings that the enemy has sown – among those born of the truth. The harvest is not a time when the age ends, but refers to the actions that God allows to be performed to fulfil His purpose fully.

In these actions there is an important role for His angels. In the parable the emphasis is on the slaves, those who work the land and take care of it, the servants of the Lord (verses 28-29). They cannot distinguish between good and evil. In the explanation the emphasis is on the reapers and they can make that distinction.

Mt 13:40-43 | The End of the Age

40 So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, 42 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

In the parable the Lord goes no further than collecting and binding the tares in bundles to burn it and bringing the wheat together into the barn

(verse 30). In the explanation He goes further. In it He speaks of the closing events “at the end of the age”, that is the age in which evil can do its work, but which comes to an end in judgment. Then He speaks of the coming of a new era, in which the wheat – which is gathered into in His barn – will reappear in the form of the righteous who will shine like the sun.

The tares are burned with fire by the angels when the Son of Man comes. The tares, the sons of the evil one, are gathered “out of His kingdom”, so that is not the world, but the terrain where the Lord Jesus exercises His authority. From it are collected “all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness”. These are not all the unbelievers from the whole world, but confessors. They are the deceivers who have led others to fall. They have also committed lawlessness, which means that they have not taken into account the authority of the King. They have refused to submit to it. They are removed from the kingdom of the Son of Man, that is His kingdom on earth. Their portion is the furnace of fire, eternal pain. Every form of joy is missing. Only weeping because of physical torment and gnashing of teeth because of the remorse of conscience is there. What a terrible fate that is!

The portion of the wheat, the sons of the kingdom, contrasts sharply with the portion of the tares, the sons of evil. The sons of the kingdom are called “righteous”. They have done what is right and have bowed themselves in truth before the authority of the Son of Man. Their part is to “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”. Both “shine forth as the sun” and “the kingdom of their Father” indicate their heavenly position. They will shine on that day of glory in that coming age like the Lord Jesus Himself, the true “Sun of righteousness” (Mal 4:2).

‘The kingdom of their Father’ is the heavenly side of the kingdom. The Son of Man is on earth, but also in heaven (Jn 3:13). On earth the earthly believers are connected with Him, and in heaven the believers who find themselves there are connected with Him. The heavenly believers shine in the sky next to the Sun and the earthly believers bask in its light and warmth.

The righteous or the sons of the kingdom are further examined in the following three parables, and then as a “treasure” (verse 44), a “pearl”

(verses 45-46) and “good” fish collected in containers (verse 48). They are introduced as what they mean to the heart of the Lord Jesus.

Mt 13:44 | The Treasure in the Field

44 *“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid [again]; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

This parable teaches us that there is something hidden in the world that is of value to the Lord Jesus. In view of this value, the Lord bought the field, which is the world (cf. 2Pet 2:1). By buying the field, He has gained the right to the whole world. Because of the treasure, He sold everything. He gave up His rights to rule Israel and the world and became poor (2Cor 8:9). The treasure is clearly not Christ. As in the other parables, Christ is here the ‘man’ as well.

It is also impossible that a man could win Christ by giving up everything. God does not ask a man for a performance in order to win Christ. If it depends on man, he will never come to Christ, for he does not naturally seek Christ (Rom 3:11). Only when someone is a follower of the Lord Jesus does the Lord ask him to give up everything. This is how Paul does it (Phil 3:8). Paul wants to get to know Christ better and gives away everything that prevents this.

Nowhere is a person told that he has to do something to win the kingdom, as if it could be won by achievement. The rich young man proves the opposite (Mk 10:21-22). By the way, how can a man buy the world as a means of winning Christ? Paul has in fact given up the world to win Christ.

There is a lot to be said for the treasure representing ‘the church’. The treasure is found without there being any question that it has been searched for. The Lord Jesus came for His people Israel, but that people rejected Him. Then, as it were, without asking for it, He receives the church as something that here is presented as a new matter. Israel is not a new matter, nor is the world. To possess the church, the Lord Jesus gives up all that is due to Him as Man, as Messiah on earth.

It has also been assumed that the treasure could be Israel. The explanation is that Israel is hidden in the field, that Christ finds the treasure, but then

hides it again because of His rejection. That is not very convincing. In none of the parables about the kingdom of heaven does Israel play a role. It is rather about something that is hidden, and that is not Israel, because the whole of the Old Testament is about Israel. The Lord Jesus did not have to buy the world to own Israel either, for Israel is already His, they are “His own” (Jn 1:11). Nor does he need to buy the world to reacquire Israel.

What is of value to the Lord Jesus in the kingdom of heaven are the sons of the kingdom. They are a treasure for Him. He finds that treasure as it were suddenly, without expecting it. He has not come for them, but He finds them as something precious for His heart.

If the Lord Jesus is rejected, it is disappointing for Him. The people for whom He came reject Him. His coming and His work seem in vain (Isa 49:4). But God gives Him something else in its place: a group of believers among the nations (Isa 49:6). Those who believe are so precious to Him that He sells everything in order to possess the treasure. For the price of His life He buys the whole field on account of that treasure. Through His work on the cross He has gained authority over all flesh, that He may give eternal life to those whom the Father has given Him (Jn 17:2).

Mt 13:45-46 | The Pearl of Great Value

45 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, 46 and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Finding the treasure in the previous parable was not preceded by a search. That is the case with the pearl. The merchant is again the Lord Jesus. In the pearl, *unity* is the primary thought. A treasure is a wide *variety* of precious things. Believers are all different and precious to the Lord Jesus in their diversity. A pearl is a unity of perfect beauty.

The merchant, the Lord Jesus, has searched for that beautiful pearl. He knew what He was looking for, for He knew the church from before the foundation of the world. Its value to Him is so great that He gives up everything, even giving Himself up to possess it. As with the treasure, the merchant is not a picture of the sinner who sells everything he has to possess the Lord Jesus, who would then be the pearl.

The Lord Jesus buys that pearl and nothing else with it. The church is formed in the depths of the sea of nations and is the jewel of the Lord Jesus, with whom He will adorn Himself in the kingdom of peace and for all eternity.

Mt 13:47-50 | The Dragnet

47 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering [fish] of every kind; 48 and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good [fish] into containers, but the bad they threw away. 49 So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, 50 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

In the parable of the dragnet, the Lord Jesus explains how the church, which He presented in the previous parables, is acquired. He makes it clear that this is done through the involvement of His servants who, over time, have pulled the dragnet of the gospel through the sea of nations. The Word of the kingdom is a dragnet through which all kinds of people come into the kingdom. It is the fishermen's responsibility to separate the good from the bad. The good ones they put in containers. The bad they throw away.

In the explanation, the evil are dealt with by angels. The servants are only concerned with the good. Unlike the parable of the tares, the servants are active here, while with the tares they only assess and are forbidden from separating the evil from the good. We cannot purge the evil from Christianity, but we can separate those who belong to that treasure and pearl from the others and gather them together.

The practical teaching of this parable is that the good are separated from the evil and that the good are gathered in the same space. That has happened more than once. Many good are united everywhere into a whole in local churches.

Here the sorting already takes place, while in the parable of the tares among the wheat sorting takes place at the end, because they have to grow up together until the harvest. The final distinction will be made by angels

at the end of the age. They are concerned with the wicked, who they will separate from among the righteous and throw into the furnace of fire (see also verse 42). In this way, the explanation goes further than the parable and adds facts.

Mt 13:51-52 | Parable of the Head of a Household

*51 "Have you understood all these things?" They *said to Him, "Yes." 52 And Jesus said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old."*

After the Lord has spoken the seven parables and explained some of them, He asks His disciples if they have understood "all these things". They, like us, have difficulty understanding this teaching. Yet their answer is a sincere "yes".

Then the Lord utters an eighth parable. This is not a parable of the kingdom of heaven, but of a scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven. He compares such a scribe to a head of a household, that is someone who knows what he has in his house. He can do whatever he wants with it, because it is his own, it is "his" treasure. A treasure is something to enjoy yourself. This head of a household, however, does not keep this treasure for himself, but brings something out of it for others, he wants others to enjoy it.

That treasure consists of new and old things. The "new things" come first, that's where the emphasis is. These new things have come to the fore in the parables of the kingdom. They are about the new, hidden manifestation of the kingdom as a result of the rejection and ascension of the Lord Jesus, things unknown in the Old Testament. By "old things" is meant what is known about the kingdom in the Old Testament.

The scribe has knowledge of the kingdom, but is completely unfamiliar with the character it will assume when planted in the world through the Word, on which everything here depends.

Whoever completes an education and has become a scribe, can now teach others. The scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom knows the old things, but through the teaching he has received from the Lord Jesus

as His disciple also knows the new things of the kingdom. He is able to proclaim both from that treasure.

Mt 13:53-58 | Rejection at Nazareth

53 When Jesus had finished these parables, He departed from there. 54 He came to His hometown and [began] teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where [did] this man [get] this wisdom and [these] miraculous powers? 55 Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? 56 And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then [did] this man [get] all these things?" 57 And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his [own] household." 58 And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.

When the Lord has finished His teaching by parables, He departs from there to go to Nazareth. There He continues His teaching. The teaching surprises the audience. They don't understand where He has gotten it all from. Amazed they wonder where He has obtained His wisdom and powers. He spent so much time with them, but they never knew Him. They see nothing more in Him than "the carpenter's son". They grew up with Him, but they never recognized the remarkable in Him.

They know exactly who His earthly relatives are. They know His father (they think), His mother and His brothers and sisters, but they know nothing of His heavenly origin. Through their ignorance of His heavenly origin, they also do not understand anything of where His special performance and teaching come from. Instead of looking for His origin, they take offense at Him. This also causes them to fall spiritually. They accuse him of fantasy. The question of where He got everything from is changed to: 'Who does He think He is to say these things?'

Then the Lord will speak the words to those who have already experienced many a servant that a prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his household. The result is that the Lord's blessing is held back by their unbelief. If there are no hearts that open themselves to Him, He cannot do anything.

Matthew 14

Mt 14:1-12 | Death of John the Baptist

*1 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the news about Jesus, 2 and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him." 3 For when Herod had John arrested, he bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. 4 For John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." 5 Although Herod wanted to put him to death, he feared the crowd, because they regarded John as a prophet. 6 But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before [them] and pleased Herod, 7 so [much] that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. 8 Having been prompted by her mother, she *said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." 9 Although he was grieved, the king commanded [it] to be given because of his oaths, and because of his dinner guests. 10 He sent and had John beheaded in the prison. 11 And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. 12 His disciples came and took away the body and buried it; and they went and reported to Jesus.*

This section deals with Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great who reigned during the birth of the Lord Jesus. Herod Antipas succeeded his father as king of Galilee. The name Herod as king over a part of Israel shows the sad state in which Israel finds itself. It emphasizes that Israel is not a free people. Herod is a figurehead of the Romans who have power over Israel. Israel is ruled by Gentiles and not by a king after God's heart.

This man Herod takes care of the death of the Lord's predecessor. The people over whom he reigns as a tetrarch will in its entirety ensure that the Lord Jesus is killed. Therefore, we can see in the moral characteristics of Herod a reflection of those of the people as a whole.

The reports of Christ have reached Herod. As a result of these, superstitious thoughts arise immediately in the distorted mind of this man. He expresses this to His servants. What is remarkable is that this unbeliever speaks about the resurrection of the dead because he thinks that John the

baptist is risen. He has a burdened conscience because he killed John the baptist. He is reminded of that by what he hears about the Lord. Not that John ever did miracles (Jn 10:41). He also clearly said that he was not the Christ (Jn 1:20).

It is wonderful in itself that even after the death of John such a testimony is given of him. It would be a beautiful testimony if people, when they hear something about the Lord Jesus, had to think of us involuntarily.

Herod lives an ungodly and immoral life. John has spoken a lot with Herod and Herod loved to listen to him (Mk 6:20). That does not mean that John only said nice things to Herod. The only word that Scripture quotes from the conversations between John and Herod is: "It is not lawful for you to have her." Time and again John has called Herod to account about his illicit relationship with Herodias.

John makes no compromises, even though it assured him of Herodias' hatred. This corrupt woman made sure that John was put in prison. She wanted to silence him. Herod also preferred to kill him, for although he loved to hear John, he did not want to break with his life in sin. But fear of the crowd prevented him from doing it.

Then there arises an excellent opportunity for Herodias to get rid of John for good. Her equally godless daughter dances on Herod's birthday in the middle of the guests. Herod and the guests watched her performance with "eyes full of adultery" (2Pet 2:14). In his admiration for her art of dancing Herod guarantees her under oath to give her the reward she wishes. Just as he is led by the crowd to hold back from a crime, so he is also led by his lusts and then says things without realizing the scope of what he says.

Both the mother and the girl are filled with so much hatred for the witness of God, that the head of John the baptist is worth more than all the riches and honor they could have wished for. The wicked woman Herodias is a spiritual descendant of Jezebel who wanted to rob Elijah – with whom John is compared – of life (1Kgs 19:2). The girl is no better than her mother.

The king's sadness shows he has a soft spot for John, but Herod would rather maintain his earthly power and glory than submit to the witness of God. His sense of honor and fear of loss of face make him the murderer of the witness of God. It is presented as if Herod has beheaded John with his

own hands, even though this decree was carried out by the sword in the hand of his servant.

This is how the one who faithfully rebukes the sin in which Herodias, together with Herod, lives is removed from her eye. As a final reminder, John's head appears once more to the woman. Her hardened heart rejoices that she has been freed from him. In the resurrection, John will repeat his testimony to her, and if she has not repented, she will be thrown into hell.

When John is killed, his disciples take his body away, bury it, and then go to the Lord to tell Him. It is remarkable that John still has his disciples, despite the fact that the Lord is there. It is proof of how difficult it is for a person to break away from traditions.

Mt 14:13-14 | The Lord Seeks Solitude

13 Now when Jesus heard [about John], He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself; and when the people heard [of this], they followed Him on foot from the cities. 14 When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick.

When the Lord hears what has happened to John, He needs solitude and rest. Here we see Him as a true Man. As the eternal God He of course knows exactly what happened and could have prevented it. As the true Man, however, He surrenders everything to His God.

What He hears about John makes Him go to a secluded place to seek His God on this matter in solitude. Although He is exalted far above John, He, together with Him, gave the testimony of God in the midst of Israel. He feels united in His heart with John. The Lord withdraws, not to Jerusalem, but to a secluded place.

He cannot be alone for long with His grief because there too people follow Him. When He sees them, He is again moved by compassion for them. The indifference of Nazareth and the badness of Herod have not changed Him. His heart remains full of unwavering compassion to do good to people in need. He can nothing other than act according to His perfect, good nature. That is why He provides His people with bread in the next story.

Mt 14:15-21 | Feeding of the Five Thousand

*15 When it was evening, the disciples came to Him and said, "This place is desolate and the hour is already late; so send the crowds away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." 16 But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away; you give them [something] to eat!" 17 They *said to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish." 18 And He said, "Bring them here to Me." 19 Ordering the people to sit down on the grass, He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed [the food], and breaking the loaves He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples [gave them] to the crowds, 20 and they all ate and were satisfied. They picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve full baskets. 21 There were about five thousand men who ate, besides women and children.*

The evening falls as the people seek relief from the Lord in numbers for the ailments they suffer from. The practical disciples come to Him with the remark that He should send the crowds away, because then they can still go to the shop in time to buy food. But a practical attitude is not always a good one. In this case, their practical proposal means that the Lord must stop doing good. By doing so they show that they do not share in His mercy.

They still don't know Him well. Because they do not share in His mercy, they are also blind to the power of His grace to provide for daily needs. Then the Lord has a lesson for His disciples, for those who follow Him and must learn from the Master, in order to be like the Master.

He takes up the case for the crowds. People do not have to leave Him Who is the source of all goodness. He turns the request to send the crowds away around and orders His disciples to feed them. He wants to make them instruments through whom He can bless the crowds. He wants to fill their hands with bread that they can distribute to the crowds. Through them He wants His power in grace to benefit the crowds.

This is also true now because the principle of faith is the same at all times. The Lord wants us to learn that faith in His power makes us instruments for the blessing of others. The disciples want to send the crowds away because they don't know how to use the power of Christ. We often don't know that either, but the Lord wants to teach us.

Then He tells them to feed them. He wants to teach them to feed others. When the order comes to feed others, first the disciples' total impotence becomes public. That is because they only count on their own resources and not on those of the Lord. The problem is not that there is nothing, but that the little there is, is totally inadequate according to man's arithmetic.

According to human standards this is also the case, but we must learn to count on the power of the Lord. One of the problems that makes us bad disciples is that we underestimate what we have in our hands. The reason for this is that we judge it according to our ability to do something with it and not according to the Lord's ability to do something with it. Our argument is often: 'We have here only ...' But believers always have something the Lord can use, even if it is so little in their eyes. The Lord commands them to bring the loaves and fishes to Him. We must learn to put everything in His hands. He even invites us to do this. What we place in His hands, He multiplies.

The Lord proceeds to work in an ordered and calming manner. That's why He commands all to sit down. By doing so, He also draws everyone's eyes to Himself. All see how He takes the five loaves and the two fish and all hear how He prays to His God as the dependent Man and blesses or praises Him. Then He acts in omnipotence, in dependence and in grace through His disciples. He breaks the loaves and gives them to the disciples who in turn give the bread to the crowds.

The food the crowd receives has become food in two ways. Before something becomes bread, a whole process precedes it. This indicates that before we can give anything into the Lord's hands so that He can use it, we must have been busy with it. There are also two fish. We have done nothing for its preparation. Those are as it were prepared by the Lord Himself. This indicates that what we have received directly from the Lord, we may also give Him to make more of it and then distribute it. What we can't do, multiplying the food, He does. Then He gives it to us to do with it what we can and that is to pass it on.

By this act Christ testifies in His own Person that He is *Yahweh* Who will satisfy the poor with bread (Psa 132:15). In Him is *Yahweh*, Who has estab-

lished the throne of David, in their midst. By His goodness, everyone can eat until they are satisfied.

He could have performed His miracle in such a way that all food was gone, that nothing was left over. He knew exactly how much was needed. Precisely because there is so much left over, it demonstrates that the Lord Jesus is a God of abundance. He not only gives what is necessary, but more than is necessary. There is a surplus, not of crumbs, but of the pieces He broke and the disciples distributed.

Abundance is not treated as superfluous. He also has an intention with abundance. He allows it to be collected so that it can be distributed to others who are not present. What we give in the Lord's hands becomes an abundance through which a crowd is satisfied and much remains for others. This is how it works with God: what we give away is not lost, but is multiplied (Pro 11:24).

The number twelve also indicates that the Lord made the surplus with an intention. He deliberately wanted to multiply more than was necessary for those present. He satisfies those who have come to Him from their homes, but in the future He will satisfy all twelve tribes with His blessing. There remains a blessing for the people of God that He must first send away.

The remaining bread is put into twelve "baskets". When the Lord later provides bread to a crowd of four thousand men, including women and children, also bread will remain. This is put into "large baskets" (Mt 15:37).

Mt 14:22-27 | In the Storm

22 Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. 23 After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. 24 But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. 25 And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea. 26 When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."

The Lord must force His disciples to go on board and go ahead of Him to the other side without Him. He Himself says goodbye to the crowds. After having given proof of His blessed presence in the miraculous feeding, now inevitably comes the moment that He must send the people away. It is a prophetic picture of what God had to do with His people because they rejected His Son.

When the Lord has sent the mass of people away, He climbs the mountain to pray. His disciples are at sea. They do not see the Lord, but He sees them. He prays for them. He seeks fellowship with His Father in solitude and in the heights. While He prays, the disciples are in distress. There is a headwind. This is a picture of everyday life. He allows storms to test our faith. The disciples are worried. In them we can see a picture of the believing remnant of Israel among the hostile nations, of which the sea is a picture, in the time of the great tribulation.

The disciples think that the Lord has forgotten them. The remnant during the great tribulation will think so too. In several psalms they state this (Psa 10:11; 13:1; 77:9). But He does not forget them. He does not come to them until the night is darkest, in the fourth watch. That is also against the dawn of the day. It is also the time for the morning star to rise. Prophetically, we live in the end of the dispensation of the night, which is almost gone (Rom 13:12). We also have arrived in the darkest period of the night. Especially at that point we can experience His closeness the most and we can see Him coming to us.

However, we are often like the disciples who regard the Lord as a ghost. This happens when, in all adversity, we see only the devil, as if he makes life difficult for us, while we ignore the fact that our circumstances are in the hand of our loving Lord. Job saw it differently. He took everything from the Lord's hand. He did not say, 'The LORD gave and *satan* has taken away', but, "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away" (Job 1:21). In our circumstances we must learn to discover the Lord, that He is close to us and has power over all circumstances.

The Lord walks on the water as if on solid ground. He Who, as God, created the elements as they are, can, as the Son of Man, according to His pleasure, dispose of their properties and walk over them. He does not do

His walking on the water for the crowds, for their appetite for sensation, but He does it for fearful disciples to convince them of His power. He is not yet calming the water. That comes at the end.

When the disciples cry out in fear, He speaks to them reassuringly. First He says to them to take courage. He has already spoken this wonderful word of encouragement in this Gospel to people who need it so much (Mt 9:2,22). Then, He refers to Himself "it is I", for only through Him can there be taken courage. Finally, He says they should not be afraid. He wants to dispel their fear because it prevents them from taking courage.

Mt 14:28-33 | Peter Walks on the Water

*28 Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." 29 And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and *said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. 33 And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"*

Peter is the first to answer to the words of the Lord. He wants assurance that it is the Lord. The event of Peter leaving the ship is only written in this Gospel. The disciples are afraid, but they are still in the boat. As long as it holds, it is well. This makes Peter's act of faith so great. He also distances himself from this last safety and entrusts himself entirely to the Lord.

Also with us it is often the case that we trust the Lord, but we are also happy with the security of the boat. An application is that it is difficult for us to leave the security of Judaism or the security of a traditional Christian system. This applies to any form of being a church where the custom has become norm and the Spirit cannot work freely. Human forms and traditions give a sense of security, although we confess that the Holy Spirit must guide us. The Lord is outside both the Jewish and man-managed Christian systems and it is necessary to go out to be with Him (Heb 13:13).

The initiative comes from Peter. He sees the Lord and asks for His command. Peter doesn't want to be the hero. He is the obedient believer who

in faith gives up the safety of the boat to come to the Lord. Then he is not afraid of the waters. He really wants to be as the Master is. The Lord must have rejoiced greatly at this spontaneous wish.

The Lord speaks one word and Peter obeys. He comes to the act of faith by climbing out of the ship and to a walk of faith by walking over the water. Walking on the water is a risky venture. But if it is based on the Lord's word "Come!", it is also a certain venture. Its foundation lies in the words "Lord, if it is you", that is to say the Lord Jesus Himself.

As long as Peter sees the Lord, things go well. Then comes the moment when his eyes wander away from Him and he sees the wind. At that moment fear strikes. It does not say that he sees the water he is walking on, but the wind that whips up the water. It doesn't matter much either, because it's just as impossible to walk on calm water as it is on rough waves. Faith is only strong when it sees only the Lord Jesus. When we look at the circumstances, faith becomes weak.

There is no support, no opportunity to walk if we lose sight of Christ. Everything depends on Him. The ship is a tried and tested aid to go over the sea, but only the faith that looks to the Lord Jesus can walk on water. Whoever walks on water once, as Peter does together with the Lord, is much better off than those who sit in a shaky boat that is about to collapse. For those who walk with the Lord on the water, it does not matter whether it is stormy or still.

When Peter begins to sink, he calls upon the Lord for help. The Lord responds directly to his cry of distress and saves him. He Who walks on water by His own power is there to support the faith and the wavering footsteps of the poor disciple. Faith has brought Peter so close to the Lord that His outstretched hand can lift him up. His cry for help sets the hand of the Lord in motion for his salvation, while his faith has previously set the hand of the Lord in motion for his support. Peter may have started to sink, but he has gained an experience that none of the others know.

The Lord's question regarding Peter's doubt is justified, for Peter's sense of purpose began when he no longer looked upon Him. Peter did not reach the ship in the same power of faith that led him to leave the ship. He climbs

aboard the ship together with the Lord. His falling short makes it clear that he reaches the goal only through the power of the Lord.

The outworking is, what it must always be, that the disciples honor the Lord. He is honored for His work of power over the elements and for His work of grace toward His beloved disciples.

Mt 14:34-36 | Healings in Gennesaret

34 When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. 35 And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent [word] into all that surrounding district and brought to Him all who were sick; 36 and they implored Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched [it] were cured.

The Lord has told His disciples in verse 22 to go ahead of Him to the other side. If He says this, then they will reach the other side. That happens here. When they arrive in Gennesaret, He exercises again the power that in the future will drive out all the evil from the earth that Satan has brought in. When He returns, the world will acknowledge Him.

At His arrival in Gennesaret, the Lord is recognized. The great Physician visits their area. Therefore, those who have already met Him before and seen Him at work let the whole area know that He is there. All those who are sick are brought to Him. Everyone who touches Him, even if only the fringe of His cloak, is completely healed.

Touching the fringe of His cloak has been the means of healing for a woman with an issue of blood before (Mt 9:20). The fringe of His cloak is the part of His cloak that is closest to the ground. It speaks of His humility. Whoever recognizes in this humble Man the goodness of God Who, in grace, receives the man who is aware of his need, finds complete salvation.

Matthew 15

Mt 15:1-6 | Tradition and the Commandment of God

*1 Then some Pharisees and scribes *came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, 2 “Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.” 3 And He answered and said to them, “Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 For God said, ‘HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER,’ and, ‘HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH.’ 5 But you say, ‘Whoever says to [his] father or mother, “Whatever I have that would help you has been given [to God],” 6 he is not to honor his father or his mother.’ And [by this] you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition.*

While the Lord shows mercy to many, the leaders break into this lovely scene to complain about outward appearances they have devised for their religion. They are totally blinded by legal forms to everything the Lord does. This Pharisaic attitude is observed in controversies that arise from traditions and general practices, but that are not based on the clear Word of God. They address the Lord because they regard what the disciples do as a transgression of tradition. They do not wonder what God’s Word says, but judge the disciples’ actions according to their own standards, which they find so particularly important.

The Pharisees and scribes have observed a transgression by the disciples of the Lord. That offense is that the disciples eat bread with unwashed hands. This is the hallmark of legalism. Legalism assesses a person solely on the basis of his outward actions. The Lord rejects their criticism by pointing out what they themselves do. What they do is incomparably worse than violating a human tradition. For they violate the commandment of God, and this for the sake of their tradition.

The traditions of the elders were originally intended as an interpretation of the Scriptures. But gradually they are equated with Scripture and have even become traditions that go against Scripture. These ‘tradition of the

elders' have degenerated into an addition to the Scriptures and into obligations that must be observed. In its spirit, tradition goes against the spirit of Scripture. The Lord denounces this principle. He accuses the Pharisees and scribes of breaking the commandment of God themselves.

He cites an example of a commandment that God has given and that they trespass. The commandment He cites is the commandment to honor father and mother (Exo 20:12; Deu 5:16). He also points out that the law says that whoever curses a father or mother must surely die (Exo 21:17; Lev 20:9). All the earthly blessings of the children of Israel depend on obeying this commandment. It is therefore a special commandment. Whoever honors father and mother will live a long life and therefore enjoy the blessing for a long time (Eph 6:2). Whoever does the opposite must be killed and will therefore no longer be able to enjoy the blessing.

After quoting the commandment of God, the Lord shows in a razor-sharp way how they have killed these two commandments of God. The Pharisees had come up with a handy way to put the money, which the members of God's people should actually use for their needy parents, in their own pockets. They had just added a commandment. The Jews only had to say to their father or mother: 'I have earmarked this money as a sacrifice for the temple.' Then, according to the law that the Pharisees had made on top, their obligation to take care of their parents would have lapsed and the money would flow into the treasury of the temple and thus into the pocket of the Pharisees. If a father or mother needed something, they could simply say that it was a gift to God, and so they would be released from the commandment to care for their parents and honor them in that way.

In this way the Pharisees have made the Word of God invalid for the sake of their tradition. Their traditions act as a veil over the true meaning of God's law. They no longer see what God has said. We must be careful not to fall into the same trap. We can gratefully use what ministers of God have said. If we make proper use of it, they will take us back to the source, which is Scripture itself. But it is not difficult to turn the teaching of the greatest servant into a kind of Talmud – a Jewish book with commentary from rabbis on the Old Testament. Then this teaching becomes a kind of fog, behind which the pure Word of God remains hidden.

Mt 15:7-9 | Judgment on Hypocrisy

7 *You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you:*

8 *'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS,
BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.*

9 *'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME,
TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'*"

The Lord exposes them as hypocrites and brings them under the destructive judgment of Isaiah (Isa 29:13). He points out that they worship God only with their lips. They speak fine words, but with their hearts they pursue their own advantage. They may imagine themselves in the presence of God, but in reality they are far from Him. The lips are the outside, the heart is the inside. The heart is the deepest being of man, from which all his thoughts, words and actions originate (Pro 4:23). God looks at the heart, man looks at the outward appearance. Their hearts remain completely cold under their religion.

Their whole religion, by which they believe they worship God, is in vain, empty, meaningless to God. A religion formed by the teachings that are commandments of men has nothing that is acceptable to God. On the contrary, God hates such a religion.

Mt 15:10-11 | What Defiles the Man

10 *After Jesus called the crowd to Him, He said to them, "Hear and understand. 11 [It is] not what enters into the mouth [that] defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man."*

What the Lord has said to the Pharisees and scribes is so important that He wants to say it to the crowd. He calls them to Himself and addresses them. He calls on them to hear and understand what serving God is really about. He teaches the crowd that defilement is not of a physical, outer nature. Defilement arises inwardly, in the heart, which is the deepest being of man and is spiritual in nature.

Mt 15:12-14 | The Disciples' Lack in Understanding

12 *Then the disciples *came and *said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?" 13 But He answered and*

said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. 14 Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit."

The disciples also feel a bit uncomfortable with these words. Even they have difficulty with what their Master says. Is it necessary to ruffle the feathers of the Pharisees in this way? They pay more attention to the reaction that the Lord's words provoke in the Pharisees than to the fact that they themselves take those words to heart. They too are still sensitive to what these religious leaders think of it.

The Lord knows that the Pharisees are of course offended by this teaching, which affects all their ceremonial rules at the root. In His answer to the disciples He makes it clear that He also knows why: they are not a plant that the Father has planted. Their annoyance is proof of that. The implanted word is not in their hearts (cf. Jam 1:21). They are weeds that must be uprooted. The disciples should not concern themselves with them, God will do that in His governmental dealings. The Pharisees are blind leaders, and they guide blind people. It is clear that both the leaders and those who are led will end up in the pit of destruction.

Mt 15:15-20 | Explanation of the Parable

15 Peter said to Him, "Explain the parable to us." 16 Jesus said, "Are you still lacking in understanding also? 17 Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? 18 But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. 20 These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man."

The disciples do not understand the Lord's teachings and ask Him through Peter to explain the parable. The cause of their incomprehension is that they still have too much respect for the teachings of the Pharisees. That has influence on their hearts. It is also difficult to be freed from Pharisaism in which outer forms are placed above inner purity. This Pharisaism is hidden inside all of us.

The Lord certainly wants to explain the parable to them, but He first reprimanded them, even though He does so mildly. Understanding His thoughts is a process that is slowed down by legalistic thoughts. He has great patience with us when our insight is lacking. But if we still see certain things in a legal way, when we should already have known better, He should reprimand us for it. For the legalistic minded person, insight comes slowly.

In His explanation He points to the natural process of food, that comes into the belly of man through the mouth. In the belly, substances that are not absorbed by the body are secreted and ejected into the toilet. This process has nothing to do with spiritual defilement. What really defiles a person is what comes out of his heart and leaves the body through his mouth. The 'mouth' here stands for what a person shows off and makes heard, as the Lord shows by His enumeration of all that comes from the heart. The mouth points to the whole behavior of man.

The Lord knows all that dwells in the heart of man. It is not all expressed by the mouth, but the mouth is the primary means by which sin comes out (cf. Jam 3:1-12). It all starts with evil, sinful deliberations which then lead to various sinful acts. Christ searches the heart.

He concludes His argument with the clear statement that the things He mentions really defile man. Equally clear is His rejection of the teaching of the Pharisees about eating with unwashed hands by His disciples about which they have addressed Him at the beginning of this chapter.

Mt 15:21-28 | The Canaanite Woman

21 Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and [began] to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." 23 But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us." 24 But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 25 But she came and [began] to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" 26 And He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." 27 But she said, "Yes, Lord;

but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." 28 Then Jesus said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once.

In the previous verses we see an oh so religious people whose hearts are in reality far from God. The Lord leaves the borders of Israel to visit places far removed from Jewish privileges. He goes to the countryside with the cities He has used as an example of those that are furthest removed from repentance (Mt 11:21-22). Here He meets a pagan woman who is outwardly far from God, but who is close to God in her heart. The woman comes from a cursed race because she is "a Canaanite". The emphatic 'Canaanite' underlines once again that she is under the curse as a great contrast with the people where God's blessing is.

She has a great need. Her daughter is cruelly demon-possessed and therefore she makes a call to the mercy of the "Lord". But she also speaks to Him as "Son of David" and that is not appropriate for this woman of the Gentiles. He is the Son of David, but not for her. He is that only for His people. She has to learn to approach Him on the right basis. She cannot speak as one of the people of God and on that ground God cannot help her. The Lord could not bless us either as Messiah of Israel.

The Lord does not answer her. It seems strange that He doesn't answer the cry of help from someone in need and calls Him. As said, the woman calls upon the Lord as the Son of David. As such He has nothing to do with this woman of the Gentiles, so He does not answer her. But He does not send her away and that is what the disciples want.

They want Him to send the woman away, "because", they say, "she keeps shouting at us". They would rather not have to deal with this woman and do not share the Lord's feelings. Therefore, He does address the disciples' remark. He points to the purpose of His mission. His mission concerns only the lost sheep belonging to Israel. He thus establishes that Israel is as lost as this woman is. There can only be hope for those who acknowledge it.

The woman will have heard what He has said. Therefore she goes on and on, for the Lord hints that everything is now based on grace, and then there can be no borders. The woman shows persevering faith. She only

asks if He wants to come to her aid in her distress. The answer the Lord then gives is even more dismissive if possible. First He said in veiled terms that she did not belong to Israel and was therefore not an object of His mission. Now He says in veiled words that she does not belong to the children of Israel, but to the nations whom He compares to despised dogs.

Then the effect of His words becomes clear. He achieves, by His apparent hardness, that the woman feels and pronounces her true place before God. She immediately takes that place, like a Mephibosheth who once assumed the place of a dead dog with David (2Sam 9:8). This does not mean that God is less good or merciful to her. That would be a denial of Himself, a denial of His nature, of which Christ is the expression. He cannot say: God has no crumb for such people. Crumbs are not thrown to the dog, but accidentally fall to the ground and remain lying there so that the dog can eat out of grace. No one who has ever appealed to the grace of God has done so in vain.

The Lord answers from the fullness of His heart. For the second time He perceives a great faith and this again with someone from the Gentiles (Mt 8:10). Both these Gentiles take a place of self-judgment. Both think low of themselves. Then there can be great faith. She receives everything out of grace, while she knows in herself to be totally unworthy. In this way and this way alone a soul can receive the blessing.

It doesn't just depend on the feeling of need. That has been there from the beginning, and it has brought her to the Lord. It is not enough to recognize that He can fulfil all needs. We must be made to feel in the presence of the only source of blessing that, although we are there, we have no right to enjoy it. Once one is there, everything is grace. Then God can act according to His own goodness and He responds to every desire of the heart to make it happy in fellowship with Him.

Mt 15:29-31 | The Lord Heals Many

29 Departing from there, Jesus went along by the Sea of Galilee, and having gone up on the mountain, He was sitting there. 30 And large crowds came to Him, bringing with them [those who were] lame, crippled, blind, mute, and many others, and they laid them down at His feet; and He healed them. 31 So

the crowd marveled as they saw the mute speaking, the crippled restored, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.

After His grace towards the Canaanite woman, the Lord goes to Galilee. Galilee is the area where He is connected to the despised remnant of the Jews. Here are the poor of the flock, while the nation are in deep darkness (Isa 9:1-2). He climbs up the mountain and sits down there. It radiates majesty and tranquility. God walks on His heights, He walks over the mountains (Mic 1:3). He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Yet He is there as Lamb. He is not frightening, but inspires confidence. His whole attitude of rest invites “large crowds” and gives them the opportunity to come to Him.

The crowds who come to Him bring with them all kinds of problems for which they don’t have a solution themselves. Many come to him with the “lame, crippled, blind, mute, and many others” and laid them at his feet. All their need they place at the Lord’s feet. So we may bring to His feet all those who move forward with difficulty in their walk (lame), are blind to the truth, or parts of it (blind), who have suffered under wrong doctrine (crippled), and do not honor God (mute). He heals them all. These are not fake healings.

The crowd brought all those who were sick to Him in the hope that He would heal them. Now that they have been healed, they still wonder. It must also have been an astonishing sight to see all those sick being so completely healed and that the results are immediately visible. It is a large healthy crowd praising the God of Israel. Yet it does not seem that they have seen the Lord Jesus as the God of Israel. Although He knew this, He still carried out His acts of mercy.

Mt 15:32-39 | Feeding of the Four Thousand

*32 And Jesus called His disciples to Him, and said, “I feel compassion for the people, because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way.” 33 The disciples *said to Him, “Where would we get so many loaves in [this] desolate place to satisfy such a large crowd?” 34 And Jesus *said to them, “How many loaves do you have?” And they said, “Seven, and a few small fish.” 35 And He directed the people to sit down on the ground; 36 and*

He took the seven loaves and the fish; and giving thanks, He broke them and started giving them to the disciples, and the disciples [gave them] to the people. 37 And they all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, seven large baskets full. 38 And those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. 39 And sending away the crowds, Jesus got into the boat and came to the region of Magadan.

We have here a second feeding, but with a very different character than the previous. In the feeding of the five thousand (Mt 14:13-21) the responsibility is emphasized, which is what we see in the number five representing responsibility. We see this also in the twelve baskets that remain there, because that represents government, and that is about the twelve tribes of Israel, as it will be exercised in the blessing of the kingdom of peace.

In this second feeding, four thousand men are fed. This is the Lord's grace for the whole world, which is present in the number four. We can think of the four points of the compass. It is something that is general, without borders. The seven remaining large baskets also declare it. The number seven represents perfection.

Another difference with the first feeding is that the surplus of the loaves is put in *large baskets* here, while it is put in *baskets* there. Large baskets are large, while baskets are small hand-baskets. It underlines that in this second feeding the emphasis lies on the richness of the grace that transcends the borders of the people of Israel and extends without borders to the ends of the earth, to all peoples.

It is also remarkable in the connection with the story of the Canaanite woman because, as in that story, here also it is about bread. The bread represents the Lord Jesus Who is the bread that gives life to the world (Jn 6:33-35). Here the disciples do not come to Him, as in Matthew 14 (Mt 14:15), but He acts in grace according to his own perfection and mercy. Therefore seven (the number of perfection) large baskets with broken pieces are collected.

The Lord sees the crowd of healthy people, but He also knows that they need food. He not only heals, but also takes further care of them. He knows how long they have been with Him and also knows that there is a chance that they will faint on the way if they go home without food. Therefore

He says that He does not want to send them away hungry. The disciples respond to His remarks. He hasn't asked them anything, but they feel that He expects something from them with His remarks. In this way we can also read God's Word and notice that the Lord expects something from us. Our reaction is often like that of the disciples. We observe the situation and notice that the Lord expects something impossible.

There is the same situation as with the previous feeding (Mt 14:13-21), but we do not notice that the disciples expect the Lord to act like this again. They show the lack of faith that we too often have. It is easy to remember how the Lord has acted in days passed, but it is something else to count on His actions today in the certainty that He is always the same.

But the lack of faith on our side is still no obstacle for Him to act. He engages again with the little they have. He tells them to take a look at what they have. They're done with that quickly. They have seven loaves of bread and a few fish. Without saying anything else, the Lord takes the initiative.

He orders the crowd to sit "on the ground". With the feeding of the five-thousand, they had to sit "on the grass" (Mt 14:19). The 'grass' indicates 'green pastures' where the Lord wants to bring His people and where He blesses them. The 'ground' is a general term and refers to the blessing that goes out to the nations. In both cases the "sitting" indicates that there must be rest to receive the blessing He is going to give.

Then He takes into His hands what the disciples have and brings it into connection with heaven by giving thanks for it. Then He begins to break it. It goes via heaven through His hands to the disciples and they give it to the crowd. It is a whole chain of blessings that originates in heaven and comes to the crowd. The Lord Jesus is the Distributor of the blessing of heaven and He involves His disciples. The result is that all eat and are satisfied and even seven baskets of broken pieces remain. That is how rich and abundant the blessing He bestows is.

Also here the number of the men is mentioned. The men are those responsible in their families. They provide leadership, and are expected to live out and present the Word of God, and to bear witness to the Lord's deeds, like those deeds He has just done.

After having satisfied the crowd in this wonderful way, He sends them away. He has provided them with bread, so that they will not faint on the way. What is more important is whether they have learned the lesson about Him Who has given them bread. It is to be feared that this is not the case. Yet that does not prevent the Lord from travelling on to another area to do His work there too.

Matthew 16

Mt 16:1-4 | The Request for a Sign

1 The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Jesus, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. 2 But He replied to them, "When it is evening, you say, '[It will be] fair weather, for the sky is red.' 3 And in the morning, '[There will be] a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot [discern] the signs of the times? 4 An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah." And He left them and went away.

When people come to the Lord, they can have very different motives. In Matthew 15 people come to Him (Mt 15:30), but with very different motives to the Pharisees and Sadducees here. There He helps, here He leaves them and goes away (verse 4). Pharisees and Sadducees are enemies of each other, but here these natural enemies unite in their resentment of Christ. They close ranks to stand strong to test Him. The Sadducees are the free thinkers of their day, while the Pharisees are the advocates of the statutes and authority of the law and especially of their own statutes and laws. Together they come to Him and long for a sign from heaven, while the greatest Sign ever given by God from heaven stands in front of them.

In His answer, the Lord points to the signs of nature. When they observe certain natural phenomena, they know exactly how to interpret them. In the evening they can see from the color of the sky that beautiful weather is coming. For those who can see spiritually, there is beautiful weather coming. The "Sunrise from on high" (Lk 1:78) has visited them in Christ. Similarly, they can see from the color of the sky whether a storm is coming. From a spiritual point of view, however, they cannot discern that bad weather is coming, that is, that God's judgment will come as a result of their rejection of God's Sign from heaven.

The Lord Jesus calls them "an evil and adulterous generation". They are "evil" in their hearts, in their minds. They are "adulterous" in their actions, their actions of unfaithfulness to their God. He gives them a sign.

The sign that He puts before them is what happened to Jonah. It is the sign of someone who disappeared from the earth, who disappeared from the Jewish people by death, as it were, and was given back to them after a while. It is the picture of death and resurrection. The Lord Jesus will act accordingly. He will go into death, but he will also rise out of death and then bring the message that Israel has despised to the nations. That is what Jonah did, and with that he is a picture, a sign, of what Christ will do.

Mt 16:5-12 | The Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees

5 And the disciples came to the other side [of the sea], but they had forgotten to bring [any] bread. 6 And Jesus said to them, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 7 They began to discuss [this] among themselves, saying, "[He said that] because we did not bring [any] bread." 8 But Jesus, aware of this, said, "You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread? 9 Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets [full] you picked up? 10 Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets [full] you picked up? 11 How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 12 Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

When the disciples have come to the other side, they notice that they have forgotten to bring bread. The Lord knows that they are concerned about this. However, He is concerned with other things. He is not concerned for their physical well-being, but for their spiritual well-being. He knows how sensitive His disciples are to the arguments of the Pharisees and Sadducees. So He warns them about this. He does this by using a metaphor that they should understand.

But the disciples are on a very different wavelength to the Lord. When He speaks of leaven, they immediately make the connection with the bread they have forgotten. They can only think of physical needs. When the Lord says something and Christians begin to reason, they never understand. That's because they start with man and then try to climb up to God. Good and healthy reasoning begins with God and ends with man.

The Lord notices both about what and how they are discussing with each other and asks a question about it. By calling them “men of little faith”, He also points out to them that they are wrong. We begin to discuss when we are not thinking of Christ. The Lord points this out in His answer. If they had thought of Him, they would not have concerned themselves with bread.

He reminds them of His feeding of the five thousand. He points out not so much what he did with the five loaves of bread, but how much remained afterwards. He not only provides, He gives in abundance. To impress His abundant provision upon His disciples He also reminds them of the seven loaves of bread which He used to feed many more than four thousand people and here too emphasizing what was left over.

They were present. They distributed the bread themselves and even collected the excess pieces themselves. They have been so closely involved in both miracles. Yet they are now so focused on the bread they have forgotten that they can only relate the Lord’s words to that. They should understand from the Lord’s reminder that He was not speaking about bread. After that He again says to watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees. Then the disciples understand what He meant. By leaven He meant the evil teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

In Scripture, leaven is always a picture of that which is wrong, which is sinful. The leaven of the Pharisees represents religious hypocrisy that places all emphasis on external and ceremonial acts. The leaven of the Sadducees is the intellectual pride that places the human mind on the seat of the judge and dismisses the revelation of God and faith with a hand wave.

Christianity is pervaded by this leaven. On the one hand we see ritualism and on the other hand rationalism and sometimes a mixture. In the letter to the Colossians, Paul warns us of rationalism, reason, as well as ritualism and formalism (Col 2:8; 2:16-22).

This warning from the Lord for this leaven immediately precedes His revelation regarding the church we hear from Him in the following verses. That is, we will not understand His revelation concerning the church in the following verses if we choke on one or other form of leaven.

Mt 16:13-14 | Who Do People Say That I Am?

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some [say] John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

The Lord's question directly concerns His Person and is at the heart of all other questions. It is a question to the disciples. He expects an answer to this from them as people who are familiar with the common opinions that are circulating about Him. He asks this question in an area that speaks of the heathen rule over the people and thus of the sinful state of the people and its discipline by God. "Caesarea Philippi" is named after Caesar, the emperor of Rome who also subdued the land of Israel, and Philip I from the family of Herod. In these regions, whose name so clearly indicates how much God's people have departed from God, the Lord Jesus will speak about the church.

But first he wants to hear from His disciples what kind of thoughts people have about Him. The disciples know that. From their answer it becomes apparent that the people make quite flattering comparisons from a human point of view. But in reality they are completely ignorant of Who He really is. All their thoughts are only opinions and have nothing to do with faith. It envelops man in uncertainty. It is the uncertainty resulting from indifference and the absence of conscious spiritual need of the soul that can only rest in the truth, in the Savior one has found.

This kind of people has a high opinion of Christ, but still falls infinitely short in the appreciation of His Person. These people form a second class, after the Pharisees who in their pride and unbelief reject the Savior. But there is a third class of people. It is found in Peter. These are the people to whom God reveals Who Christ is with faith given by Him.

Mt 16:15-16 | Who Do You Say That I Am?

*15 He *said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

Then the Lord's question is put directly to His disciples: Who do they say He is? This question is of the utmost importance to every disciple. Simon

Peter answers the question first. He confesses that Jesus is the Christ. Christ is to say Messiah as the One Who is the fulfilment of the promises of God and of the prophecies that have announced their fulfilment. He is the Messiah promised by God. Moreover, He is the Son of God according to Psalm 2. This is the confession of the Jewish remnant (Jn 1:49).

In addition, Peter confesses Him as the Son of the living God. With that he says that there is life in Him. Also connected with this is that He possesses life-giving power. To be the Son of the living God means that He Himself has this life. What is built on it cannot be affected by death or anything connected with it. The life of God cannot be destroyed. Everything is based on His Person. No one can understand the truth of the church unless He has first accepted the truth about His Person. In the following verses, the Lord Jesus begins to reveal the truth of the church.

Mt 16:17-20 | The Church and the Kingdom

17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal [this] to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." 20 Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.

Christ has provided enough evidence of Who He is. But all these proofs have clearly had no effect whatsoever on the heart of any human being. The revelation of the Father is the only way to know Who He is, and that goes far beyond the expectation of a Messiah. The Lord Jesus adds a new revelation on top of the Father's revelation to Peter. By saying "I also say to you" He places Himself on the same level as the Father. He and the Father are one (Jn 10:30). The Father has revealed something and now He will reveal something.

For this revelation, He uses the meaning of Peter's name in saying to him, "you are Peter". Peter means 'stone'. The Lord thus indicates that Peter is one of the stones that will be built on the rock, in Greek *petra*. We see in Peter's first letter that he made an allusion to the Lord in his name. In

it he writes about the believers as “living stones” which together form a spiritual house (1Pet 2:5).

The building of the church is still future here because the Lord says: “I will build.” This also makes it clear that the church does not exist from Adam. He further points out that this work of God cannot be disrupted by the power of the enemy. When it comes to man building the church, there is a possibility of disruption (1Cor 3:12-17). The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is proof that He is the Son of the living God (Rom 1:4) and that death has no power over Him. He Himself has the keys of death and Hades (Rev 1:18).

He gives Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven. These are not the keys of the church. The kingdom is shaped by people, while the church as presented here is God’s work alone. From the use Peter makes of the keys, we see that the kingdom and the church are two different areas.

We see Peter using the keys in Acts 2 to “loose” the Jews, that is, to free them from their Jewish environment (Acts 2:37-40). In Acts 10 he uses those keys to “loose” the Gentiles, that is, to separate them from their Gentile environment (Acts 10:44-48). Baptism is the gate through which they enter the kingdom of heaven. In Acts 8 he uses the keys to “bind” Simon the magician, that is, to bind his sins upon him (Acts 8:20-23). Although Simon the magician was baptized, he appeared to be bound to his sins, which is, as it were, confirmed by the action of Peter.

After these special announcements from the Lord, perhaps the disciples have a great desire to make Him known as the Christ. The Lord does not want that. The time for that has passed. The people have rejected Him. It is now about something else, namely the work on the cross. He presents this in the following verse.

Mt 16:21-23 | First Announcement of Suffering

21 From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. 22 Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “God forbid [it], Lord! This shall never happen to You.” 23 But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are

a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

After the revelation of His building of the church, the Lord Jesus speaks for the first time about His suffering, death and resurrection. He knows that this now lies before Him. If there is to be a church, He must first complete the work of redemption on the cross and also endure all the suffering that He will be inflicted upon Him in connection with it. To undergo all this he has to go to Jerusalem – and not to ascend the throne. He adds that He will be raised on the third day. His death is not the end. He wants His disciples to know that.

But Peter does not want to know anything about a suffering Messiah. This cannot be true and it may not happen! He even calls on God to forbid. Peter is still too concerned with the establishment of the kingdom here and now. By doing so he ignores the problem of the sins of the people. However blessed and honored Peter may be by the Father's revelation, his heart still operates in a carnal way with the human glory of the Messiah and in reality that of himself. He cannot rise to the height of the thoughts of God. He is not alone in that. It is one thing to be convinced of the most exalted truths and even sincerely enjoy them as truth. It is something else that the heart has absorbed and enjoyed those truths and that they lead to a walk that is in accordance with those truths.

The Lord recognizes the source from which Peter speaks. Peter allows himself to be used by satan, who wants to turn him away from the path of obedience. Satan can use him for this because he does not think of the things of God, but those of men. People shun suffering and want glory without suffering. With God there can be no glory on earth except through suffering.

Mt 16:24-28 | Following a Rejected Christ

24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. 25 For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man

is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. 28 "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

The Lord immediately connects to His rejection teaching for His disciples. He presents to them what it costs to follow Him. Following him costs someone everything. Whoever wants to follow Him must set himself and all his own interests completely aside. Then he must be prepared to suffer the reproach of the world. This is the meaning of "take up his cross". Both one and the other are presented by the Lord as a choice to His disciples. Whoever wants to follow Him will have to meet these two conditions. Only when he does this he can follow Him. No one is forced to do it, but if someone wants to, that is the cost.

Whoever wants to live for this life and thus keep his life, will not keep it in the end, but certainly lose it. If, on the other hand, someone surrenders his life to Him, he will find the true life that is only found and enjoyed in His company. What the Lord says here is always true, there is no escape: whoever wants to save his life *will* lose it; whoever loses his life for His sake *will* find it.

The Lord gives a consideration to make the choice easy. He wants that they and we think about it. Imagine that we win the whole world. How long can we enjoy it? At most a hundred years and then only very limited. For example, we may have an abundance of delicious food and jewelry, but our stomach has a limited capacity and our body can only wear a very limited number of pieces of jewelry. After all, there is death and eternity. When the soul is forfeited, eternal torment follows the short earthly pleasure.

The soul of a human being is the most precious possession he has. If he loses it forever, there is no means of exchange that frees him from eternal pain. The Lord points out with these words the importance of the soul. People should be concerned about this and not about the temporary pleasure of the world.

The Lord Jesus places the importance of the soul in the light of His imminent coming as the Son of Man to reward everyone according to his works. And He will not come alone, but His angels will accompany Him while He

is surrounded by the glory of His Father. Everything radiates majesty and splendor. Anyone who passes this by, and does not already bow in faith for the future majesty, is hurting his soul.

After these serious words, He has an encouragement for some of His disciples. These turn out to be Peter and James and John. They will see the Son of Man coming into His kingdom with their own eyes before they die. They will see it soon, for with these words the Lord is referring to the scene we have in the next section, the transfiguration on the mountain. What they will see there will encourage them to do their service for Him, no matter how great the opposition.

Matthew 17

Mt 17:1-3 | The Transfiguration on the Mountain

*1 Six days later Jesus *took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and *led them up on a high mountain by themselves. 2 And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.*

The Lord Jesus takes Peter, James and John up a high mountain. These three disciples are the “some” of the previous verse (Mt 16:28) to whom He said that they “will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom”. In the scene that follows, they get a taste of what it will be like when the Son of Man comes into His kingdom.

This event is introduced with the words “six days later”. Six days is the period of man’s ordinary working hours on earth (Exo 20:9). When the period of man’s activity is over, the seventh day, the day of rest, comes. The Sabbath, the seventh day, is a picture of the peace of the kingdom of peace. The transfiguration on the mountain gives an impression of this and these disciples are allowed to experience it. The Lord Jesus is the radiant center of that kingdom. All attention is directed to Him.

In the presence of the three disciples He is transformed. The Man Who is outwardly indistinguishable from other people, Who for the natural eye has no “[stately] form or majesty” (Isa 53:2), receives another, impressive, glorious appearance. His face shines like the sun. The sun is the picture of the highest dominion and has dominion over the day (Gen 1:16). He shall shine like this in the kingdom of peace, over which He shall rise as the Sun of righteousness (Mal 4:2).

Then what Zacharias, the father of John the baptist, prophesies when he speaks of “the Sunrise from on high” which will direct the feet of his people on the way of peace will become fully reality (Lk 1:78-79). His garments turning white as the light indicates that all the works of His rule throughout His reign will be perfectly clean and immaculate. He shall exercise this right in a completely transparent manner.

Peter understood all that later. He writes in his second letter that he and the other two disciples have “made known ... the power and coming of our Lord Jesus” as “eyewitnesses of His majesty”. He also writes about how they have experienced that the Lord Jesus received from God the Father “honor and glory” when “such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is My beloved Son with Whom I am well-pleased’”. All this happened when they were “with Him on the holy mountain” (2Pet 1:16-18).

While they are with Him on the mountain, Moses and Elijah appear to them. They do not appear to the Lord Jesus, for they have never been hidden from Him. They are always before Him. Moses and Elijah represent the two pillars on which the Jewish system rests. Moses is the founder of the people in connection with the law. Elijah is the restorer of the relationship between God and the people in connection with the law. The disciples have no problem recognizing them. We see here also that in the resurrection the distinction between persons is maintained, although the earthly relations are over.

Both men speak to the Lord Jesus. From the Gospel according to Luke we know that they speak with Him about the path He must tread to get to the kingdom of peace, of which they enjoy a foretaste here (Lk 9:31).

Mt 17:4-5 | The Father’s Testimony

4 Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” 5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!”

Peter does not yet understand much of the glory of the Lord Jesus here. In his enthusiasm he proposes to make three tents for the three persons he esteems very highly. In doing so, he falls far short of the glory of Christ. He mentions the Lord first, but he places Him on an equal footing with Moses and Elijah. He sees all three of them as people through whom God has spoken, without realizing that the Lord Jesus is the God of Moses and Elijah.

Peter also places himself too highly by talking about the fact that it is good that “we” are here. However understandable it may be that he wants to hold on to this scene, his words also indicate that he thinks only of himself and not of the other disciples. Above all, it indicates that he has no eye for the work that the Lord Jesus had yet to accomplish. The Lord has spoken about this, but Peter does not pay attention to it.

Then there is the voice of the Father who puts an end to all Peter’s misunderstandings. The Father testifies that Christ is His beloved Son and that He has found pleasure in Him. God is also pleased with people who do His will. However, people always fall short. The Son is the Person in Whom He has been well pleased for all time. The Son is the complete expression of the Father. In everything He does and says, He answers fully to Who the Father is. Therefore He is the Only One Who should be listened to. The only reason to listen to Moses and Elijah when they speak is that they pass on the Son’s words.

The voice of the Father comes from the “bright cloud” that overshadows them. The bright cloud is the same that was always present above the tabernacle. It is the cloud of the glory of God, also called *Shekinah* by the rabbis, the symbol of God’s dwelling place. Grace can place Moses and Elijah in the same glory as that of the Son of God and connect them to Him. If the ignorant man, in his ignorance, wants to place these three persons next to each other as if they have in themselves the same right to the heart of the believer, it is necessary that the Father stands up immediately for the rights of His Son.

Mt 17:6-8 | No One Except Jesus Himself Alone

6 When the disciples heard [this], they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. 7 And Jesus came to [them] and touched them and said, “Get up, and do not be afraid.” 8 And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone.

When the three disciples hear the voice of the Father who expresses the pleasure in His Son, they fall on their faces. However, this happens more out of fear than for worship. They are still too attached to the earthly glory to appreciate the heavenly glory. Then the Lord comes to them. He who

is used to this voice encourages them, as He always did when He was on earth, and says: "Do not be afraid." He Who is the pleasure of the Father is with them. So why would they be afraid?

When the disciples lift up their eyes again, Moses and Elijah are gone. They see no one else "except Jesus Himself alone". That is the purpose God has with our lives as well. He wants to take all support from and appreciation for people away from us, that we may be satisfied with the Son alone. The honor to which His Son is entitled cannot be shared with others. Christ is entitled to our undivided admiration and service. We must pray that God will give us an undivided heart (Psa 86:11).

Mt 17:9-13 | The Coming of Elijah

9 As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead." 10 And His disciples asked Him, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" 11 And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things; 12 but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." 13 Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.

After the moment of glory on the mountain, the Lord and His disciples descend the mountain again. The Lord is aware of the pleasure of the Father. He is the Son of the Father's love to Whom all glory belongs. He consciously distances Himself from the glory that is due to Him. He will receive it, but first He must go through death. The glory of God, the fulfillment of the Scriptures, and the blessing for creatures and creation depend on His death.

By descending the mountain again He shows that He is the true Hebrew slave, who says: "I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man" (Exo 21:5). He could have left as a free man because He had honored the Father in everything, but He chose to descend and go to Jerusalem, to the cross. Because of His love for His Father, for His church and for all God's children, He did not want to remain in the glory of the mountain, however much He was worth it personally. If He had remained

on the mountain, the Father's will would not have been completely fulfilled, and He would always have remained alone as Man in heaven.

When they descend the mountain again, the Lord commands them not to tell anyone the "vision" they have seen on the mountain. They may only do so after His resurrection. Only then will they receive the Holy Spirit, and only then can the content and scope of the vision be understood. There would be no point in telling others about this now because it would not be understood.

A difficulty arises in the mind of the disciples that relates to the vision they have just seen of the future glory of the Messiah. This difficulty is caused by the teaching of the scribes concerning Elijah. Elijah, so to speak, must come before the coming of the Messiah. They derive this thought from a statement by the prophet Malachi (Mal 4:5).

'Why,' the disciples ask the Lord, 'do the scribes say, that Elijah must come first, that is, before the revelation of the Messiah, when we have seen that You are the Messiah, without Elijah having come?' The Lord answers their question, He takes it seriously. He does the same with our questions.

The Lord answers that Elijah will certainly come first. The scribes are correct in this. He confirms the words of prophecy. At the same time, he adds that Elijah will restore all things. The effect of Elijah's coming is to restore all things. The Son of Man is also yet to come, that is to say, in glory. The Lord speaks about *that coming in glory*.

But before He will come in that way, it is necessary that He is presented to the people as the promised Messiah to see if the people will accept Him. Now He has come in humiliation to His people to test them. The result is that He is rejected, as God has prophesied in the prophets. Because John the baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Lk 1:17), the Lord Jesus can say that Elijah has already come. But also John as His forerunner (Isa 40:3-5; Mal 3:1; not: Mal 4:5-6) was rejected.

After this explanation, the disciples understand that in John the baptist Elijah has already come, but that the people as a whole did not listen to his message and were therefore not ready to receive the Messiah.

Mt 17:14-18 | Healing a Lunatic Boy

14 When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before Him and saying, 15 "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. 16 I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him." 17 And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me." 18 And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once.

After the high point on the mount of transfiguration, the Lord and the three disciples come down again. There someone comes to Him who falls to His knees before Him. It is someone who is in need. The experience of the glory has only been a short event. The reality of life presents itself again. The same goes for the lives of believers. They have their special moments of being close to the Lord, for example, in meetings. But when the meeting is over, they are again confronted with the reality of every day.

The man asks the Lord to have mercy on his son. He is a lunatic. This disease can be compared to epilepsy, a disease in which someone falls down suddenly. The boy has this disease to a serious degree and suffers a lot, because he often falls into the fire and often into the water. He falls down in the most wide-ranging situations.

Because the Lord was not there, the man brought his son to His disciples. He speaks of "Your disciples". He expected that they could help him because they are His disciples and were supposed to do what He did. But the disciples have failed. Here another characteristic of man's unbelief is seen, even of the believer, namely the inability to make use of the power at his disposal, so to speak, in the Lord. There is more faith present in the man who brings his child than in the disciples, because the feeling of need brought him to where there is salvation.

When the Lord comes in, fortunately everything changes. Before He acts in favor toward the father, He first reproaches the unbelief of His disciples. The same word that condemns the unbelief of the disciples calls the sorrowful father to the enjoyment of blessing. The Lord tells the man to bring his son to Him. To enjoy His power, we must be in fellowship with Him through the practical working of faith. We show this faith when we really

come to Him with our need. If we do that, we will see that He destroys the power of the enemy and provides for the need.

As long as this dispensation of faith continues, Christ never fails to respond to personal faith with blessing. This is even if His disciples cannot glorify Him because they lack faith. In accordance with his faith in Christ, the father receives his child back, cured.

Mt 17:19-21 | Cause of Failure

*19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not drive it out?" 20 And He *said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. 21 <But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.">*

The disciples go to the Lord to ask Him about the cause of their failure to heal the lunatic boy. That is a good thing. Thus we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Then He will indicate why it has come about that in our lives on certain occasions there was no faith to do anything in His Name. It is also good to take that place for Him now, already, so He can point out where the fault is with us.

The answer to His disciples makes clear what the problem is. It is about faith, that is to say trust in God that nothing is impossible for Him. Do I believe that? The slightest activity of faith in the heart is sufficient for the present difficulties. For faith, the power of the world, or any other established power, represented by "this mountain", will fade away.

Mt 17:22-23 | Second Announcement of Suffering

22 And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; 23 and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day." And they were deeply grieved.

The fame of the Lord gives Him a great following. Many gather together around Him. However, he does not want to be honored for His miracles, but for Who He is. Therefore He speaks for the second time about His suffering, death and resurrection. In the first announcement he speaks

about what *the Jews* will do to Him (Mt 16:21). Here He speaks about what “men”, the nations, will do to Him, the Son of Man.

His communication of His suffering causes sadness in His disciples. It shows their love for Him. But their sadness also shows that they think only of his death and not of his resurrection. They can’t understand the resurrection and therefore they pass it by.

Mt 17:24-27 | The Temple Tax

*24 When they came to Capernaum, those who collected the two-drachma [tax] came to Peter and said, “Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma [tax]?” 25 He *said, “Yes.” And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, “What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?” 26 When Peter said, “From strangers,” Jesus said to him, “Then the sons are exempt. 27 However, so that we do not offend them, go to the sea and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for you and Me.”*

When they come to Capernaum, Peter is overwhelmed by a question from “those who collected the two-drachma”, which is the annual temple tax. They ask him if his Master is paying. Because he knows his Master as a good Jew, Peter answers in the affirmative, without asking Him. He has forgotten the glory he has seen on the mountain and the revelation the Father has given him, and descended again to the ordinary level of his own thoughts.

The Lord knows what Peter said to the collectors. After all, he is the Omniscient. When Peter enters the house where He is, He seems to want to ask Him about it. The Lord, however, is ahead of him and has a question for him. The question is about the collection of collect customs or poll-tax by the kings of the earth. It is a question about everyday life and is about from whom the king collect customs or poll-tax. Do they collect customs or poll-tax from their sons or strangers, those who do not belong to their family? With His question the Lord Jesus says that He is the King of the earth and that He sees His disciples as sons of His kingdom.

Peter gives the right answer and that is that the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax from the strangers. Then the Lord says to him that the sons of kings are indeed free from paying customs or poll-tax. He as the King of His kingdom and His disciples as the sons of His kingdom would thus be free from paying customs or poll-tax. But because the time of the establishment of the kingdom has not yet come, He pays. He does so to prevent offense. Although He is the Son of God, He continues to take His humble place as a Jew in patience and submits Himself to the applicable regulations.

By a remarkable miracle He provides the right amount. Peter needs to work for it. He has to go to the sea to cast a fishhook. Then a fish will come up with a shekel in his mouth. This shekel is not immediately visible, but Peter will find it when he opens the mouth of the first fish that comes up. That shekel is the amount needed to pay the temple tax. As well as the Omniscient Christ is also the Omnipotent Who can do all things, Who ensures that a fish brings the right amount.

Peter is given the task to give that shekel to those who collect the temple tax "for you and Me". In paying the tax, that is to say in acknowledging the relationships that still exist among God's people, the Lord binds Peter to Himself. He is first, but He connects him with Himself. In this we see the way the sons of the kingdom are connected with Him in this time. They are connected with Him in the kingdom as it is now present on earth, which is in a hidden form.

We also see in what the Lord also says distinction. He doesn't say 'for us'. He maintains the distinction between Him and His own when He says "for you and Me". He is the King, His own are the sons. The same distinction can be seen in the message that the Lord has for His disciples through Mary after His resurrection. He does not say, 'I ascend to *our* Father and to *our* God,' but, "I ascend to My Father and your Father and My God and your God" (Jn 20:17).

Matthew 18

Mt 18:1-5 | Become Like a Child

1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, 3 and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me;

The Lord speaks in this chapter about two topics that we also find in Matthew 16: the kingdom and the church. This chapter is therefore in line with Matthew 16. Here we learn the practical meaning of the kingdom and of the church.

The Lord has just declared that His disciples are sons of the kingdom (Mt 17:26-27). Apparently that is still keeping their minds busy, because they ask Him a question about it. While they are concerned about who is the greatest, the Lord makes it clear that in the kingdom only the small count.

The first characteristic that fits the kingdom is that of a child. Children are weak and incapable of upholding their rights in the face of a world that overlooks them, for whom they do not count. In children we see the spirit of dependence and humility. The Lord calls a child to Himself. The child comes to Him without any fear, and to the men who are with Him. He sees only the Lord. He places the child in the middle of the men. He wants them all to see this child well.

When the child stands there in their midst and they look at him, they hear the voice of their Master Who says they must be converted and become like the children. If they are not converted and become like the children, it is certain that they will not enter the kingdom of heaven. In the absence of their rejected Lord, the spirit that characterizes children is the spirit that fits His followers.

Becoming like a child has, according to the Lord's judgment, consequences for the position in the kingdom. The great example of humiliation is He

Himself. We read about Him that He humbled Himself (Phil 2:8). He is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. With the child's example in mind, He tells His disciples that they must all do their best to be the greatest. There can only be one who is the greatest.

It's like what Paul says about winning a prize in a competition. The prize can only be received by one participant in the competition: the winner. What Paul is trying to do when using that comparison, we hear in his exhortation. He says that everyone must run in such a way that he obtains the prize (1Cor 9:24).

There is more to becoming a child than just a position in the kingdom. The Lord says that whoever receives such a child in His Name receives Him. This means that He identifies Himself with followers who reveal the mind of a child, for that is His mind. He does not stand up for His rights and is not in count. He is dependent and humble.

Mt 18:6-9 | Causes to Stumble

6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 "Woe to the world because of [its] stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! 8 "If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. 9 If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.

The Lord gives a serious warning to those who shake the faith that "these little ones" have in Him and in God. By "these little ones" not the children are meant, but the followers of Him with the characteristics of children. "A cause to stumble" is anything that can shake their confidence. The seriousness of the punishment makes it clear how close the little ones are to the heart of the Lord Jesus and how far removed from His heart those are who cause such little ones to stumble. To such a terrible person fits a terrible punishment which, as a side effect, makes it impossible for him to commit such a terrible act again.

Then the Lord will pronounce the “woe” to the world in which there will be many stumbling blocks. These stumbling blocks are necessary because they make it clear what there is in the world. The world is here the summary of the evil aimed at causing the little ones to stumble. The man through whom the stumbling block comes is the antichrist, the man of sin. In him the sin of the world is as it were concentrated and his only goal is to lead man away from God. This ‘woe’ is pronounced over the world and over that person. They will not escape their righteous judgment.

The sharp warning with a view to the stumbling blocks is also important for the disciple. He will come into contact with it. He may just be tempted to do something, “your hand”, or go somewhere, “your foot”, because the seducer presents something beautiful to him. A sinful act or a sinful way must be avoided at all costs. Therefore, the disciple must cut off his hand or foot without pardon, that is to say, say a radical ‘no’ to the stumbling block, ‘no’ to the temptation to commit a sinful act or to walk a sinful path, whatever the cost. Saying ‘yes’ will cost infinitely more.

The same goes for the eye. It is vital to keep the eye in check and not to give it the opportunity to look at something that would lead to sin. In Eve’s case, the eye was the stumbling block. The devil pointed out to her the tree from which God had forbidden man to eat. The devil managed to get Eve to look at the tree in *his* way and to arouse her desire to eat of it. She did not pluck out her eye, but took and ate, with all the terrible consequences of it (Gen 3:1-7). Therefore, we must remember that the loss of what is most precious to the disciple in this life is nothing compared to the horrors of eternal fire in the other world.

Mt 18:10-14 | Parable of the Lost Sheep

10 *“See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.*
 11 *<For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.>* 12 *“What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying?* 13 *If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he*

rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. 14 So it is not [the] will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.

The Lord means here by “these little ones” His disciples and not little children. In verse 6 and verse 10 He did not speak of children, but of ‘little ones’. ‘Little’ in this context is not about age or height, but has the meaning of ‘small’ or ‘humble’ and refers to ‘thinking little of oneself’. The angels here are the heavenly beings who permanently represent these little ones before the Father, or bring their existence to the Father’s attention.

What the Lord says here has given rise to the thought that every child has a ‘guardian angel’. It is certainly true that children have the special attention of the Father. It can even be deduced from Matthew 2 that the Lord Himself, as a child, enjoyed the protection of an angel (Mt 2:13,19). But enjoying special care does not mean that every child or person has a special angel with them to protect them.

If there is any talk of protection in this section, it is the protection of the Father and not of the angels. The little ones may be despised on earth, but heavenly representatives of these little ones are permanently in the immediate presence of God the Father. From this angels derive the authority of their service. Their service is for the little ones (Heb 1:14).

The Lord compares the Father’s care for the little ones with the shepherd’s care for a sheep that has strayed from the flock. With this picture He wants to make clear that in the kingdom there should also be care for each other. Is our concern for those who go astray? Are we looking for them? The shepherd follows the sheep until he has found it. If he has found it, it gives him great joy. He has made effort for this sheep. The other sheep did not need this care.

The Lord concludes His teaching to His disciples about the kingdom and children with the conclusion that their Father Who is in heaven does not want that any of the little ones, the small, those who do not count, to be lost. In that will, disciples must learn to share and commit themselves to bring back those gone astray.

Mt 18:15-20 | Church Discipline

15 *"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 But if he does not listen [to you], take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. 19 "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. 20 For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."*

This section of verses 1-14 deals with a little one and the kingdom. This section of verses 15-20 is about a brother and the church. Just like a little one can go astray, a brother can also go astray. Just as a stray little one must be brought back to the herd, a stray brother must be won.

If a brother goes astray by sinning against another brother, the brother against whom he has sinned must reveal the same spirit of gentleness as the Lord supposes in the case of a little one. He should not sit down and wait for the other person to confess his sin. He must go there himself and convince the brother of the wrong he has done and thus win him. He has to go alone. Nobody should know about it. If the brother listens and confesses his sin, the brother is won. Nobody knows about it and never needs to know because it is confessed and therefore gone.

However, it may happen that the brother does not listen. Then he has to take one or two brothers with him and look for the other. Thus there are two or three witnesses to the conversation that then takes place. The intention is that the brother, in the presence of one or two witnesses, will still be convinced of the sin he has committed. If he is convinced and confesses, the brother is also won.

However, if he does not listen, a report must be made to the church. However, it is necessary that the report is made by two or three witnesses, because only then is the report acceptable to the church. According to the report, the brother is visited for the third time, this time by a delegation

of the church. If he does not listen to the church either, the case is settled for him against whom sin is committed. For him the brother is no longer a brother, but he is like the Gentile and the tax collector with whom he cannot associate.

It is clear that the church cannot let the matter run its course. Maybe some more attempts can be made to bring the straying brother to repentance. If he persists in his sin despite all the loving efforts to win him, the church has the responsibility and the authority to bind sin to such a person. He must then be regarded as an evil one and remove him from among the church (1Cor 5:13). This very last act of the church seals the fact that any attempt to win the stray brother has failed.

By binding sin to the person, the person is surrendered to the Lord with the prayer that He will yet work repentance. The Lord Jesus also points this out when He then says that the church can also loose, that is, loosening sin from the person. This happens when the person confesses his sin and the church pronounces forgiveness over it and accepts him again in its midst. These acts of discipline by the church of binding and loosing are recognized by heaven. The church must therefore know well that what it does in this respect must have the consent of heaven. She can only convince herself of this if she acts according to the Word.

In order to know for sure whether an act of binding or loosing will be acknowledged in heaven, any act of discipline must be the result of unanimous prayer to the Lord. The whole church must ask the Lord for His will. The Father will make His will known through His Word. Therefore, a church must be able to base a disciplinary action on God's Word.

It is a disciplinary act of the church and not one of some random believers. All believers belong together. However, it is not just about *belonging* together, but really *being* together. The power of prayer and the action of the church do not depend on the number, but on His Name, that is the Name of the Lord Jesus.

It is important to read the Lord's words about His presence in the middle of the two or three in the context in which they stand. From verse 15 it is about sin in the church and how to deal with it. After the various steps, sin must be made known to the church.

The church here cannot be the entire church on earth. It must be the local church. For example, the Bible speaks of “the church of God which is at Corinth” (1Cor 1:2). That is, the believers are the church of God there. They also come together as a church (1Cor 11:18,20) to celebrate the Lord’s Supper and to encourage and build each other up in the faith (1Cor 14:23,26).

There are many privileges attached to the meeting of the church. How important and blessed it is to come together as believers with Christ in the midst, we see with the Lord Himself. After His resurrection from the dead, His first thought, spoken with reverence, is to be with His assembled disciples (Psa 22:22-23; Jn 20:19-20; Heb 2:11-12).

As said, there are also responsibilities connected to it. One of them we find in this section is the exercise of discipline. The context shows that it is about the church and it is in connection with it that the Lord Jesus speaks about being gathered in His Name. We can conclude from this that the Lord Jesus connects His presence to the church in a special way when she comes together.

Certainly He is always with each of His own. According to His promise He will be that “always, even to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). Here, however, it says that He is in the middle of the two or three that have met in His Name. That’s something else than His nearness that every believer may experience anytime and anywhere – and what a tremendous encouragement that is!

Before the Lord says “I am there in their midst”, He first speaks of being gathered in His Name. He attaches His personal presence to the condition of being gathered in His Name. He talks about the smallest possible number – “two or three” – to be able to be gathered.

He says more. It is not just a meeting of two or three believers. Believers can gather anywhere and for many purposes, but that does not mean that wherever believers meet, this is a gathering of which the Lord says they are ‘gathered together in My name.’ What does it mean to be gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus? It means that those who have come together have all come because they know that this gathering is only about the Lord Jesus. His Name is the center.

To come together in His Name means to give Him full authority in the gathering. He exercises that authority through His Word and through His Spirit. All those who are together there want to acknowledge that. No one who would like to be with the Lord Jesus may be refused. All those who belong to the church and are pure in doctrine and life and reject any connection with evil have access to it. This does not mean that everyone who says he is a believer should be received. In this section we see exactly how there should be care in the case that sin becomes public in the church. Then it is clear that from an unknown person who comes, it must be determined that he is not connected with sins.

An important aspect here is that no one may enter into the Lord's rights and set their own conditions for those who come. And someone who comes may not demand to be received on the basis of his own conditions. It is both contrary to the spirit of grace and the sense of forgiveness that characterize this whole chapter.

It is also important for the church that this gathering is not governed by its own rules. Everything is in the hands of the Lord and the Word is the unchanging touchstone. When believers come together in this way, aware of their weakness in the practice of coming together, the Lord says that He is in the midst.

Mt 18:21-22 | Question About Forgiveness

*21 Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus *said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.*

After the Lord has spoken of one who has sinned against another (verse 15), the next section is about the one who has been sinned against, how his attitude and mind should be. The occasion for this teaching is a question from Peter. The Lord's answer to that question makes it clear that the spirit of forgiveness must characterize us.

Peter makes a proposal himself, which he undoubtedly thinks goes far. Will he forgive his brother up to seven times? The Lord answers that this is totally inadequate. By speaking of "seventy times seven", He emphasizes

that there is no end to forgiveness when it is asked for. Forgiveness should always be in the heart of the Christian (Eph 4:32).

Mt 18:23-35 | Parable About Forgiveness

23 *“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 When he had begun to settle [them], one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25 But since he did not have [the means] to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. 26 So the slave fell [to the ground] and prostrated himself before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.’ 27 And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and [began] to choke [him], saying, ‘Pay back what you owe.’ 29 So his fellow slave fell [to the ground] and [began] to plead with him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you.’ 30 But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. 31 So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. 32 Then summoning him, his lord *said to him, ‘You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?’ 34 And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. 35 My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.”*

The Lord illustrates with a parable which attitude and mind should characterize the subjects in the kingdom for the sake of forgiveness. He presents the situation that a king is settling his accounts with his slaves. A slave is brought to the king who owes him the enormous sum of ten thousand talents. If we convert this into the euro, we will arrive at a figure of 3 billion euros.

The calculation is as follows. A denarius at that time was the wages of a day laborer (Mt 20:2). On 1 January 2008, the gross minimum daily wage for a person aged 23 or over was €61.62, which is slightly more than €50.00 net. For the sake of convenience, let’s assume €50.00. A talent is six thou-

sand denarii, which is equivalent to €300,000.00. The slave owed his lord ten thousand talents. That is the equivalent of €3,000,000,000,000.00 or 3 billion euro.

The man can't afford this. He cannot even make a deposit because he has nothing. In order to still be able to collect some of the debt, his lord orders him to sell him with his wife and children and all that he still has in his possession.

When the slave hears that, he throws himself prostrate before his lord and begs him to be patient with him until he has paid everything. This statement alone proves that the man has no idea how big his debt is and how impossible it is to pay it. If he had indeed wanted to pay his debt, he would have to work 164,383.56 years [$€3,000,000,000.00 / (365 \text{ days} * €50.00)$] day in, day out, without a rest day and without being able to spend one cent for what he himself would need.

Although the Lord of the slave recognizes his slave's bluff and knows that his slave will never be able to pay him, he relieves him of all that debt. He does so out of his compassion for the hopeless situation of his slave.

It is extraordinarily disillusioning to see in the next scene how the slave, who has been remitted of an enormous debt, is acting toward a fellow slave who owes him the relatively small sum of a hundred denarii, that is €5,000.00. The mercilessness drips off. It is as if he immediately went looking for that fellow slave who is still a little in debt to him, because he "found" him. The grace shown to him has no effect on him. Instead of telling his fellow slave in the utmost gratitude what has happened, what burden has been taken away from him, he grabs his fellow slave by the throat and demands payment of the debt.

His fellow slave does the same as he did to his lord. The fellow slave falls down and begs him for patience until he would have paid. But this slave does not have that patience, for he has not been impressed by the way in which his lord has acted toward him and by what he himself has been forgiven. It is not about him forgetting it, but it has done absolutely nothing to him. He is not changed by it. This is the greatest ingratitude imaginable. Such ingratitude shows the hardness of heart.

When his fellow slaves see this, they are deeply grieved. They do not understand how this is possible. Instead of taking the law into their own hands, the fellow slaves do the only right thing. They go to explain to their Lord everything that has happened. We should do the same when we notice that there is no sense of mercy in an action. Then we can do nothing better than tell our Lord, with deep grieve in our hearts because of the hardness of a fellow slave.

When the lord hears about it, he has his slave summoned. It is his slave and he can do with this slave what he sees fit. He calls him "wicked slave". That is what the man made of it himself by his actions. The lord recalled that he had remitted him all that debt because the slave had begged his lord. His lord also tells him that the grace shown to him should have determined his attitude toward his fellow slave.

This is important to us. We have been given great mercy by God Who has forgiven us our sins. We had a debt to God that we were unable to pay. Now that God has forgiven us this guilt, He expects us to show the same mercy to our brothers and sisters.

Such an attitude of ingratitude towards his lord, resulting in no mercy towards his fellow slave, causes anger in the lord of that slave. He hands over his slave to the torturers until he would have paid his debt, as he had said. That means eternal torture, for he will never be able to pay that debt. The Lord Jesus attaches to the parable the serious lesson that we must forgive our brother from our heart, otherwise our part will be the same as that of the evil slave.

Matthew 19

Mt 19:1-2 | From Galilee to Judea

1 When Jesus had finished these words, He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan; 2 and large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there.

This chapter speaks even more about the spirit of humility that is appropriate for the kingdom of heaven. This spirit is brought forth by the Lord in three encounters. These three meetings are about what comes from God and what dominates human nature: marriage, the child and the character of a young man. With the young man the condition of the heart of the human being is also exposed. It is about what is of God in the old, or first, creation that is totally corrupted by man's sin. At the same time they are things that keep their validity in the kingdom of heaven, where the Lord indicates how they should function according to the will of God.

The Lord Jesus finishes "these words", which are the words He spoke in the previous chapter about forgiveness, words of eternal life. He has spoken and finished them, but their value remains, is eternal and necessary to put them into practice in the present. They are words of blessing, but also of warning.

Then His service in Galilee, His third round trip in that area, is also finished. He crosses the Jordan – the Jordan is a picture of His death and resurrection – and enters the area of Judea. There too, many crowds follow Him and heals them there. He reveals His grace to all who need it.

Mt 19:3-9 | Marriage: Inseparable

3 [Some] Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful [for a man] to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" 4 And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created [them] from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, 5 and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? 6 So they are no

longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." 7 They *said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND [her] AWAY?" 8 He *said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. 9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

While the Lord works in grace, the Pharisees try to test Him in order to accuse Him. They want to eliminate Him at all costs. How hardened their heart is! They come to Him with a question about divorce. Their question is intended as a trap for Him to walk into. But their intent failed completely because they dare to measure themselves against Divine wisdom.

The Lord refers them directly to the Word of God. Did they not read how God made it in the beginning? Scripture answers all questions, including those of unbelief. That is why we too must always ask ourselves, with every question: 'What does Scripture say?' The Lord, as always, sets a perfect example here too.

He does not wait for an answer. He does not let them look the answer up. Nor does he appeal to their memory to quote it, but He Himself quotes the Word of God completely. As the perfect Interpreter, He also gives the unambiguous explanation of the verse He quoted and the attached fixed conclusion. There is no doubt that marriage unites two people into a perfect unity. That is how God made it. That is the clear explanation. His equally clear conclusion is: do not let man take it into his mind to separate that unity made by God! God hates divorce (Mal 2:16).

The Pharisees do not give in. It seems as if they have taken His answer into account. They think they've got Him stuck now. Triumphantly they refer to Moses. Who would dare to oppose Moses? Didn't Moses command that a certificate of divorce should be given and she should be sent away? Then it is possible to send her away, isn't it? They fold their arms with great self-satisfaction. They have this nicely done.

The fools. They are dealing with Divine wisdom that also knows the hardness of man's heart. In view of this hardness, Moses "permitted" – and did not give a *commandment*, as they suggest – to divorce their wives. Then the

Lord again refers to the beginning. Never will it be possible for a sinful act of man to destroy what God has given in the beginning.

The Lord speaks of 'permitted' and not of 'did command' as the Pharisees have said. Moses *permitted* something. The law is good in itself, but cannot communicate goodness. The law is perfect for the purpose for which God has given it, but it cannot bring anything to perfection. Through the law the hardness of man's heart has become apparent. This hardness is also evident in his marriage. In view of this hardness, Moses allowed someone to send his wife away. But then he had to give her a certificate of divorce with the reason for the divorce.

With the words "and I say to you," in which the divine authority of His Person resounds, the Lord continues His teaching on divorce. Divorce or sending away is a bad thing. Anyone who thinks he can rid himself of the inextricable bond of marriage and therefore also thinks he is free to enter into that inextricable bond with another person, is very wrong. He commits adultery. The same goes for someone who marries the divorced woman, because this divorced woman is still inextricably linked to her husband.

The exception "except for immorality [or fornication]" concerns the case of someone who is betrothed. An example of this we have with Joseph and Mary who were betrothed. When Joseph notices that Mary is pregnant, he considers to secretly send her away (Mt 1:18-19). If someone is betrothed, there is a permanent connection, but the official marriage has not yet taken place. In the case of Joseph and Mary, who were betrothed, sending away was permitted. God does not blame Joseph for this, but lets him know what is really going on. Then he doesn't send her away.

There is a misunderstanding that I would like to point out. This is the idea that someone who marries someone who is divorced lives continuously in adultery. This error is based on a misinterpretation of what is written in verse 9. In practice, this teaching causes great spiritual distress, as I have seen in contacts. I therefore asked a New Testament expert in Greek what is literally in Greek.

He writes:

The texts we talked about in our telephone conversation tonight are Mt 5:32 and Mt 19:9. Both places state ‘moichatai’, or ‘commits adultery’. In the vision that you and I reject, one concludes from the present tense ‘moichatai’ that the man or woman in question is permanently living in adultery and therefore permanently sinning.

This is a misunderstanding. It is based on an erroneous view of the significance of the *aspect* of the present tense, namely that this form of tense would indicate something permanent, something continuous. However, the present tense is without aspect to the extent that it is *always* marked / limited by / the direct context.

This means that in Mt 5:32 the form ‘commits adultery’ is limited by the immediately preceding ‘who marries a divorced woman’ – the conclusion is therefore that the *marriage* may not take place because it has the character of adultery. In Mt 19:9 it says that whosoever divorces his wife, except for immorality [or fornication], and marries another woman commits adultery. Again the same: *this specific marriage* may not take place, because it has the character of adultery. In short: such a marriage is not allowed, but it is possible.

Is there marriage or not? Yes, there is a marriage, and that should not have been taken place. That *marriage* was the mistake, and it must be confessed as sin. But that does not mean that this wrongly concluded marriage must be dissolved. Compare it to a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever: it should not have been made, but *it is in force*; it may *not be dissolved* (see the teaching on this subject + on divorce in 1Cor 7:10-15). [End of quote]

This answer is illuminating and can free you from a spiritual struggle or compulsive situation. A person who, through this wrong doctrine, is in spiritual distress because of the situation in which he finds himself, can experience, by accepting the truth of God’s Word, that the truth sets free (Jn 8:31-32).

Mt 19:10-12 | The Unmarried

10 The disciples *said to Him, “If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.” 11 But He said to them, “Not all men [can] accept this statement, but [only] those to whom it has been given. 12 For there

are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are [also] eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept [this], let him accept [it]."

Time and again it becomes clear how the disciples are still under the influence of thinking by legal standards. They think the Lord is only radical. If marriage is so coercive and restrictive, you better not marry, they argue. There must be a little room to put an end to it if there really is no other option. That's what the disciples think and so also many Christians today. They will not say it in this way, but the exception clause is for them an alleviation of what they consider to be the overly major implication of the inviolability of marriage.

It is also a word that is not easy to understand. Not all can accept it. Only those who have to do with it will understand what the Lord means. He proposes three situations in which someone does not get married:

- A person may be unfit to marry by birth, for example because of a certain physical or mental disability.
- Someone may also have been made unfit by people to marry. These are those who have been castrated or dismembered.
- The third category remains unmarried on the basis of a personal, voluntary choice. Someone does this to serve the Lord with soul and body, without needing to worry about the obligations of marriage (1Cor 7:37).

Mt 19:13-15 | Children Blessed

13 Then [some] children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. 14 But Jesus said, "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." 15 After laying His hands on them, He departed from there.

Following on from what the Lord Jesus said about marriage, children are brought to Him so that He might bless them. Marriage and children belong together. Children are a blessing. They are brought to Him for the purpose of His laying hands on them and praying. Mothers come to the

Lord Jesus because they see in Him the great Friend of children He really is. The disciples do not share in His feelings for children. They rebuke the mothers as if they were busy with the wrong work, a work of the evil one.

How far the disciples are from the heart of Christ. They have more important pursuits and experience children as a disturbing element in their important work for the Lord. The disciples reveal the spirit of the world because they want to send the children away as meaningless beings. They have not yet understood the Master's earlier lesson (Mt 18:1). Even today, Christian couples may believe that children are an obstacle to serving the Lord. That is why they take measures not to have children. But by rejecting the blessing of children, they – possibly unconsciously – act against the spirit of Christ.

The Lord reprimands His disciples. He says once again how important children are, for it is they who will be in the kingdom of heaven where He reigns. In the previous section we saw the Pharisees. They are led by evilness and hatred. Here we see the disciples. They are guided by self-interest and ignorance about Him.

The Lord blesses the children. Those children will not have been aware of it, but what must their lives have been affected by that blessing. Eternity will reveal it.

Mt 19:16-22 | A Request for Eternal Life

*16 And someone came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" 17 And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is [only] One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." 18 [Then] he *said to Him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS; 19 HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 20 The young man *said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?" 21 Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go [and] sell your possessions and give to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and*

come, follow Me.” 22 But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.

In the third story of this chapter we see a young man with a sincere character. A sincere character is something that we can appreciate as a goodness from God, even though – and that goes for anyone who reveals this sincere character – he is by nature a sinner. The young man who comes to the Lord with a question has such a character.

He introduces his question with “Teacher”. The young man calls the Lord Jesus ‘Teacher’ because he sees in Him Someone from Whom he expects to be able to learn something. But despite acknowledging in the Lord One Who stands above him, he sees in Him no more than a man. If He is no more than Teacher, the young man falls short. The Lord therefore does not accept the title of address. He rejects it and refers to God as the Good. He is that Himself in Person.

The young man’s question shows that he believes that by doing something he can earn eternal life. For him, eternal life is what the Old Testament means: to live forever on earth (Psa 133:3; Dan 12:2). However, he must find out that this can only be obtained by faith.

He receives the appropriate answer from the Lord, who refers to the commandments of the Old Testament. According to the Old Testament, eternal life can be earned indeed by keeping the law. The summary of the law is: ‘Do this and you shall live’ (Lev 18:5; Lk 10:25-28). If the young man kept the law, he would enter life, that is, he would enter the atmosphere where eternal life is experienced.

Then he asks which commandments he should keep. This question betrays an approach to the law that the law does not allow, namely that there are important and less important commandments. James says that whosoever stumbles over one commandment is guilty of all (Jam 2:10). To meet the young man, the Lord mentions a number of commandments. However, it is precisely those commandments that a human being can by nature keep. They are commandments that relate to the relationship with one’s neighbor. Although loving one’s neighbor should be a matter of the heart, it can be kept as an outward commandment, without saying anything about what is inside.

In all sincerity, the young man answers that he has kept all the commandments mentioned by the Lord. It seems that he is not presenting himself better than he is, for the Lord does not dispute that he has kept these things. Yet the young man says he still lacks something. Keeping these commandments has not given him what he really seeks. When asked what he still lacks, the Lord does not answer with another commandment from the law, but with a test that makes it clear that he cannot keep the law. It is the commandment: You shall not covet. This test will reveal what is really in his heart for his neighbor. This test is about his possessions.

The Lord tells him to sell his possessions. He should not keep the money he receives for this, but give it away to the poor. Then his relationship with the poor, the love of his neighbor, will be as God intended. The question is whether the young man wants to have eternal life at all costs and wants to have that in connection with following a rejected Lord. By the way, the Lord promises a great thing. He asks to give up everything, but He gives back incredibly more in return. If he were to do what the Lord says, he would get even more than eternal life on earth, namely a treasure in heaven. As for the earth, the Lord invites him to come to Him and follow Him.

Indeed, the condition mentioned by the Lord reveals what is really in His heart. This word grieves him and makes it clear that his heart hangs on his possessions. A rich person can be honest and yet be attached to earthly things. He chooses for his possessions and thus against the Lord, for he goes away from Him. The Lord has exposed the selfishness, the covetousness, in the heart of the young man. His request was to do something great, but it was a matter of personal interest. All the benefits of the flesh that this young man possesses become a reason not to follow Christ. He loves his possessions more than the Lord.

This uncovering of the heart can only be done by the Lord. He does this not only with this young man, but with each of us. Thus we are by nature, without connection with the grace of God. The apostle Paul shows us how we are saved from it, both in his teaching and in his practice. Like this young man, he was in relation to the law irreproachable. He said, 'I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, You shall not covet' (Rom 7:7b).

This last commandment of the ten made him realize what was in him. It showed that however impeccable he was in appearance, inside he was corrupt. Nothing could save him from this depravity but the death of Christ. By grace he has seen this, as he says to us: "For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God" (Gal 2:19). In his life thereafter he has shown what the Lord asks of the young man (Phil 3:4-10).

Mt 19:23-26 | With God All Things Are Possible

23 And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I say to you, 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 When the disciples heard [this], they were very astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?" 26 And looking at [them] Jesus said to them, "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Following the young man's departure, the Lord addresses His disciples with a word about being rich. He tells them that for many rich people, having many possessions is an obstacle to entering the kingdom of heaven. It is oh so difficult for a rich man to renounce his wealth. How difficult that is is shown by the fact that He wants to bring this to their attention with a sharp example.

The eye of a needle was at that time the smallest imaginable opening, and the camel the largest imaginable animal. Therefore it was unrealistic to think that something very big – a camel – could go through the eye of something very small – a needle. This would only be possible if there were a miraculous change, in which the camel would become smaller or the eye of the needle larger. Christ uses a typically oriental picture and it is precisely because of this contrast that he depicts an impossibility.

When the disciples hear this, they are surprised. For them this means that no one can be saved. A rich man lives for them clearly in accordance with God's law, for his wealth proves that God's favor is on him. Wealth is a proof of Divine blessing in Judaism. Therefore the disciples do not understand the scope of the Lord's words and cannot hide their amazement about them.

In this chapter they always show their difficulty with His teaching (verses 10,13,25). Their difficulty arises because He places the Jewish views of His disciples on marriage as well as on children and property in a different light, namely the light of the kingdom of which the King is rejected.

The Lord does not answer their question of who can be saved by saying that it is *difficult* for people to be saved, but that it is *impossible*. It is not possible for people to work on their own salvation. But that is not why it is hopeless, because with God it is possible. There must be a work of God to make this happen. Man always reveals his nature and it is impossible for him to change anything about it, just as an Ethiopian cannot change anything about being black and a leopard cannot change anything about his spots (Jer 13:23). It is their nature. But God can make that change.

In other words: it may be impossible for a person to come to God, but this does not mean that God is not able to come to man. In Christ He came, and on the cross Christ accomplished the work that no man could ever accomplish. Our Lord Jesus Christ was actually rich and became poor for us, that we through his poverty might become rich (2Cor 8:9). This is not possible with people, but it is possible with God!

Mt 19:27-30 | The Disciples' Portion

27 Then Peter said to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?" 28 And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life. 30 But many [who are] first will be last; and [the] last, first.

The event with the young man reminds Peter that they have left everything and followed the Lord. He is curious about the reward and asks Him about it. The Lord assures His disciples that their choice to follow Him will be richly rewarded. Now there is still rejection, but soon He will reign and then they may reign with Him. The throne and the twelve thrones speak of this. His throne is the throne of His glory, the throne that shall be

established on earth in the glory of the kingdom of peace, when His glory shall cover the earth as the waters cover the bottom of the sea (Isa 11:9).

The thrones they will sit on relate to their reigning over Israel, that is to say their government over Israel. They will be distributors of blessings to Israel. That time of His reign and of their reign with Him the Lord calls "the regeneration". This is seen in the regeneration of the earth. When creation is freed from the curse of sin (Rom 8:19-21), the earthly realm is renewed, born again (Psa 104:30b).

Whoever gives away something to follow Christ will receive many times as much. It is not a question of compensating, a reimbursement of costs, but an abundant wealth as a reward for the little that has been abandoned. That will be enjoyed in the atmosphere of eternal life. That will be their life. That is the life that the rich young man wished for, but that he turned his back on because he did not follow Christ.

The Lord teaches that those who claim the blessing through external privileges will not receive it because of their wrong attitude towards Him. On the contrary, the blessing will go to those who had no part in it. They will inherit the blessing by sovereign grace. The Lord elaborates on this lesson in the following parable.

Matthew 20

Mt 20:1-7 | Laborers for a Vineyard

1 *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2 When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; 4 and to those he said, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ And [so] they went. 5 Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing. 6 And about the eleventh [hour] he went out and found others standing [around]; and he *said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day long?’ 7 They *said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He *said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’*

The parable that the Lord pronounces here is in line with Peter’s demand for the reward for following Him. This is already apparent from the word “for” with which the parable begins. This is also shown by a comparison between the last verse of the previous chapter and verse 16 of this chapter. In His answer to Peter, the Lord pointed out that many of the first will be the last, and the last the first (Mt 19:30). He will explain this in this parable of the kingdom of heaven, which He then concludes in verse 16 as follows: “So”, that is: in this way, “the last shall be first, and the first last.

In this parable, the Lord establishes the principle of the grace and sovereignty of God towards those whom He calls. He also makes it clear that what He gives to those He sends into His vineyard depends on His grace and calling. The important point in this parable is the trust in the grace of the Lord of the vineyard and that that grace is the starting point for the treatment of those who go into the vineyard.

It is a parable of the kingdom of heaven. This means that in the parable it is made clear how things operate in the kingdom of heaven. It is not a parable that shows how sinners are converted. This parable is about those who have a relationship with the Lord Jesus and are called to service by Him. In this, He acts sovereignly, as well as in rewarding the workers. He will

acknowledge every service that is done and every sacrifice that is made for His cause without exception. At the same time, He will also maintain His own right to express that recognition as He wills. He has the right to give to those who may have done nothing according to us.

The lord here is a lord of the house [landowner is also translated as householder (Darby Translation)], which also connects the idea of a house to the kingdom. This lord got up early and goes looking for workers for his vineyard. With the first batch of workers he negotiates. These workers enter the vineyard after an agreement has been made with them. The workers go to work in the vineyard for the agreed wage.

The lord of the house can use even more workers. He sees people who have nothing to do. He goes to them to say that they too should go into the vineyard, with the promise that he will give them “whatever is right”. This group of workers goes into the vineyard without agreement, but in trust on the pledge of the lord. Then, for a third and fourth round, the lord goes outside again and acts in the same way. He is constantly calling people to work in his vineyard. Each time he goes outside.

Even at eleven o’clock, when the day is almost over, the lord goes outside. Again he finds people who are doing nothing. Before he sends them into his vineyard, he asks why they have been unemployed all day long. His question shows that he knows their past. Their answer demonstrates passivity. They are not like Ruth who herself looks for work wherever she can find it and counts on the favor of the land owner (Rth 2:2). Yet the Lord sends them into His vineyard. This last batch of workers enters the vineyard without any commitment.

Mt 20:8-15 | The Payout

8 “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard *said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last [group] to the first.’ 9 When those [hired] about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius. 10 When those [hired] first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. 11 When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, 12 saying, ‘These last men have worked [only] one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the

burden and the scorching heat of the day.’ 13 But he answered and said to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? 14 Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. 15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?’

The time for payment of the wage comes. With wisdom, the lord of the vineyard decides how the payment should be made. He tells his foreman that he must start paying out with the last. They get paid first. Then the others see it, especially those who first went into the vineyard. The actions of the lord will make public what is in their hearts. When the group of workers who last went into his vineyard is paid out, to their amazement each one of them receives a denarius. In his grace, the lord gives to those who have only worked one hour, the pay for a whole day’s work.

Finally, the first come. They have seen how those who have only worked one hour have been given a denarius. It seems only logical to them that they should then have twelve denarii. In the end, they worked a whole day of twelve hours, around the clock. They can count well. Let it be a bit less, but at least they count on more than one denarius. However, they get justly the agreed wage of a denarius.

When they see this, they express their displeasure. They feel they are being treated unfairly and complain to the lord of the house. They feel wronged. There they are put on an equal footing with those who have only worked for an hour, while they have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day. Their complaint relates to the conduct of the lord of the house. They find it unjust that the last are equated with them, while they have had to make much more effort.

Comments only come from the group that was paid out last and started first. None of the other groups, one of which also has endured the heat of the day, says anything about the pay-out to the first group that last started. They realize the grace in the pay-out. The comment comes – and that is the lesson – from people of the law that make God a debtor of man.

The lord replied to one of them. That might well be the very first man to enter the vineyard. He calls him “friend” and reminds him that he is not wronging him. He reminds this ‘friend’ of the agreement. If he pays him

for what he himself has signed up for, what is wrong in his conduct? The worker may take his money and go. It has become *his* money, the lord calls it “yours”. He has really earned it and he can spend it the way he wants.

In his grace, the lord of the vineyard gave to the latter as much as to the former. The lord speaks of “this last man”, that is to say one person with whom he will mean the one who really entered the vineyard as the very last. What the lord has given to the last one is not the matter of the worker of the first hour, but the matter of the lord. Who is the worker telling the lord what to do with his money? Is the lord not free? Or is it rather so that the generousness shown to others reveals the enviousness of the heart of those who believe they have more rights?

Mt 20:16 | The Lesson

| *16 So the last shall be first, and the first last.*”

The Lord Jesus teaches His disciples, for to them He spoke this parable from the previous section. There is the order: the first will be the last and the last will be the first (Mt 19:30) because it is about the failure of man. Here the order is the other way around: the last are the first and the first are the last, because this is about the sovereignty of God.

The lesson to be learned – and difficult to learn – is that the Lord does not leave any work unremunerated, but that He values simple faith in Him higher than the greatest effort made for Him. This is the faith that goes out for Him, even though the day has already passed, without thinking of wages, but because He sends out. The faith and love for Him as a motive for His service are more important to Him than the actual work that can be done.

True servants of Christ have drunk of His grace and are guided by the desire that He be glorified and their fellow men served. They are filled with what has been bestowed upon them by grace to serve such a Master, their Savior. This unprecedented privilege of serving Him would be completely lost if we were to negotiate it with Him.

That this happens in this parable of the kingdom of heaven means that we see the kingdom here in its widest sphere which also includes those who confess only in name to belong to the Lord, the nominal Christians.

Working for the Lord from the motive to be rewarded in the future is misleading. But working for Him in the power of inner devotion for Who He is, puts the stamp of heaven on the service. The latter makes us conform to Him Whom we serve. Certainly the Lord promises a reward, but that is not the motive to serve. As we look at the Lord Jesus in His service, we learn how to serve.

Mt 20:17-19 | Third Announcement of Suffering

17 As Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve [disciples] aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them, 18 "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, 19 and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify [Him], and on the third day He will be raised up."

After the parable of the workers in the vineyard, the work He Himself must do comes to His attention. To do this He must go up to Jerusalem. When He directs Himself toward this, He wants to share the thoughts of His heart with His twelve disciples, and with them alone. He wants to involve them in what concerns Him.

While they are on the road, He speaks to them while walking. He tells them where they are going and what the religious leaders will do with Him, the Son of Man, in Jerusalem. He will be handed over – by Judas, but the Lord does not mention his name – to the false leaders, and they will condemn Him to death. After being handed over by Judas to the false leaders, they will hand Him over to the nations in the person of Pilate and his soldiers. He will be mocked, scourged and crucified. But that is not the end. He will be raised on the third day. He is the Conqueror of Death.

Mt 20:20-24 | A Place in the Kingdom

*20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him. 21 And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She *said to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left." 22 But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am*

*about to drink?" They *said to Him, "We are able." 23 He *said to them, "My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on [My] left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father." 24 And hearing [this], the ten became indignant with the two brothers.*

After His impressive words about His suffering, death and resurrection, the mother of John and James comes to Him. She honors Him first. She is aware of His majesty. Then she asks something of Him. She has not asked the question yet, but asked if she can ask something. Although the Lord knows what concerns her, He invites her to ask what she wants. Her request is whether her sons may have a prominent place in His kingdom. Her question shows her faith in Christ as King.

He answers to her that she doesn't know what she is asking. This is a reprimand. She should not have asked such a question. The Lord reveals the motive of the question by then asking the sons a question. They will have asked their mother to ask Him about the coveted position in the kingdom.

Peter has just asked what their portion would be (Mt 19:27); the brothers John and James go a step further and determine their portion themselves by asking for an important place in the kingdom. Although they are being reprimanded for their question by the Lord, we must not forget that it was their desire to be close to their Master and Lord. No doubt they will be close to Him on the day they will sit with their fellow disciples on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28).

The Lord responds with a question about drinking a cup. Drinking a cup is a form of suffering. The sons of Zebedee answered that they are able to drink the cup. Is that overconfidence? The Lord does not answer that they *are able to* drink the cup, but says that they *will* certainly drink it. He does not say anything about their position in the kingdom. This matter is in the hand of His Father, Who has prepared a place for each one.

What the mother asks the Lord for her sons, she does not receive. It is exceptional that we read that a mother asks the Lord something for her children that is not heard by Him. That is because of what is being asked. An emergency question is always answered. This is a request for a reward for her sons, a tribute to them, and He cannot grant it.

When the other ten disciples hear this, they become indignant with the two brothers very much. But why do they become indignant with John and James? Have they maybe been troubled by competitive feelings?

Mt 20:25-28 | Not Ruling, but Serving

25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and [their] great men exercise authority over them. 26 It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, 27 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

The Lord calls His disciples to Himself. He wants to teach them something about the things that concern them all with regard to their place in the kingdom. To teach them the lesson of serving, He points to what is customary in the world. They know how things are going there. They know the world. In the world, people strive for authority. The rulers and great men are in charge and the others have nothing to say.

Among the believers it should be different. The spirit of Christ is a spirit of service that leads to the choice of the humblest place and total devotion to others. It means renouncing everything to depend with confidence on the grace of Him we serve. It is a question of consistent readiness to take the humblest place in order to be the servant of all. That should be the mind of those who have part in the kingdom as it is now established by the rejected Lord.

In the kingdom of God there are rules that are opposed to the rules that apply in the kingdoms of the world. In the kingdom of God, true service leads to true greatness. Greatness in the world is expressed in lordship and authority over others. Greatness among the saints is expressed in serving and care.

"To become great" has to do with how someone makes themselves known. A person who wants to be great in the kingdom will be great if he wants to serve others as a servant. "To be first" has to do with ranking. Whoever wants to be that must be a slave, that is to say someone who is the full property of a master and has no right to his own existence. His existence

is determined by his master. “Servant” is more about what he does, his willingness to serve. “Slave” is more about what the master wants. He who is served determines his life.

The Lord Jesus Himself is the great Example of Someone Who lives according to the rules of the kingdom of heaven. Therefore He is the Greatest and the First. He has also accomplished a work in which we cannot follow Him. That is the work of salvation. His service went so far that He gave His life. Only His perfect life and its surrender to death can be a ransom for “many”, that is all who believe in Him. The word “for” here means ‘in place of’.

In the lesson that the Lord gives His disciples and us, we see one of the moments in the history of our Lord in which He combines majesty with submission and authority with obedience. These combinations are seen in His life in a way that brings the disciples and also us to worship at His feet.

Mt 20:29-34 | Healing of Two Blind Men

*29 As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Him. 30 And two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!” 31 The crowd sternly told them to be quiet, but they cried out all the more, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” 32 And Jesus stopped and called them, and said, “What do you want Me to do for you?” 33 They *said to Him, “Lord, [we want] our eyes to be opened.” 34 Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.*

The Lord has spoken of His life as a ransom. With this in mind, He begins His last journey to Jerusalem. Jericho is the city of the curse. He has been there and has brought blessings. Now He is on His way, with His disciples, to Jerusalem to lay the foundation for all the blessings He has spread and will bring. Attracted by this blessing a large crowd follows Him and leaves Jericho with Him. They do not realize where His way leads.

While he is on the road, two blind people call upon his mercy (cf. Mt 9:27). They sit by the road. When they hear that “Jesus” is passing by, they cry out to Him. They must have heard of Him before. Their eyes are blind, but they have enlightened eyes of the heart. This is their chance and they seize

it. The crowd wants to silence them. When the Lord is called upon, there are always those who want to prevent it. But the blind possess the power of faith, and are of those violent men who take the kingdom by force (Mt 11:12). Instead of remaining silent, they call all the more for the mercy of the Lord.

“And Jesus stopped.” What a wonderful Lord! While He is on His way to Jerusalem and the thought of what will happen to Him there occupies Him, He lets Himself be held up by a call for mercy. Then He calls them. He takes the time for them. Here too comes His question as to what they want Him to do (cf. verses 20-21a). He knows it, but He wants to hear it from them. He wants to hear from our mouth what we want from Him. Without many words they express to the Lord what their longing is: that their eyes be opened.

The Lord heals them. He does not do this as a benefactor, but as One Who shares in their need. He is moved with compassion. From an inner involvement with their misery He touches the place where it all revolves around. The result is immediately visible. These two follow Him from now on His way to Jerusalem.

Matthew 21

Mt 21:1-11 | The Entry Into Jerusalem

1 When they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied [there] and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to Me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them." 4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

5 "SAY TO THE DAUGHTER OF ZION,
'BEHOLD YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU,
GENTLE, AND MOUNTED ON A DONKEY,
EVEN ON A COLT, THE FOAL OF A BEAST OF BURDEN.'"

6 The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them, 7 and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their coats on them; and He sat on the coats. 8 Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road. 9 The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting,

"Hosanna to the Son of David;
BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD;
Hosanna in the highest!"

10 When He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" 11 And the crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee."

They are approaching Jerusalem. The entry into Jerusalem marks the beginning of the last week of the Lord's life on earth before the cross. The description of the events in this week is extensive. It takes up more than a quarter of this Gospel.

There is a stop at Bethphage, which lies on the Mount of Olives. The Mount of Olives is the mountain of Gethsemane, the mountain where Christ will go to heaven and where He will descend at His second coming, that is His return to the earth in power and majesty. From there He sends out two

of His disciples. He tells them where to go. With His Divine omniscience He also tells them what they will find there. He also tells them what to do with the donkey and the colt. He also knows that there will be comments. Therefore He tells them what to answer. Then it will be clear to the owner and he will – not ‘give’, but – “send” the animals. The owner will agree to it and will gladly give them up. We see how the Lord works the situation and hearts.

This commission is necessary for the fulfilment of a prophecy which has been pronounced five hundred years ago (Zec 9:9). At the right time, the animals are ready for their share in the fulfilment. The owner is also immediately prepared to give them up. The donkey and foal will become the bearers of the Lord Jesus Who comes to His people as King. He does not come on horseback to judge (Rev 19:11), but “gentle”. This is the message for “the daughter of Zion”. Zion is the name for Jerusalem as connected with grace, for Zion is the mountain that speaks of grace (Heb 12:22). “Foal” speaks of a new beginning.

The disciples obey. They go to the village that the Lord has appointed and act according to His command. When they come to Him with the animals, they put their clothes on the donkey as a tribute to Him. He accepts that tribute. Through the symbol of their clothes they make themselves available to carry Him.

Under the action of God’s Spirit, the large crowd also sets in motion. They too give the Lord Jesus their coats, not to sit on, but to ride over. The branches they cut from the trees are palm branches, a picture of victory. So they welcome their King. Unfortunately it is only an external whim, without depth. This will become clear when they will soon call for His death on the cross. Yet God works this tribute to His Son. The power of God influences the heart of the crowd. He cannot allow His Son to be rejected without having received this testimony.

In their greeting the crowd uses a verse from Psalm 118 (Psa 118:26). In that psalm the thousand-year Sabbath is sung, that will be established by the Messiah when He will be recognized by His people. Unfortunately, their words go beyond their hearts. They wish He will rule, because they

have already received so much blessing from Him, but they are blind to the state of sin in which they find themselves.

When the Lord has entered the city of Jerusalem as King, the sixty-nine (year) weeks which was spoken to Daniel are fulfilled (Dan 9:25). After these sixty-nine weeks the seventieth week of the year could begin, about which Daniel was also spoken to (Dan 9:24), that is to say the kingdom of peace. But, as also was spoken to Daniel, the Messiah is rejected (Dan 9:26). As a result, the seventieth (year) week could not be fulfilled at that time. That week has been postponed because that week will also be fulfilled.

The presence of Christ and His whole performance at His coming to Jerusalem causes turmoil and curious questions about His Person. It is felt that He is the Prophet. By this they mean the Prophet announced by Moses (Deu 18:15). And He is. At the same time there is unbelief in who He really is. For them he is nothing more than "Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee", a man from Nazareth. They have no eye for the fact that "His origins are from long ago, from the days of eternity" (Mic 5:2). If He is nothing more than a prophet, their faith is fatally lacking, for that faith does not lead them to acknowledge their sins of departure from God.

Mt 21:12-17 | The Cleansing of the Temple

*12 And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. 13 And He *said to them, "It is written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER'; but you are making it a ROBBERS' DEN." 14 And [the] blind and [the] lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant 16 and said to Him, "Do You hear what these [children] are saying?" And Jesus *said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'OUT OF THE MOUTH OF INFANTS AND NURSING BABIES YOU HAVE PREPARED PRAISE FOR YOURSELF'?" 17 And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.*

In Jerusalem the Lord goes to the temple, the center of their religion. He proves His royal power by cleansing it. Without any restraint He drives everyone and everything out of the temple, His house.

The Lord Jesus cleansed the temple twice. The first time we read about it in the Gospel according to John. There He does so even before He begins His public ministry (Jn 2:13-17). The zeal for the honor of the house of His Father drives Him. There is also the proof that He rejects them because they have rejected Him. This is certain from the beginning of that Gospel: "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him" (Jn 1:11).

Now, standing just before the end of His earthly journey, He cleanses the temple once more. He acts on the basis of the Word. He saw the abuse of God's house, which he called "My house" according to the quote (Isa 56:7c). In Him we see *Yahweh* acting. It is His house. People should come there who are in need of and seek God's help. However, the Jews turned it into a trading house. They want to benefit from it themselves. In this way they have made it a robbers' den (Jer 7:11). They rob God of his due. Through the presence of the Son of God, the temple becomes, after having cleansed it, a house of mercy where people come to Him with their misery. And He helps them.

This is not to the liking of the chief priests and scribes who have their own ideas about the temple, about Christ, about His miracles, and about children singing His praises in the temple. These people reveal again their resistance to Him. They can only criticize. They find every tribute to Him misplaced. They want to receive honor from people themselves. They dare to ask Him if He understands what the children are saying. He answers that He certainly hears it and appeals to the Scriptures. From what He cites from Scripture, it becomes clear that He is *Yahweh* (Psa 8:3).

The Lord does not wait for their reaction. He has finished talking with them. He does not want to spend the night in Jerusalem, but with people who gladly receive Him. Indeed, Martha and Mary and Lazarus live in Bethany.

Mt 21:18-22 | The Fig Tree Cursed

*18 Now in the morning, when He was returning to the city, He became hungry. 19 Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only; and He *said to it, "No longer shall there ever be [any] fruit from you." And at once the fig tree withered. 20 Seeing [this], the disciples were amazed and asked, "How did the fig tree wither [all] at once?" 21 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen. 22 And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."*

The Lord returns to Jerusalem early in the morning. He is hungry. He is fully Man – but without sin (Heb 4:15) – and needs sleep and also food and drink. So when he sees a fig tree, he goes to it to eat of its fruit. When He comes to the tree, He finds only leaves on it, and no fruit. Then He curses the tree. The tree withers immediately. Such a tree that, by the presence of the leaves, gives the promise that there is fruit to be found, but whose appearance is deceiving, is a tree that arouses His wrath.

The curse of the tree can only have a symbolic meaning. In this one miracle of judgment that the Lord has performed during His life on earth, we see the judgment of Israel in the flesh. The fig tree is a symbol of Israel. As a nation, there is nothing with them to be found for God that He could use. It is a picture of man in the flesh with all the privileges, but which does not produce fruit for the farmer.

Israel possesses all outer forms, "leaves", of religion. It is zealous for the law and the statutes, but does not bear fruit for God. And in so far as it is given responsibility for bearing fruit, that is, under the old covenant, it will also never bear fruit. The curse of the tree has a direct result because there is no hope of recovery.

The disciples are amazed at the direct effect of His words. Despite the fact that they have already seen so many of His miracles, they do not yet realize Who He is in Himself. In His answer the Lord does not point to His Divine omnipotence, but to their faith. If they face a mountain of difficulties, without doubt, in faith, they will be able to move this mountain.

The mountain also symbolizes the entire Jewish system that will merge into the sea of nations, as happened and as it still is today. Faith places the Jewish system where God has placed it. The Lord connects to this the promise that they will receive everything they ask for in prayer with faith. What the Lord says must be read in the context in which it stands. It is a system that prevents the unfolding of Divine grace. Through prayer we will be able to overcome human reasoning and remove this obstacle to living by grace.

Mt 21:23-27 | The Authority of the Lord

23 When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?" 24 Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 The baptism of John was from what [source], from heaven or from men?" And they [began] reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?' 26 But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet." 27 And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." He also said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

This is where the chief priests and elders begin a dispute with the Lord. In the following section, we find more disputes. In these disputes the Pharisees, the Herodians, the Sadducees and a lawyer also come to speak with cunning questions, all of which through His answers have no rebuttal. The Lord concludes the disputes with a question to them concerning His own Person (Mt 22:41-46).

Apparently, the different classes of people come to judge Him or embarrass Him. In reality, all appear before Him, one after the other, to hear God's judgment of themselves. He reveals their true condition.

The temple is His dwelling place, His home. He teaches there. In this place, the religious leaders of the people come to Him with a question about His authority. It is not a fair question, but a question to dispute His authority. It is the question about the authority that they moderate themselves and deny Him. However audacious it is to ask Him about His authority since His authority is impossible to deny.

Those who must lead the people deny His authority. They set themselves as judges. The question “by what authority are You doing these things?” is enquiring about His authority. The question “who gave You this authority” is important to them, for they have not given this authority to Him. He is not qualified by them.

The Lord asks a question in return. His questions always aim to shed the true light on a matter. In this way, He wants to teach the enquirer about his own position and also about the position that He Himself occupies. If the person asking the question were to acknowledge this, it would mean new life for him.

He makes their assessment of the service of John and in particular his baptism the test question for their conscience. If they gave an honest answer, they would also have a proper assessment of His service. For John was His forerunner and announced His coming and pointed Him out. His opponents realize this and discuss what response each answer to the question concerned would provoke. Again, it becomes clear that they are not honest.

The Lord’s question does not appeal to miracles or prophecy, but to their conscience. In their discussion there is no place for God and therefore their answer is false and wrong. If God is not the Object, then the ‘self’ is the idol. They don’t want to say: “From heaven”, because then they really should have believed him. And they definitely do not want that. If their answer would be: “From men”, they would lose their credibility with the crowds. And the honor of the people is precisely what they are after.

Their answer “we do not know” is the result of self-confidence and fear of man. It shows that they are not competent to ask the question about His authority. There is no point in answering their question. With their answers they admit that they are blind leaders.

Mt 21:28-32 | Parable of Two Sons

28 *“But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go work today in the vineyard.’ 29 And he answered, ‘I will not’; but afterward he regretted it and went. 30 The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, ‘I [will], sir’; but he did not go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?” They *said, “The first.” Jesus *said to*

them, “Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing [this], did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.

The Lord takes the initiative by asking them a question in the form of a parable. The vineyard is a picture of Israel under the law (Isa 5:7). With this parable the Lord shows that the spiritual leaders of the people are further away from God than those of the people they most despise.

The parable is about a man with two children. They are each instructed to work in the vineyard, but not at the same time. First the one child gets that assignment. After an initial refusal he then goes because he repents of his refusal. Then the second child gets that assignment. He seems willing because he agrees that he will go. However, he does so with the words “I [will], sir!” This means that he sees his father as a ‘sir’ and has no relationship of love with him. His willingness is therefore only in appearances, because in the end he does not go.

Then the Lord Jesus asks who did his father’s will. To this the leaders give the right answer: “The first.” He makes it clear to them that this ‘first’ child represents people who first did not do God’s will. They lived in sin. It is these people who are repentant about their sins and are allowed to enter the kingdom of God before they do. In doing so, He equates the leaders with the second child who said to go into the vineyard, but did not do so.

Now the Lord refers back to His question about John and shows how important it is to believe in His message. John came to them “in the way of righteousness”, that is, he preached in accordance with the right of God, but they rejected him. With this, Christ has fully demonstrated their corrupt attitude toward Him and thus also the impossibility of judging His authority.

Mt 21:33-39 | Parable of the Vine-Growers

33 “Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT AND DUG A WINE PRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went

on a journey. 34 When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. 35 The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them. 37 But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 38 But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' 39 They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

The Lord continues His teaching. He adds another parable to it to make their position clear. With the words "listen to another parable" He commands that they should continue listening. This parable is not only about their behavior toward God as in the previous one, but also about God's behavior toward them. Three charges against Israel come to light in this parable:

1. no fruit for God;
2. the abuse and killing of God's slaves, the prophets;
3. the rejection and murder of the Son.

The presentation of all that the landowner does to his vineyard is based on the parable in which Israel is compared to a vineyard to which God has tried everything to make it produce fruit (Isa 5:1-2). In this we see the special favor of God for Israel. As those knowledgeable in the law, they must have recognized this.

When all the work with an eye to obtaining fruit has been done, the landowner rents out his vineyard to vine-growers. He himself goes abroad, but remains closely involved with his vineyard while abroad. He knows exactly when it is harvest time. At that time he sends his slaves to receive "his" fruits. The produce is his, it belongs to him.

But the vine-growers have no intention of giving the landowner his fruit. They see the landowner's slaves as intruders on their property and act accordingly. One slave they beat, the other they kill and yet another is stoned by them. Because the landowner wants to receive fruit, he sends even more slaves. But when they come to the vine-growers, they suffer the same fate.

While the landowner knows what they have done with his slaves, he is making one last attempt to receive the fruits. He sees one more possibility to move the vine-growers to give him his fruits. He will send his son. They will certainly have respect for his son and spare him.

But what turns out to be the case? When the son appears, destruction and selfishness are expressed in the most terrible way imaginable. The vine-growers know that he is the heir. Because they want his inheritance themselves, they deny him his right to it. To make this evil scheme succeed, they decide that they will kill the heir. They turn words into action. They knowingly kill the heir, the son of the landowner and owner of the vineyard.

This is the end of the experiment with man. The question of his true condition has been answered. God's attempts to get fruit out of His vineyard are over. The natural man has shown his complete hatred of God and what comes from Him. Further testing is useless. The situation is hopeless. What remains is judgment.

The presence of a Divine Person in love and goodness, a Man among men, ultimately only gives them the opportunity to insult God in the most wicked way. Now it appears fully that man is lost. The proof of man's wickedness is undeniable.

Mt 21:40-46 | Consequences of the Rejection

*40 Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?" 41 They *said to Him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the [proper] seasons." 42 Jesus *said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures,*

*'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED,
THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER [stone];
THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD,
AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES?'*

43 Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. 44 And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like

dust.” 45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them. 46 When they sought to seize Him, they feared the people, because they considered Him to be a prophet.

Finally, the owner of the vineyard comes himself. Then the question is not what the vine-growers will do with the landowner, but what the landowner will do with the vine-growers. The Lord Jesus asks the leaders this question. They know how to give the right answer. This answer makes it clear that they can give a morally correct answer, while at the same time being blind to the fact that with this answer they have passed judgment on themselves. They go even further by saying that the vineyard will be given to others who will deliver the fruits in their time. That also happened, namely when the salvation went to the nations.

The Lord refers to the Scriptures they know so well. The conduct of the vine-growers is clearly revealed in their own Scriptures. He applies Psalm 118 to the parable he has just pronounced (Psa 118:22-23). The son is the stone, the vine-growers are the builders. Just as the vine-growers rejected the son, so the builders rejected the stone. But God made it so that the rejected stone becomes the most important stone of the building. This is something no one could think of; only He could think of it.

It is therefore marvelous in the eyes of the faithful remnant in the end times, about which this psalm speaks. It is an astonishment that they will pronounce as a confession in the end times when they see Him they have pierced (Zec 12:10).

The Lord continues with the effect of the parable, and follows the judgment they themselves have made in their answer to His question (verse 41). “The kingdom of God” is taken from them, for that is present in His Person (Lk 17:21). He does not say that the kingdom of heaven will be taken from them, for they did not have it. The Lord Himself will depart from them.

He is the touchstone for every human being. All who fall on Him shall be broken to pieces. The leaders are such people. They have fallen on this stone, they have fallen over it, they have stumbled over it because they despised it. Therefore in the last days the stone will fall upon the rebellious

people and scatter them like dust. This will happen when Christ returns to earth (cf. Dan 2:34-35).

It is clear to the leaders that the Lord Jesus refers to them in His parables. That's why they try to seize Him, but at the same time they think of the favor of the people they don't want to lose. As in verse 26, here too they are guided by their fear of people, their fear of losing the prestige they believe they have. Fear of the multitude restrain their *deeds*, as in verse 26 where this fear restrained their *tongue*.

Matthew 22

Mt 22:1-7 | Those Invited to a Wedding

1 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, 2 "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. 3 And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. 4 Again he sent out other slaves saying, 'Tell those who have been invited, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are [all] butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast."' 5 But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, 6 and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them. 7 But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire.

With the following parable, the Lord reacted on His rejection, which He brought to light in the previous parable. In this reaction His grace is expressed. Despite His rejection, He still offers His grace in the invitation to come to the wedding. If they accept the invitation of the gospel, they come under the rule of heaven after the national collapse proposed in the preceding parable has taken place.

It is again a parable, but now in connection with the kingdom of heaven. That distinguishes this parable from the two previous. Those were about the righteous claims the Lord Jesus has on Israel on the basis of what He has confided to them and their response to it. This is about something new, the wedding. With this parable He brings again to light why He came. As in the previous parable, there is mention of a son, this time a son of a king.

The Lord introduces this parable with the words: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to." This means that He does not announce the kingdom of heaven in its original form. This is no longer possible because of His rejection. By talking about a wedding, He emphasizes the joy that is connected to someone accepting the invitation and attending. In this parable an invitation is issued. The slaves are not ordered to go into the vineyard

and work, but to call: "Come to the wedding feast." There is not demanding, but giving.

The slaves are the disciples whom the Lord has sent out. The guests are first and foremost the Jews, the people of God. But the people don't want to come, they reject the invitation. However, Christ is full of grace and sends out a second invitation to the same group of particularly privileged persons, the guests. He now instructs His slaves not only to invite, but also to present the attractiveness of the party in the invitation. It is all ready for the guests. They just need to come. He does everything He can to get the guests to the party.

The spiritual meaning is that everything is ready through the sacrifice of Christ. This was not yet the case for the first call. The fulfilment of the second invitation can be seen in the first chapters of Acts. This second invitation is made by the apostles when the work of redemption is completed.

But the guests show no interest. The cause is different. There is one group that is too busy with its own possessions, another group is busy with its business. There is also a group among the guests that react differently. When they receive the invitation, they flare up in anger. This has to do with their pride in their national religion from which they derive their importance. They answered the invitation by mistreating and killing the messengers.

It should come as no surprise that the king cannot let these reactions to his invitation go unpunished. In the year AD 70 God allowed Jerusalem to be destroyed by the Romans as "his armies".

Mt 22:8-10 | The Wedding Hall Is Filled

*8 Then he *said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find [there], invite to the wedding feast.' 10 Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests.*

The king tells his slaves how things stand and that the guests are not worthy of coming to the wedding. He has sent them the invitation, but they have made themselves unworthy to be present at the wedding. Now he

wants to send out his slaves, a picture of the Lord's servants, to people who were not earlier among the guests. His slaves may, without making any distinction, invite to the wedding all those they find in the main highways. At the main highways you can always find the most people. Now that the guests have turned down the offer of grace from the gospel, the offer goes to all people.

The slaves carry out their task by bringing together, without distinction, all those they find. The gospel is offered to all people. The evangelist does not have to deal with who has been chosen by God. He must bring the Word to all he encounters. By "evil" we can understand great sinners and by "good" people like Nicodemus. It is not about the nature and character of the people to whom the gospel goes, but about the fact that the invitation is made to all without distinction. There is no search for people who wear wedding clothes because they will receive them from the King. It is here as it is in Matthew 13 with the parable of wheat and tares. In this way the wedding is filled with dinner guests.

Mt 22:11-14 | Without Wedding Clothes

*11 "But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, 12 and he *said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And the man was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 For many are called, but few [are] chosen."*

Then the king comes in to see who has come in. This parable is not about the responsibility of the preacher, but of those who responded to the preaching. The man without wedding clothes has entered in an arbitrary way. He has mingled with those invited, but did not accept the wedding clothes. He thinks his own clothes will suffice.

This is clearly not about heaven. No one who is not clothed with Christ can enter there. It is a parable of the kingdom of heaven that has become like a situation in which evil and good are present together. However, there will come a day when God will reveal who really belongs in it and who does not.

The man is called to account. The king calls him “friend” because he has come. But the man gives no answer to the question about how he came in without wedding clothes. The imagination by which he thought he could be present there on the basis of his own conditions, has disappeared. So it will be with all people who now have a big mouth about how they will respond to God when He calls them to account.

In this parable we have already seen the judgment on Jerusalem (verse 7). Because this is a parable of the kingdom, we also see the judgment of what is within the kingdom. There may be an outward entry into the kingdom, a confession of Christendom, but he who is not clothed with what belongs to the feast will be ejected. We must be clothed with Christ Himself. He who is not, is thrown into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The Lord represents the terrible destiny of those who imagine themselves in the light, while their hearts are in darkness. They will be eternally where their hearts always were.

He ends the parable by pointing out once again that many are called, that is to say all people, but few are chosen, that is, not many bow under grace. The fate of this individual in the parable, will in reality be the fate of many. The twofold test of the nation ends here. The first took place under the responsibility of the nation under the law (Mt 21:33-46). The second benchmark for them was the message of grace (Mt 22:1-14).

Mt 22:15-22 | About Poll-Tax to Caesar

*15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said. 16 And they *sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any. 17 Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?” 18 But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, “Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? 19 Show Me the coin [used] for the poll-tax.” And they brought Him a denarius. 20 And He *said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” 21 They *said to Him, “Caesar’s.” Then He *said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.” 22 And hearing [this], they were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away.*

In the rest of the chapter we see different groups in Israel trying to condemn and trap the Lord in His words. But every group that appears before Him comes into the light, *His* light. In His light their position becomes clear. The first group is that of the Pharisees. They try to tempt Him into a statement that they can use to denounce Him.

The Pharisees do not come themselves, but send their disciples. They involve the Herodians in their devilish plan. This combination of Pharisees and Herodians is only conceivable through a common hatred towards the Lord Jesus. The Herodians are friends of Rome, the Pharisees are enemies of Rome, but in their rejection of the Lord their mutual political enmity disappears and they find each other (cf. Lk 23:12). They put in their disciples' mouths what they should say. The words of their disciples are their words.

In what they let their disciples say, they bear witness to the impeccability of the Lord. What they say of Him is true, though their motives are evil. He is indeed truthful. He teaches the way of God in truth. He certainly defers to no one, literally "it is not a concern to You about anyone" i.e. He did not seek anyone's favor. Everything they say of Him is not present in them. They are untrue, they do not teach God's way in truth, but their own way in lies. They only seek the favor of others. They are leaders who abuse the sheep for their own ends (Eze 34:2).

The question that the envoy must ask the Lord is about giving a poll-tax to Caesar. Is this permissible or not? With this question they think they can get Him to say something incorrect. If He says 'yes', they can discredit Him in the eyes of the people. He cannot be the Messiah, because He accepts the rule of the Romans and does not commit Himself to Israel. If He says 'no', they can accuse Him before the Romans of an insurrection against authority. Of course the Lord sees through their deceit. He knows their malice. Openly He rebukes them and calls them "hypocrites".

With authority He commands them to bring Him a coin used for tax. They obey without argument. Then He has a question for them. He points to the coin and asks them "whose likeness and inscription" are on the coin. They can say nothing other than that the likeness and the inscription are both of the emperor. They still do not realize where the Lord wants to go. That is now coming. In perfect divine wisdom He points out the obligations they

have, both towards the emperor and towards God. Giving to the emperor means acknowledging that they are under his authority. Giving to God means acknowledging that He came to them in Christ to receive fruit.

The *likeness* on the coin indicates who it represents, the representative. The *inscription* on the coin indicates his will. Both are those of the emperor in Rome. This means that they stand there with money in their hands – the Lord has not taken the money in His hand – that they use in their land which is symbolic for their submission to foreign rule. This submission is the result of their stiff-necked refusal to listen to God (cf. Neh 9:33-37). The persistence of their sin is evident from their rejection of Him who stands before them Who is the likeness and inscription of God (Col 1:15).

They can only marvel at this answer. They're finished talking. The Lord has silenced them. Instead of bowing before His majesty and wisdom, they leave Him and go away. They have been defeated, but don't want to acknowledge that.

Mt 22:23-33 | About the Resurrection

23 On that day [some] Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and questioned Him, 24 asking, "Teacher, Moses said, 'IF A MAN DIES HAVING NO CHILDREN, HIS BROTHER AS NEXT OF KIN SHALL MARRY HIS WIFE, AND RAISE UP CHILDREN FOR HIS BROTHER.' 25 Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother; 26 so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh. 27 Last of all, the woman died. 28 In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had [married] her." 29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. 30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 31 But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: 32 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." 33 When the crowds heard [this], they were astonished at His teaching.

The Sadducees are the liberals of that time. They only believe in what they can reason. Therefore they do not believe in the resurrection, nor in angels

and spirits (Acts 23:8). They are rationalists, as the Pharisees are traditionalists. The Sadducees come to the Lord with a question as insincere as that of the Pharisees and Herodians in the story before.

They approached Him with hypocritical respect by calling Him "Teacher." And He is, but they do not recognize Him. Nor do they recognize the Word of God. They take a part of it, let their human and foolish reasoning loose on it, and then believe that they have shown their own right and God's wrong.

They propose to the Lord a case they themselves invented of seven brothers who marry the same woman one after the other. They explain from their corrupt thinking how the situation develops in their invented example. They start with the first brother who marries the woman and dies without having offspring, leaving his wife to his brother.

Here they do not violate the Word yet. That is how Moses said it. The same goes for the second who marries her, then dies and leaves his wife to his brother. All subsequent matrimonial bonds would also be in accordance with what Moses said. Finally, the woman dies. So far, there is nothing wrong with their representation of things, however nonsensical the story itself may be.

Then, in their folly, they come up with a question which, according to their darkened mind, proves the impossibility of the resurrection. They believe to have eliminated the Lord with this and to have demonstrated the absurdity of the Word of God. In the certainty of their victory they triumphantly ask Him to which of the seven she will be a wife in the resurrection. After all, all of them have had her as wife in a perfectly legal way.

He Who knew exactly where they were going with their example, does not interrupt them. He lets them finish and thus expose themselves completely. Then comes His answer! He does not spare them in it. He exposes the source of their error and folly. Scripture is often misquoted and always misunderstood by people who lean on their own understanding. Furthermore, by their reasoning they denied the power and glory of God, which places them in insurmountable difficulties in connection with God's ways.

In His grace for us, the Lord declares how it will be in the resurrection. In the resurrection the situation is not the same as on earth. Those who rise

up, will then be genderless like the angels, as there is already *in Christ* neither man nor woman (Gal 3:28). Often, false teachings are occasion for the Spirit of God to present the truth in all its brilliance and glory. They have quoted the Scriptures, now the Lord quotes the Scriptures. Have they read the following? Of course they have read it.

But He also says if they have read what has been spoken by God “to you”, that is to say to these Sadducees who stand here before Him. That has passed them by. They have their own explanation for Scripture and are therefore blind to the real explanation. It passes them by because they don’t know to be addressed by it themselves personally. They are only intellectually busy with Scripture.

Yet the Lord makes an effort to enlighten their darkened minds. He points to the Scripture that speaks of God as the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob (Exo 3:6,15-16). He cites this Scripture to show that in the days of Moses the patriarchs *live* in another world, although they were not yet raised from the dead. The fact that their spirits are there guarantees that at the end of time they will be in the kingdom with resurrected bodies.

The moment God says this, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have long since passed away. But God has given them His promises. Would He then no longer be able to fulfil them? Surely He will fulfil them, and in the resurrection. How different was the faith of Abraham from that of the Sadducees. He believed that God was able to raise even the dead (Heb 11:18).

By calling Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, while they have already died, God says that He is still their God. This means that, for Him, they are alive. He is not connected with the dead, but with the living. In His answer, the Lord makes it clear that the resurrection brings us into another world, where different conditions apply. This teaching about the resurrection makes a big impression on the crowds.

Mt 22:34-40 | The Great Commandment

34 *But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. 35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him [a question], testing Him, 36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”*

37 And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ 40 On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

When the Pharisees hear of the Sadducees’ defeat, they meet in a crisis council. They must and will silence Christ. They try again, this time through a lawyer. He asks the Lord a question with the purpose of testing Him. He wants Him to choose which of the ten commandments (Exo 20:1-17) would be the most important. He wants to entice Him to make a statement which he can use to accuse Him of detracting from the law.

The Lord answers with two quotations from the law (Deu 6:5; Lev 19:18). He quotes them fully to allow their power to sink into the lawyer. Then He says that what the law requires can be summed up in one word: love (Rom 13:10). This love must go firstly to God and secondly to one’s neighbor. The commandment to love God is paramount. The second commandment, the love of one’s neighbor, is as important as the first, but the first is paramount. It is impossible to do the second without the first. That is why the first commandment is the greatest commandment. The second results from the first. The first without the second is also not possible, but the first does not result from the second.

With His answer, the Lord has summarized the whole law and the prophets. His answer goes beyond the question. The lawyer is very limited in his thinking. He has ventured to challenge the eternal God. He has received his answer.

This is where the interrogation ends. Everything has been judged and highlighted, both in terms of the position of the people and the sects among them. The Lord has reminded them of the perfect thoughts of God

1. about their condition: they are subject to the Romans (verses 15-22),
2. about His promises: He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (verses 23-33) and
3. on the essence of the law (verses 34-40).

Mt 22:41-46 | The Son of David

41 Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question: 42 "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?" They *said to Him, "[The son] of David." 43 He *said to them, "Then how does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying,

44 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD,
"SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND,
UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR FEET"'?

45 If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his son?" 46 No one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question.

Then it is the time and turn for the Lord Jesus to take the initiative and ask a question. He asks this question not only to a single Pharisee, but to a whole group. His question puts His own position in the light. This question is the crucial question that every human being must answer, for it relates to His Person as the Christ.

First the Lord asks of whom Christ is the Son. They know how to answer that question correctly: He is the Son of David. Then the Lord continues to ask questions about the Christ. If He is the Son of David, how is it possible that David, in the Spirit, calls Him 'Lord'? How can someone be the son of a person and at the same time be called by that person with respect 'lord'? To support His question, He quotes a word from the Scriptures which they think they know so well.

The quoted word refers unambiguously to the Messiah (Psa 110:1). The Pharisees confess that too. Here, too, Christ quotes the whole verse to make its power sink into His hearers. This verse speaks of the glory of the Messiah in heaven, a glory that God gives Him.

After He has quoted the verse, the Lord Jesus repeats His question. They know that the Christ will be the Son of David. But they don't know why David calls him 'Lord' in Psalm 110. The solution to the problem is given at the beginning of this Gospel. He is "Messiah [Christ], Son of David" (Mt 1:1) and also "Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us" (Mt 1:23). As Man, He is the Son of David, born of Mary, of the family of David. At the same time He is and remains God before Whom David bows down.

The Messiah, the Lord Jesus, is God “revealed in the flesh” (1Tim 3:16). For those who believe this, everything is clear. He who does not believe this, lives in darkness. Although He is the Son of David, He must go to heaven to receive the kingdom. While He waits for the kingdom on earth, He sits at the right hand of God in accordance with the rights of His excellent Person: the Lord of David and the Son of David.

The Pharisees cannot answer. Because of their pride they are blind to the glory of the Person Who stands before them. He answered all their questions and then asked His question, which they cannot answer. The Lord Himself has the last word. It is extremely serious, searching and probing. It is like the old, flaming sword that goes back and forth in all directions (Gen 3:24) to guard all that is of God in His Person and shows the highest authority of Him over Whom they want to pour out all the hatred of their hearts.

The defeat of His opponents is complete. They are out of words. But the Lord has not finished with them yet. The time has come for these hypocrites to take off the masks and do so in the presence of the people under their influence. He does so in the next chapter.

Matthew 23

Mt 23:1-4 | Religious Leaders

1 Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, 2 saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; 3 therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say [things] and do not do [them]. 4 They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with [so much as] a finger.

The opponents are finished talking. Although there are no more hypocritical words on their lips, their hearts are invariably full of hypocrisy. The Lord will now uncover that hypocritical heart. He knows all the deliberations and thoughts of man’s heart. He is the omniscient God. He does according to the word he once spoke to Samuel: “For God [sees] not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1Sam 16:7b).

At the end of this chapter He foretells the destruction of the people. This does not primarily concern the lawless and licentious, not even the unbelieving Sadducees. It concerns in the first place the downfall of those who are generally held in high esteem for their religious knowledge and holiness.

The Lord speaks to the crowds and disciples who are still seen together here. Only after He is captured does a separation take place between the crowds and the disciples. He addresses both groups to warn them about the Pharisees. He does so in no uncertain terms. As we read this section, we must be careful not to think that the Lord is always talking about ‘others’. He also speaks to us. In us there is also hidden something of the Pharisees and scribes. We will experience this if we apply His words that He speaks to the Pharisees to ourselves.

The first thing He says about them is that they accept the place of teacher, a place elevated above the people. They look down upon the people and even ‘curse’ the crowd who in their eyes do not know the law (Jn 7:49).

That is how they think about the crowd whose honor they so love. The application for us is obvious. For anyone who has knowledge of the Word of God, there is a great danger that he will take a place above God's people where there is generally no knowledge of God's Word.

Despite the posturing of these people, the Lord says that they should be listened to. That is only as far as they teach God's Word. The Lord does not say that the traditions of these people should be followed. They should not follow their works. The reason, he says, is that these false leaders say something about the law, but do not act according to it themselves. They give their own interpretation to keeping the law. That is, they tell others how to keep the law while not keeping the slightest account of it in their own lives. They don't even *want* that. We always find this with religious zealots. They like to tell other people what to do while making things easy for themselves.

Mt 23:5-7 | For the Eyes of the People

5 But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels [of their garments]. 6 They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, 7 and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men.

These religious leaders do everything only to be seen by the people. They want prestige among the people. They are not interested in what God thinks about them. When it comes to their prayer life, which happens properly in secret, they are flamboyant about it. They broaden their phylacteries, literally: amulets, so they stand out well. Phylacteries are parchment ribbons, written with texts worn around the forehead and on the hand (Exo 13:9; Deu 6:8). Their prayer life is not marked by being in the presence of God, but by being in the presence of men. It is an evil form of religion to pretend they are approaching God when their intention is for people to honor them for their piety.

The same goes for the ostentation with which they make it clear that they keep the commandments of God. The tassels of their garments, which are cords at the hem of the outer clothes, they lengthen. These tassels are di-

rectly related to the commemoration and fulfilment of the commandments of God (Num 15:37-40).

Furthermore, on several occasions they push themselves to the places of honor because they find themselves the most important. Banquets in the houses and religious gatherings in the synagogue are all about them. They also want to draw attention to themselves in public on the markets. Extensive and noisy greetings should serve to make their name and fame known to all bystanders. What they also love and makes them puff out their chests is when people call them 'Rabbi'. It is a tribute to their elevation over the people.

Mt 23:8-12 | One Is Your Teacher

8 But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 Do not call [anyone] on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. 10 Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, [that is], Christ. 11 But the greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

The Lord warns His listeners of certain things which should not be so among them. It is thus inappropriate to be called "Rabbi", for that title belongs only to Him. All others are brothers. They are all on an equal footing, no one is more than the other. What He says of 'Rabbi' also applies to "father". There is only One Who has the right to be so called and that is the Father in heaven. One of the sins of the papacy is that the pope calls himself this and even 'holy father' (cf. Jn 17:11). This is hideous posturing.

Nor should we want people to call us "leaders", for that title belongs only to Christ. All to whom the glorified Lord has given a task as a teacher (Eph 4:11) are therefore no more than others. On the contrary, they are servants of others. Christ is the only Leader. Leaders only lead in what they have learned from Christ. It is not a question of raising oneself above others, feeling better or more important, but of bowing to the other and serving the other. Such a person is truly the greatest.

God will deal with every man according to the choice he makes. Raising oneself up is a choice of one's own, as is humbling oneself. God's answer

depends on man's choice. He will humiliate those who exalt themselves, and He will exalt those who humble themselves. The choice is ours.

Mt 23:13 | First Woe

13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

[Verse 14 is not found in early mss: Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.]

The Lord now addresses Himself directly to the scribes and Pharisees. He pours out his first "woe" on them and calls them "hypocrites". Instead of pointing out to people the kingdom of heaven and what is needed to enter it, they shut off the kingdom from people. They do not point to God's interests, but only have their own interests in mind. Therefore they themselves remain outside the kingdom of heaven, while also preventing others who want to enter from entering. Therefore they raise the people up against the Lord Jesus. All those who receive Him enter the kingdom. They have lost their authority over them. They want to prevent their prestige and influence among the people from diminishing at all costs.

Mt 23:15 | Second Woe

15 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

The second "woe" comes over their fanaticism to make followers and what they then do with these new followers. Their zeal to make even "one proselyte [that is a Jewish convert, or "companion of the Jew"]", knows no limits. They travel tirelessly over sea and land for it. People they have brought under their influence are so indoctrinated by them that they become sons of hell and behave twice as badly as they do. "A son of hell" means that they raise their followers, whom they consider to be sons, from and for hell.

Mt 23:16-22 | Third Woe

16 *“Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, [that] is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.’ 17 You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? 18 And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, [that] is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.’ 19 You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? 20 Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears [both] by the altar and by everything on it. 21 And whoever swears by the temple, swears [both] by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. 22 And whoever swears by heaven, swears [both] by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.*

In His third “woe” the Lord addresses them with “blind leaders”. Their blindness is apparent from their own theory that they have developed about oaths. They argue that swearing by the temple has no binding power, whereas it does when swearing by the gold of the temple.

The Lord calls them “fools and blind men”. With His explanation He does not mean to indicate the correct form of oaths, but to indicate the folly of their reasoning. They only look at the appearance. They see the gold and that means a lot to them, no matter on which house it is. It may as well be an idol temple. They don’t think at all about what the temple speaks of and what happens there and what value that a sincere service in it has for God. They only see the shimmer of the gold. This makes them blind to the fact that gold derives its meaning from the fact that the temple is decorated with it. For God, gold is not the most important thing, but the temple, His dwelling place.

The Lord mentions another example, the altar, with which He refers to the service itself. The previous example, the temple, concerns the place where the service happens. Just like the temple, the altar also means nothing to them. They only look at the offering.

Again the Lord calls them “blind men”. Also with regard to the altar He asks the question what is greater. Through His questioning He shows that they make the wrong distinction. Here too they only look at the offering and not at the altar. For them it doesn’t matter what kind of altar it is. It

may well be an idolatrous altar. As long as there is an impressive offering on it. Then at least you have something to swear by.

In reverse order, the Lord explains what the altar and the temple mean. Swearing by the altar means swearing both by the altar and by everything on it. Altar and offer are inseparable. In their folly and blindness the leaders do separate them.

This is also important in relation to the work of the Lord Jesus. We see that altar and offering are inseparable in Him and His sacrifice. What He offered to God was so very pleasant to God because *He* offered it. The Lord Jesus is both the Altar and the Offering.

The same applies to oaths by the temple as to oaths by the altar. Oaths by the temple are oaths both by the temple and – not: by the gold, but – by Him Who lives in it.

The Lord adds another aspect to this, in which He goes from speaking about the earth to speaking about heaven. They also swear by heaven. Here again, it is not the outward appearance that matters, but the inward. The throne of God in in heaven, they have to consider that carefully. And God sits on that throne, they also have to consider that well. If they were aware of all this, they would be revising their teaching about oaths.

Mt 23:23-24 | Fourth Woe

23 *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. 24 You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!”*

The fourth “woe” the Lord pronounces on the hypocrisy which they reveal in connection with the fulfilment of the command to give tithes. They carry out this commandment down to the very last detail, neglecting what the law is really about, which is “justice and mercy and faithfulness” (cf. Mic 6:8).

Giving tithes is prescribed. They therefore strictly adhere to this. They have given it a meaning that makes them, in their own eyes, the most faithful

fulfillers of that commandment. The Lord makes clear to them what are the “weightier provisions of the law” and that it is of no use to them. He accuses them of not being concerned about the “justice” or the assessment by God, what His thoughts are about a certain matter, what He considers important. Also the demonstration of “mercy” is completely alien to them. About “faithfulness” to God and His commandments they know just a little. They themselves are violating the law.

The Lord Jesus does not say that no tithes should be given. What He denounces is the distinction they make in the commandments, by which they prove themselves truly blind. They pay attention to the gnat, that’s the finicky thing they do, while they don’t pay attention to the big, the really important, that’s the camel, and pass it by.

Mt 23:25-26 | Fifth Woe

25 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. 26 You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.

The fifth “woe” has to do with their pious appearance that contrasts sharply with their inner depravity. What they do seems very pious, very separated, very pure, but in reality their hearts are predatory and they know no measure. This judgment can be given by the Lord because He knows the inside of man. That inner being is as visible to Him as the actions that we observe (Psa 139:1-4; Heb 4:12-13).

The Lord shows them the way in which they can be freed from this hypocrisy. This can only be done by first cleaning the inside, i.e. repenting internally. By confessing sins a person is purified inwardly. Only then can his actions come from a pure inner being and therefore also be pure.

Mt 23:27-28 | Sixth Woe

27 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like white-washed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. 28 So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

In His sixth “woe” over them, the Lord reveals the smell of death that hangs around all their actions. They are walking coffins. Magnificent coffins, though. But no matter how beautiful the coffin looks, there is nothing beautiful in the coffin; on the contrary, it is lifeless and dirty and it stinks.

The Lord emphasizes how much these people keep up a false appearance that makes them seem righteous to men, while in their hearts there is nothing but deceit. This deceit is that they present themselves differently to what they are and that they do their own will. He says they are “full” of it. There is really nothing else present in these hypocrites and there is no room for anything else. Hypocrisy is contrary to being honest in who you are and lawlessness stands contrary to doing the will of God.

Mt 23:29-32 | Seventh Woe

29 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, 30 and say, ‘If we had been [living] in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in [shedding] the blood of the prophets.’ 31 So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure [of the guilt] of your fathers.

The seventh and last “woe” concerns their hypocrisy in connection with the honor of the prophets and righteous who have been killed. They pretend great respect for these witnesses who were killed in earlier centuries because of their testimony to the truth. For such witnesses they build monuments and adorn the place where they are buried. In so doing, they dare to distance themselves with big words and a haughty attitude from their fathers who have these crimes on their conscience. They would never have participated.

Then the point of the spear they aim at their fathers is pointed at themselves. They speak of “our fathers”. The Lord declares that thereby they are revealing themselves as true sons of those murderers. As sons of the murderers, they do not bow to the message that the murdered prophets brought either.

That they are sons of their fathers, they will soon prove by killing the true Prophet and Righteous. With that they will fill up the measure of the guilt of their fathers!

Mt 23:33-36 | The Lord Judges

33 You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? 34 "Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, 35 so that upon you may fall [the guilt of] all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. 36 Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

The Lord explodes against these people. By calling them "serpents, ... brood of vipers" He places them on a par with the devil. Just as the devil will not escape hell, neither will these people. This statement is the most terrible indictment from the lips of the Lord Jesus mentioned to us in Scripture. He has never said anything like this to any tax collector or sinner. He has kept these fiery words for religious hypocrites.

With the words "therefore, behold, I am sending you", He exalts Himself here in His Divine authority as Judge over them. The one they are about to kill is *Yahweh*, God clothed with power. After being killed by them, He will rise up. After His resurrection and ascension, as the glorified Lord and Christ He will send prophets and wise men and scribes to them.

Sending these servants is a new proof of His great grace. They will also remain blind to this new proof of grace because of the self-interest they will continue to pursue. They will kill several of these new witnesses. In so doing, they will allow the full measure of their iniquity to flow over in the rejection of their Messiah.

In the testimony of Stephen and his murder we have a striking example of this. How this witness acted as a prophet who spoke to their hearts and conscience. The wisdom with which he spoke his opponents could not withstand, and his interpretation of the Scriptures no one could refute (Acts 6:10; 7:53). The result is that they stoned him in rage (Acts 7:57-58a).

The consequence of the rejection of the servants whom the Lord will send in His grace after His ascension is that there will be no more salvation for them. The measure is more than full. All the blood shed by them will come upon them. God will demand the shed blood of every righteous man from them. The first righteous person whose blood has been shed is Abel (Gen 4:8). The last martyr mentioned in Scripture is Zechariah (2Chr 24:20-22). With the latter we have to remember that in the Hebrew Bible the last book of the Bible is not Malachi, but Chronicles.

With a solemn “Truly, I say to you”, the Lord confirms the verdict on “this generation”, that is, this kind of people.

Mt 23:37-39 | Judgment on Jerusalem, Until...

37 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. 38 Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! 39 For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, ‘BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!’”

It touches the Lord’s that this privileged city has so turned away from Him. What an effort He has made to take care of and protect all its inhabitants. He has done so “the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings”. All the love of His heart goes out to them, but Jerusalem has not listened. The children of Jerusalem did not want it.

The heart of Jerusalem, the temple, was first His house, that is, God’s house. He calls it here “your house”, that is, the home of the religious leaders who have taken it. He had left (Eze 9:3; 10:3-4,18,19; 11:22-23) and no longer lived there. The house is empty and will remain empty and will be left to them desolate.

God cuts the bond with His people because they reject their Messiah. Therefore the city will not see her Messiah anymore. He withdraws into heaven. But not forever. There is an “until”. God will restore the broken connection with His people. The Messiah will come back. When they see Him then, they will acknowledge Him whom they now so scornfully reject (Zec 12:10).

The faithful remnant will welcome Him with the words: “Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord” (Psa 118:26). These words are the introduction to the next two chapters in which the Lord Jesus speaks about this coming and all that goes with it.

Matthew 24

Mt 24:1-2 | What Will Happen to the Temple

1 Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. 2 And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down."

The following two chapters, Matthew 24-25, contain prophecy and are also teaching to the disciples for their guidance on the path they should follow in the midst of the coming events. The Lord departs from the temple for good. He is thus exercising the judgment which he has just pronounced. As a result, the temple has become a soulless body. It is now "your house" (Mt 23:38).

This is a repeat of what happened earlier in Ezekiel (Eze 10:18-19; 11:22-23). There the glory of the LORD, *Yahweh*, disappears. The same glory disappears here also in the form of the humiliated Man Jesus Christ. Whoever has eyes to see sees in Him the glory of the only begotten Son of the Father (Jn 1:14).

Yet the hearts of the disciples remain attached to the temple. They point out the imposing building to the Lord. Because of earlier prejudices, they cannot be separated from its outer beauty. But because He is no longer in it, they are busy with nice outward appearances, the display of pomp and splendor in the service of God.

The Lord looks with them when He says: "Do you not see all these things?" But He looks in a different way. He sees that these buildings have become symbols of self-willed worship. He therefore pronounces the verdict on everything they admire in the most radical way. He wants to free them from their vain thoughts. Therefore He communicates His thoughts to them and sheds the light of the future on the present. There is only interest in this if our hearts are not attached to the things of the earth. How will I long for His coming when that coming draws a line through everything I try to build up in the world?

Mt 24:3-8 | The Beginning of Birth Pangs

3 As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what [will be] the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" 4 And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. 5 For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. 6 You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for [those things] must take place, but [that] is not yet the end. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. 8 But all these things are [merely] the beginning of birth pangs.

The Lord sits down on the Mount of Olives. He sat down on a mountain in a similar way to preach the sermon on the mount (Mt 5:1). Now He is sitting on the Mount of Olives and here He also holds a discourse, His end time discourse. He does so in response to questions from the disciples. They would like to know from Him when the things He has just spoken about are going to happen. They also want to know what the sign of His coming and of the end of the age is, because they feel that these things are interrelated. The "coming" of the Lord means that He will be present with them on the earth. "The end of the age" is not the end of the world, but means the end of the period that the Lord will be absent, or the end of the period that He will not be with them.

The Lord Jesus is the omniscient God for Whom the future is present. He alone can say with certainty what the future looks like because He determines it. Before He does that, He warns His disciples. We should not see the disciples here as representatives of us, Christians, but of the believing Jews in the future. A Christian can never be misled by people who come to him under the Name of Christ. A Christian does not expect Christ on earth, but will meet Him in the air.

The believing Jews will be exposed to that danger. Israel has given up the true Christ. Now they are in danger of receiving a false one. The unbelieving mass will do the same (Jn 5:43). The Christian is not warned of false Christs, but of false spirits (1Jn 4:1) because it is characteristic of the church that the Holy Spirit dwells in it. We must be wary of the deceit of false spirits, not of pseudo-Christs.

In addition to deception in the form of false Christs, the enemy tries to induce fear through wars and rumors of wars. Christians do not receive such a warning either, although it does not mean that this warning has no application for us. Because of their earthly perspective, wars will have a major impact on the Jewish remnant in the future. Therefore the words of the Lord are a consolation for them. They need not doubt that He will deliver and fulfil His promises of peace.

The enemy will also be able to use famines and earthquakes to shake their faith in the prosperity and unshakeability of the kingdom of their Messiah. There are many means available to the enemy to try to overthrow the disciples' faith. The true believers will endure; the confessors will be deceived and robbed of everything they have believed they can trust.

The things the Lord has just described are bad. But it will all get much worse because He has only presented them with "the beginning of birth pangs".

Mt 24:9-14 | Endurance to the End

9 "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. 10 At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. 11 Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. 12 Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. 14 This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

They will experience for themselves how great the hatred against Christ is, for the enemies will indulge their hatred against Christ on those who confess Him. Nowhere in the earth will there be a nation who will treat them kindly. At that time, many will become public as false confessors. Such persons will then fight in the army of the enemy against the true disciples. But there will also be hatred between the enemies themselves. They do act as if united, but they are not.

However, the difficulties and trials do not only come from the outside, they also come from the inside. The false confessors will not only become public through external threats. False confessors will also become recog-

nizable because they will follow the many false prophets that will be there at that time, blind as they are for being misled.

Together with a turning away from God and His truth lawlessness will increase, which is the rejection of any authority. At the same time, the love of the many will grow cold, for selfishness will reign supreme. In this terrible time, with all its terrors and deception, it is a matter of enduring to the end.

There is a beginning of the birth pangs, but there is also an end to the birth pangs! Those who endure are those who have a living connection with the Lord Jesus, their Messiah. When the end comes, the kingdom will be preached everywhere. It is the kingdom that will be established on earth, as John the baptist and the Lord Himself preached it. The establishment of the authority of Christ, Who went into heaven, will be preached throughout the world to test the obedience of the nations. Those who have ears to hear will see the object of their faith, Christ, in His glory on earth.

Mt 24:15-28 | The Great Tribulation

15 *“Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16 then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. 17 Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. 18 Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. 19 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 20 But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. 21 For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. 22 Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. 23 Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’ or ‘There [He is],’ do not believe [him]. 24 For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. 25 Behold, I have told you in advance. 26 So if they say to you, ‘Behold, He is in the wilderness,’ do not go out, [or], ‘Behold, He is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe [them]. 27 For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. 28 Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.*

To underline the seriousness of the situation in the days preceding His coming, the Lord points to what is spoken of by the prophet Daniel. By this He means parts in the book of Daniel that bring us to the last days (Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11), or the end time (Dan 11:40). The place that the Lord speaks of where these things will play out is Judea, that is Jerusalem and its surroundings. "The holy place" is the temple in Jerusalem. The "abomination of desolation" will be there.

An abomination is an idolatrous image. The abomination of desolation means that the idol will cause desolation. Because of that idolatrous image God will bring great misfortune upon the land through the antichrist, the one who set the image up, to which he also commits himself by showing himself as God (2Thes 2:4). The statue is the image of the beast from the sea and represents the dictator of the restored Roman empire (Rev 13:12-15).

It is a word to the remnant of Israel and not to the church. The Lord tells them that those who are near to that area must flee to the mountains. The mountains will be the only suitable location to hide from the antichrist and his followers. There will be no time to lose. The persecution comes like a storm in the desert. Any delay can be fatal. If you are on the roof, you shouldn't go back into your house to pick up essential items. If you are on the field, you must not attempt to pick up your cloak that you have placed somewhere else on the field. The watchword is: flee for your life. To give in to any other thought will result in death.

The Lord speaks with compassion about the pregnant women, those who are about to bring new life into the world, and those nursing babies, those who have just brought new life into the world. They are the vulnerable. He even thinks of the weather conditions and religious duties. They must pray that they will play no part. Any obstruction to their flight can be fatal.

He says these things because He knows how terrible that time will be. It will be a time of unparalleled tribulation. There has never been such a thing and never will be. It is a time that, as far as the abominations are concerned, is unparalleled. The Lord emphasizes the horror of that time by saying as a consolation that those days will be shortened. If He did cut those days short, no one would survive that time. This cutting short is made for the sake of the elect. He knows all those who belong to Him and,

in view of them, ensures that the maximum suffering is not exceeded (cf. 1Cor 10:13).

He points out once again that this time will be particularly hard because of the false Christs. If, in the midst of the greatest ordeal, people present themselves as those who want to give help, there is a huge temptation to respond to it. Those false Christs and false prophets will present themselves by doing great signs and miracles. It will all seem so real that even the elect are in danger of falling into this deception. They should not do so, especially now that the Lord has told them so in advance. Forewarned is forearmed.

They should not let themselves be lured out of their hiding place by fine words to go to a wilderness or an inner room because the Messiah would be found there. The wilderness, where John preached (Mk 1:4), is not the setting of the Messiah. He is also not in the inner room. They are all traps. When He, the true Messiah, appears, it will be like the lightning that comes from the east and flashes to the west. With this the Lord also answers the question the disciples have asked in verse 2. His coming will be seen everywhere. They only have to pay attention to the ‘flash of lightning’ to know it is He Who comes and not another.

He will come as “the Son of Man”, that is to say to rule over all the earth and not only over Israel. The first acts of His government will be judgmental acts. Where the objects of judgment are, there He will appear, as vultures gather where dead bodies are.

Mt 24:29-31 | The Coming of the Son of Man

29 *“But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. 31 And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.*

The plagues that will come over the earth during the great tribulation, will find their end in a total darkening and chaos. Any orientation based on the heavenly bodies is gone. We can also see in these heavenly bodies a picture of different forms of authority (Gen 1:16). The total darkening and chaos then means that all authority has disappeared and there is complete anarchy on earth.

The sign that will then appear in heaven is the Son of Man. He appears to assume His dominion. He will appear unexpectedly, not as a Messiah Who answers the worldly pride of the unbelieving masses, but as the Christ despised by them, coming from heaven to judge. His coming will bring about a lamentation in all Israel (Zec 12:10-14). They will look on Him Whom they have pierced (Rev 1:8). Then the Lord Jesus appears for the second time on earth, this time in power and majesty. He comes as the Son of Man, that is to say as the Ruler over all creation, heaven and earth.

The splendor of His majesty is additionally empowered by the sending out of His angels. This will be accompanied by a great trumpet. His angels are instructed by Him to gather together His elect who are scattered throughout the earth. Here we see the bringing together of the scattered ten tribes of Israel. This will happen after the Son of Man has appeared.

Mt 24:32-35 | The Parable of the Fig Tree

32 "Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; 33 so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, [right] at the door. 34 Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

The Lord gives His disciples directions from nature (cf. Mt 16:1-4). In nature they can see from certain signs that winter is coming to an end and summer is near. We can think of the winter of tribulation that will be over and the summer of the kingdom of peace that will come after that. The Lord uses the picture of the fig tree. That tree represents the people of Israel. Signs of life will become visible in it. The softening of the branch and the sprouting of the leaves can be recognized in the national restoration of

Israel, the restoration as a nation which has been a fact since 14 May 1948. The summer with its fruit indicates the spiritual restoration of Israel when it has accepted its Messiah.

When the disciples see the things He has just described, they will know He is about to come. All His warnings for an abomination of desolation and for false Christs are all proof that His coming is imminent. But first these things must come over this generation that rejected Him.

Heaven and the earth will pass away in their present state. If that happens, it will prove to be a confirmation of His words. He speaks the truth and all that He says happens as He has said it.

Mt 24:36-44 | Day and Hour Unknown

36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. 37 For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. 38 For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. 41 Two women [will be] grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left. 42 "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. 43 But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. 44 For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think [He will].

There is no exact time known of His coming. The signs will point to His coming, but when it will be, only the Father knows (Acts 1:7). It sounds strange that the Son does not know about it either, because we know that the Son is also God after all. This is one of the wonders of His unfathomable Person. As Man, He does not know the day and hour either. Just as His whole life on earth was led by the Father, so He is also in glory completely surrendered to the Father.

Even if the day and hour are not known, the circumstances that announce His coming are. His coming will resemble what was going on in the days

of Noah. There seemed to be no problem, everyone lived his own life. That life came to an abrupt end with the flood. The flood was, just like the great tribulation will be, a judgment of God over the whole earth. Just before the flood the earth was full of people of whom the Lord says here that they ate and drank, and married and were given in marriage. Those things were not wrong, were they? No, but life consisted of that. Life was lived without any thought of God.

The people's way of life made them blind to the impending judgment. No matter how Noah preached (2Pet 2:5), they did not allow themselves to be persuaded, but lived on happily. Their horizon did not go beyond what they saw. God was completely out of the picture. Serving Him did not occur to them, they were blinded so much by the pursuit of pleasure. But the judgment came and took them all away. What they did not want to think about, came irrevocably. Then it was too late for all except Noah and his family who were safe from judgment in the ark.

The judgment that comes will work to separate men who are working in the field. Working is a good thing, but those who only work for a good life will be taken away by judgment. He who looks forward to the coming of the Messiah will be left behind and may enter the kingdom of peace. This separation also exists between two women who are working in the same task. One does it only for herself, the other because she lives for the Lord.

The message from the Lord is that they must watch because it is not known exactly on which day their Lord will come. If they watch every day, they will be ready for His coming every day. He wants them to understand the importance of constant vigilance. If someone knew exactly what time a thief would come to break in, he wouldn't sleep. This attention must be continuous. Therefore, attention must not slacken. A thief always comes at the moment when it is not suspected, when attention is waning. That is not allowed. They must be ready, without dozing off.

Mt 24:45-51 | The Good and Evil Slave

45 *“Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? 46 Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. 47 Truly I say to you*

that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. 48 But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time,' 49 and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; 50 the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect [him] and at an hour which he does not know, 51 and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The Lord is now going to give directions for the time of His absence. He teaches three parables (Mt 24:45-51; 25:1-13; 25:14-30). Then He speaks again about His future connection with the earth and the Gentiles. The three parables should be read in brackets, as it were, as they form a kind of parenthesis. They are three separate parts, but they are all related to His coming. As throughout Scripture, we see perfect order here too.

The first parable is about behavior in the house (Mt 24:45-51). The Lord has spoken of vigilance. Now He is going to talk about food. We will only remain attentive if we feed ourselves well. For the present time we know that the house is a picture of the church (1Tim 3:15), but then seen in this parable from the aspect of man's responsibility and not as God building the church. This similarity is especially important for those who have the responsibility to teach in the church. In this parable, the state of the church is also seen as a whole.

Whoever is busy distributing food is called "blessed" by the Lord Jesus. It proves one is thinking of Christ and others and not of oneself. The condition of the responsible church depends on their waiting for Christ, or on saying in their hearts that He is absent. Those who have been busy looking forward to Him and serving Him in serving His own will receive a rich reward.

The way in which the goods were administered in the time of the Lord's absence forms the basis for the servant to be entrusted with the putting in charge of the Lord's possessions when He returns. Loyalty will be rewarded at the coming of Christ. Those who, in humility, have been faithful in His service during His absence will be made rulers of all that belongs to Him.

But there may be a situation where the faithful slave turns into an evil slave. Note: it is about "that evil slave". It is the same slave who was first

faithful. This transformation of a faithful slave into an evil slave is evident in the history of the church. After initial faithfulness to the Lord, as we find in the book of Acts, decay came quickly.

The slave's unfaithfulness begins in his heart. It is not forgetfulness. The will is involved. The result of the Lord's staying away is that the flesh will reveal itself. When the expectation of His coming is no longer operative, the Christian is turned to earth. Except thinking only of himself, he also starts to mistreat others. Furthermore he seeks other company than that of the fellow Christians. He goes to eat and drink with the drunkards.

It is no longer a devotional service for God's house with the heart focused on the Master's approval upon His return. The daily expectation has been given up. That is the cause of the decay.

When the coming of the Lord is set far into the distance (cf. Eze 12:27), the true Christian position is lost. But not only that. Forgetting His coming will lead to debauchery and tyranny. It does not say that the slave himself is drunk, but that he eats and drinks with those who are drunk. He connects with the world and follows its habits.

A person who loses sight of the coming of Christ, who no longer looks forward to His coming, will be surprised by His coming. The Lord's judgment of this slave is in keeping with his actions and the appearances he made. He did as if a Christian, but he is not. He is a hypocrite. Hypocrites are two-faced. That is why he is cut 'in two pieces'. This slave is a hypocrite and will share in the fate of the hypocrites. This is the fate of Christianity which, according to confession, is religious, but who in essence participates in the world. It is important to remember that what applies to the whole is also true for the individual.

Matthew 25

Mt 25:1-13 | Parable of the Ten Virgins

1 *“Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. 3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. 5 Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and [began] to sleep. 6 But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet [him].’ 7 Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish said to the prudent, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ 9 But the prudent answered, ‘No, there will not be enough for us and you [too]; go instead to the dealers and buy [some] for yourselves.’ 10 And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. 11 Later the other virgins also came, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open up for us.’ 12 But he answered, ‘Truly I say to you, I do not know you.’ 13 Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.*

The parable of the virgins is not meant to show that only those who wait diligently for the Lord go to the wedding with Him. The whole company consists of confessors, they are all people who have come out to meet the bridegroom. What matters is to show the difference between the confessors. There are both real and false confessors.

In this parable the Lord is not the Bridegroom of the church. The bride is not mentioned in this parable. This is about personal responsibility during the absence of Christ. It is a parable of the kingdom of heaven that is compared to ten virgins. The number ten speaks of responsibility. The word “virgins” speaks of devotion, of having only one beloved. They all have lamps, that is to say light. They know the future. They all go out to meet the bridegroom.

Then the Lord makes a distinction in the ten virgins. He calls five foolish and five prudent. The difference is not in going out, because they all go

out. They also all have lamps. The distinction lies in having or not having oil in their lamps. What makes the foolish virgins foolish is that they have no oil. Oil speaks of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, kings, priests, and in some cases prophets were anointed with oil. The New Testament believer is anointed with the Holy Spirit in this way (1Jn 2:20,27; 2Cor 1:21-22). The flasks speak of the body (2Cor 4:7).

When the bridegroom delays, all ten of them fall asleep. The possession of the Holy Spirit does not prevent the prudent virgins from falling asleep. This indicates that the entire confessing church, even those who have the Spirit, lose sight of the Lord's return. In the early days of the church, the believers were looking forward to the coming of the Lord. But because of the delay of His coming, the expectation has subsided.

Then, when it is midnight, when the night is at its darkest, there is a shout. The bridegroom is approaching! The call of the Holy Spirit is: "Behold, the bridegroom!" The person of the bridegroom awakens the sleepers from their sleep. Moreover, the exclamation "behold, the bridegroom" is not only meant to awaken in order to meet Him. It also implies an appeal to see in the examination of the Scriptures the magnificent features of His Person.

Besides waking up, activity is also expected. That's why it sounds as follows: "Come out, to meet [him]". In verse 1 they have already gone out once. Now the cry is to do that again. Going out means separation from the world, also in its Christian form. But that is not all. There follows: 'To meet *Him*.' It is about Christ.

In the history of Christianity we see this happening when, through the action of God's Spirit in the 19th century, there arises a renewed interest in the coming of Christ. Through the examination of the Scriptures, especially of prophecy, the hope of the church is also rediscovered, as it was in the days of Paul. For the sake of Christ, wrong associations were given up and people began to live in accordance with the true calling of the Christian. What we see in the history of Christianity also applies to the life of the individual believer. Whoever lives with and in the expectation of the imminent coming of Christ, does not live for the earth, but for heaven.

All the virgins wake up. Both real and false Christians are preparing to meet the bridegroom. They all trim their lamps. They let the light they have shine again. That is also the moment that the foolish come to the discovery that they have no oil. They see that their lamps are going out. They had only lit the wick, but had not supplied themselves with oil. The lamp without oil represents a man who does not possess the Holy Spirit. The lamp of a natural person can sometimes let light shine for a while, giving the impression that there is oil, but in reality such a lamp goes out quickly.

There is enough time between the call and the coming to make everyone's condition clear. Now the foolish come to the discovery that they have no oil. They miss the essence of the light. The light they possessed was but an appearance. They recognize that the prudent do have oil. They see that the prudent have a real relationship with the bridegroom. Their question to the prudent is whether they may have some of their oil. But the prudent know that they cannot supply oil. They refer the foolish to the dealers.

When the foolish have left to buy oil, the bridegroom comes. The prudent, those who are ready, enter the wedding feast with him. Then the door is closed. When the other virgins come, they also want to go in. Oil is not mentioned. They want to go inside and beg the Lord to open up for them. But for the foolish virgins it is too late. They should have been ready when the bridegroom presented himself.

The lord remands them with words indicating that there is no connection between him and them. He does not know them. He *does not pretend* not to know them, but he *really does not know* them. They have never surrendered to him. There has never been love for him in their hearts. They found him interesting, but they never bowed before him.

The Lord Jesus ends the parable with a warning to be on the alert. This is the purpose of the parable. It must move the prudent to keep their eyes well open and not fall asleep. It must move the foolish to become prudent now by buying oil before it's too late.

Mt 25:14-23 | Parable of the Talents

14 "For [it is] just like a man [about] to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. 15 To one he gave five talents,

*to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. 16 Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. 17 In the same manner the one who [had received] the two [talents] gained two more. 18 But he who received the one [talent] went away, and dug [a hole] in the ground and hid his master's money. 19 "Now after a long time the master of those slaves *came and *settled accounts with them. 20 The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.' 21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' 22 "Also the one who [had received] the two talents came up and said, 'Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents.' 23 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'*

The Lord adds another parable about the kingdom of heaven. He goes from the condition of the heart – that is the subject of the previous parable – over to service. The possessions that this man entrusts to his slaves are not a picture of the gifts that God gives in His providence, such as earthly possessions. The Lord did not give His servants any earthly possessions when He left. "His possessions" which He entrusts are the gifts which make them competent to work in His service during His absence.

This parable resembles the parable of the pounds in the Gospel according to Luke (Lk 19:12-27). Yet they are different. In the Gospel according to Luke each receives one pound. There the emphasis is on personal responsibility. There is no difference there. In the zeal which is applied, there is a difference, which is expressed in the profit and in the reward. The one who has gained ten pounds gets authority over ten cities and the one who has gained five pounds gets authority over five cities. Here in the Gospel according to Matthew it is about the sovereignty and wisdom of God. Here each gets a different number of talents, according to the sovereignty and wisdom of God. But here the reward is equal for those who have shown faithfulness in using the talents.

Everyone has their own ability, a natural gift. This ability makes each person suitable for the service in which he will be used. In addition to that, there is a gift, talents or spiritual gifts, needed to perform the service that has been commissioned. Faithfulness in performing the service is the only thing that matters. What distinguishes the faithful from the unfaithful is faith in the Master.

The slave with the five talents uses his talents well. He gains one hundred percent more. The slave with the two talents also uses his talents well. He also gains one hundred percent. The slave with one talent also does something with it. But what he does is not what his master has told him. He digs into the ground and hides "his master's" money. It is not his own money. He doesn't want to use it. He is disobedient and lazy.

"After a long time" the master returns. This 'long time' is necessary to test the perseverance and loyalty of the slaves. When the master returns, he settles accounts with them. The slave with the five talents comes to him, takes the profit with him and shows it to his lord. The master's reward is a special appreciation for his entire service. He receives a "well done" and thereby proved that he is a "good and faithful" slave. He is good because he did the right thing. He is faithful because he has done what his master had said.

He has been faithful with a few things, even if it may appear big in the eyes of others. We must count according to the wealth of the master and not according to what others have. The reward is that the master will put him in charge of "many things". What these 'many things' are, he will find in 'the joy of his master', into which he may enter.

He who has received the two talents also comes to his master and brings the profit for his master with him. Because the slave with the two talents has done just as well, and thereby has proven that he is as "good and faithful" a slave as the slave with the five talents, he gets the same reward. He who received the five talents and he who received the two talents, enter equally into the joy of the Master Whom they served. They knew Him in His true capacity as a good Master and enter into His full joy.

Mt 25:24-30 | The Wicked, Lazy Slave

24 *“And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no [seed]. 25 And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.’ 26 “But his master answered and said to him, ‘You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no [seed]. 27 Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my [money] back with interest. 28 Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.’ 29 “For to everyone who has, [more] shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. 30 Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

There is a big contrast between the slave with one talent and the other two slaves. The slave with one talent also comes to his master, but his story is different. He speaks to the master as a hard master. He has observed things about his master and formulated his own completely misplaced conclusion. He has judged his master from a disobedient and lazy attitude. Then you will get scared. Out of fear he has despised his master’s talent. He didn’t want it when he got it and he still doesn’t want it. He brings it to his master to hand it back to him as a worthless and even contemptible talent.

The master designates the slave as wicked and lazy. He is a “wicked” slave because he did not do what his master said. He is a “lazy” slave because he did not make any effort. He put his own interest above that of his master. The master says to him that the knowledge he believed to possess about his master should have led him to act wisely. Then he would not have put that money in the ground, but, at the very least, brought it to the bank. At least then it would still have generated interest. But people who are wicked and lazy come to the wrong conclusions and those conclusions encourage them to act wrongly.

The master determines that the one talent should be given to him who has ten. The master lets him keep the profits of the five and he gets one more.

That one talent is better spent on him. The Lord always acts according to this principle. He who has and acts faithfully with it, gets more and comes to abundance. He who does not have, has what he thinks he has taken from him. What he has, he owns wrongly. It is not his property, because it is his master's who has given it to him to act with it.

The slave is thrown into the outer darkness because of his uselessness. How bad it is to be useless. We may sometimes feel useless, but we are not. Therefore this parable is an exhortation to work with what the Lord has given us. Those who think they have received 'only' one talent must be extra vigilant against the danger of being wicked and lazy. The Lord distributes sovereignly and it is the love for the Lord that motivates us to work for Him with every talent we have received from Him.

The outer darkness is the place farthest removed from God. God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. In that outer darkness man is completely left to himself, without one ray of light. He can only weep and gnash his teeth there because of the remorse that he was wicked and lazy during his life. That remorse will torment him forever.

Mt 25:31-33 | The Son of Man on His Throne

31 "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; 33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

This verse is connected to Matthew 24:31. In that verse (Mt 24:31) the coming of the Son of Man with His angels is already referred to. He appears on earth in the glory from on high, the glory that is His own and that is given to Him. He will connect heaven and earth with each other. However, the earth must first be cleansed of sin and sinners. To this end He takes His place on the throne of His glory in Jerusalem. The Father gave Him this authority to judge because He is the Son of Man (Jn 5:27).

Before His glorious throne is seen the result of the preaching of the kingdom by the brothers of the Lord, which are His disciples who preached in the time of the great tribulation. They performed His command and went

to all nations to preach the kingdom (Mt 28:19). How the nations have reacted to this is now being made clear.

The nations are gathered before Him. All nations. No nation will be able to stay away. He is the Commander and Judge. He judges with discernment. He is Shepherd as well as Judge. He knows who His sheep are, and He also knows who the goats are, and thus do not belong to His sheep. They are not individuals, but nations. By the location which He designates for the different nations, He already makes their position clear. They obey without contradiction. It does not occur to them to protest.

Mt 25:34-40 | The Judgment of the Sheep

34 "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry, and you gave Me [something] to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me [something] to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You [something] to drink? 38 And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39 When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, [even] the least [of them], you did it to Me.'

The Lord first addresses those who are on His right hand, the sheep. He calls them "blessed of My Father". That must have sounded good, but also surprising, to their ears. They may come in order to inherit the kingdom. They will be overwhelmed by it. They hear that they are heirs and that they are receiving something that is already prepared for them "from the foundation of the world". This has always been God's intention with the earth, this has always been in His mind.

The Lord tells them why they are receiving this blessing. They have done something for Him. All the things He mentions are related to a situation of need, misery and loneliness. He mentions it all one by one. He doesn't say very generally in one word that they have been good to Him, but He says

what they have done for Him. As the Creator He provides others with food and drink and He provides shelter. His concern extends even to the foxes and birds of heaven (Mt 8:20). But as Man He made Himself dependent on people's care for Him.

He was hungry and thirsty and was like a stranger on earth. And the sheep provided Him with food and drink and shelter. Even when He was naked and sick and in prison, they dressed Him and visited Him, and made the effort to come to Him. Clothing and shelter provide protection. He was without protection. That is what they offered Him. Disease and imprisonment limit a person's freedom to go and be wherever he wants. The sheep have come to Him Who had those restrictions.

By the way, we see here that the Lord has participated in the *consequences* of sin, including illness. Not that He Himself was sick, but He made Himself one with those who are sick and felt and carried sickness (cf. Mt 8:17). Sickness is not a sin. He says "I was sick" in the same way He suffered hunger and thirst. This means that sickness is not something bound up in salvation and should therefore be contested. We must bear the *consequences* of sin, including sickness, and He helps us to bear them.

The sheep who are called "the righteous" here do not boast of anything. On the contrary. Amazed, they ask when they saw Him hungry and thirsty, and then gave Him food and drink. They don't remember that at all. They go through the list He has mentioned and do not recognize any of the charitable acts where He says that they have done it to Him. They don't know that they ever welcomed Him hospitably into their house or that He was naked and that they dressed Him. Nor can they remember ever seeing Him sick or in prison and then coming to Him.

The Lord makes it clear to them that He and His brethren are one. Everything they have done for even the least of His brethren, they have done for Him. He sent out His brothers in a time of great tribulation to preach the gospel of the kingdom. They have done so under the toughest conditions of trial and persecution. And these people have invited His brethren and provided them with what was necessary. This deed proved that they received Him Who had sent them. The sheep, those who received the servants, thereby participated in their trials and tribulations.

As proof of His appreciation and the Father's appreciation, the Lord gives them the kingdom as inheritance. Here we see how highly He values their work. We also see here how great His love is for His faithful servants He has sent out. The proof of this we see in the fact that He judges the nations to whom the testimony has been sent, according to whether or not they received the servants as if it were Him.

Mt 25:41-46 | The Judgment of the Goats

41 "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry, and you gave Me [nothing] to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; 43 I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' 44 Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?' 45 Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' 46 These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

The goats are referred to as "those on His left". They get to hear the greatest possible contrast with the sheep. The sheep hear "come" (verse 34), the goats hear "depart from Me" (verse 41). He calls the sheep "blessed of My Father" (verse 34); He calls the goats "accursed ones" (verse 41). The sheep inherit the kingdom, the goats are referred to the eternal fire. This eternal fire was originally prepared for the devil and his angels, but they will be joined by all those who rejected the Lord Jesus, no matter in what way He came to them.

The goats had no eye for the need of the Lord's messengers because they had no eye for Him. So they gave the messengers nothing to eat and drink when they were hungry and thirsty. The goats also had no regard for the circumstances of the messengers of the Lord. There was no compassion for them.

Just like the sheep they ask for the "when" of the withholding the necessary and desired. They did not recognize Him. Neither did the sheep, but they had acted charitably to the brothers for the Lord's sake. The Lord

answers them in the same way He answered the sheep. Those who have gone out for Him are so important to Him, that He sees everything that has happened to them as done to Him.

The final destinations of the behavior on earth are so far apart that no greater contrast is conceivable: eternal punishment or eternal life. These two destinations will never come together. The eternal fire is the eternal punishment for the people who have conspired with the enemy against the Lord and His messengers. The righteous, those who have done God's justice, may enter the kingdom of verse 34, which is called here "eternal life" (verse 46).

This does not mean that entering eternal life is based on merit, a performance delivered. The Lord Jesus says in John 3 that one can enter the kingdom of God only if one is born again, that is, has new life (Jn 3:3,5). But that new life manifests itself in receiving the brothers of the Lord. He therefore presents it here in such a way that whoever receives His messengers enters eternal life. Receiving the messenger is equivalent to receiving the message. Because of the special time in which that happens, it is appreciated by the Lord in a special way.

Matthew 26

Mt 26:1-2 | The Handing Over Announced

1 When Jesus had finished all these words, He said to His disciples, 2 “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man is [to be] handed over for crucifixion.”

In the two preceding chapters, Matthew 24-25, the Lord has proposed the ultimate goal of all God’s actions with His people on earth – both Israel as well as Christianity – and the world. With that He has come to the end of everything He had to say. In this respect, His task here below was finished.

He now takes his place as a Victim. In this capacity He turns again to His disciples. He says to them that they know what is about to happen. They know the Jewish calendar and they know that in two days the Passover will be celebrated.

It is Tuesday when the Lord speaks these words. On Thursday evening He will celebrate the Passover with His disciples. In the same breath He says that they also know what will happen to Him, for He has told them about it three times (Mt 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19). The Passover and His handing over for crucifixion form a whole. But the disciples have not understood the connection between the Passover and His crucifixion.

How simple are the words the Lord uses to announce what is going to happen. He presents the picture of the terrible sin that man commits by crucifying Him to our attention. But He Himself announces this suffering in advance with the tranquility of One Who has come just for that purpose. He is the fulfilment of the Passover. It is the fulfilment of the counsels of God, His Father, and of the work of His own love. The Lord speaks of His crucifixion as something that is already established, while, in the following verses, the deliberations have yet to take place.

Mt 26:3-5 | Deliberations Against the Lord

3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people were gathered together in the court of the high priest, named Caiaphas; 4 and they plotted together to

seize Jesus by stealth and kill Him. 5 But they were saying, "Not during the festival, otherwise a riot might occur among the people."

The chief priests and elders of the people gather to the high priest. All of them have the task of connecting, and keeping the people in connection, with God. The high priest is the highest representative of this group with this task. But in the place where the greatest respect for God and the greatest holiness in approach to God on behalf of the people should be, the most evil deliberations that have ever been held take place. They want to get rid of God revealed in goodness!

They assume that the Lord would appeal to the people and call upon their support. That is why they don't want to seize Him at the festival when there are many people in Jerusalem on that occasion. They make their assumption because wicked people cannot think beyond their own wickedness and therefore always count on finding their own evil principles in others. Their devilish deliberations serve only to fulfil the counsel of God. They say: 'Not during the festival'; God says: 'During the festival'.

Mt 26:6-13 | Anointing in Bethany

6 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper, 7 a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it on His head as He reclined [at the table]. 8 But the disciples were indignant when they saw [this], and said, "Why this waste? 9 For this [perfume] might have been sold for a high price and [the money] given to the poor." 10 But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me. 11 For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me. 12 For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial. 13 Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."

The Lord Jesus is in Bethany for the last time, a place of rest and peace for Him. That is where His friends live and where He is welcome. What a blessing it is to be such a house where the Savior, while death draws ever closer – and what a death! – can have a last stopover before He surrenders Himself to allow these things to happen to Him.

Simon, into whose house He comes, is no longer a leper. Yet he is still so called to remember who he used to be and what the Lord has done to him. Rachab the *harlot* (Jam 2:25) is also spoken of in this way, who she once was, and of Ruth the *Moabitess* (Rth 4:5,10), the people to whom she once belonged.

In this house God has a loving consolation for the heart of His Son before He suffers. There is a woman who comes to Him and pours very costly perfume on His head. It is more balm for His heart than for His body. In this deed she expresses the appreciation of what her heart understands of His preciousness and grace.

This woman had a need to show the Savior her admiration. The “very costly perfume” expresses this. She feels this is also the right moment to do this. In this deed lies all the worship of her heart for her Lord of Whom she understands that He will soon die. While the religious world outside calls for His blood, she comes inside to honor Him.

She has saved a long time for this very costly perfume. She has been occupied with this for a long time. True worship is the result of being occupied with the Lord Jesus and His death on the cross and what He has accomplished as a result.

The disciples do not understand her. They even reproach her and call her act of love to the Savior a “waste”. They address her and want her to account for what they consider to be the irresponsible use of her money. The testimony of affection and devotion to Christ brings the self-interest and heartlessness of others to light. Judas’ heart is the source of the evil, but the other disciples fall into the snare because they are not occupied with Christ. It provides sad evidence that knowledge of Christ does not automatically arouse the feelings of affection in our hearts that go with it.

They also tell her that they knew of a better destination for the perfume. It could have helped many poor people. Helping the poor is indeed a good thing. But it is not a good deed to give something intended for the Lord Jesus a different purpose. That will always be a lower destination, while He is thereby dishonored.

We can also have this wrong way of thinking. For example, we may think that the time we spend studying God’s Word is lost time, for we would be

better off bringing the gospel to other people or helping others to get on better with their neighbors or the environment.

The Lord knows how they are talking among themselves about the act of the woman, of whom we know from another Gospel that it is Mary. He protects her and justifies her act. It is both an approval and an acknowledgement. The disciples bothered her, but He called the deed she had done to Him “a good deed”. How great the difference in assessment of the deed is by the disciples and by the Lord. The Lord does not say that it would not be good to help the poor, but that everything has an appointed time.

The woman who anointed Him had not been informed of the circumstances that would come, nor is she a prophetess. But she feels the approach of the hour of darkness because her heart is directed toward Him. The perfection of Christ that arouses deadly enmity in the leaders arouses fervent love in the women. The true character of every person is placed in full light by Him.

For the Lord, the woman’s deed is not only meaningful for the moment she does it. He gives the deed a far-reaching significance. The anointing has happened in view of His burial. This significance is always attached to it in all future preaching of the gospel. The meaning is worship. The purpose of the gospel is that people become worshippers of the Father. In this way, the woman will be remembered in all ages. She is the example of worship.

Mt 26:14-16 | Judas’ Betrayal

14 Then one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests 15 and said, “What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?” And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him. 16 From then on he [began] looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus.

What a contrast between the woman and Judas! Judas was also at the anointing. He saw it and was disturbed by it. He has also heard how the Lord has spoken of both the anointing and their reproach. However, he does not care about anything. Money is the only thing he can think of.

He considers the moment to have come to leave the circle of the Lord’s company. He who is one of the twelve, seeks another company, that of the

Lord's enemies. He is not looking for their company because he feels more at home there, but because there is money to be made. He offers to hand over Christ to the company and negotiates it with them. This is downright astonishing. A man who has been journeying with the Savior for so long, who has heard and seen so much of Him, wants to use Him as an object of trade to enrich himself.

The chief priests consider this a great opportunity. They must have been surprised that one of His disciples is willing to betray Him. That amazement will not have lasted long and will have turned into devilish joy. They agree on the price and pay it to him. They are sure that Judas will not run away with the money, but that he will be their accomplice in this evil business. Once he has the money – not only in the sense that he owns the money, but even more so that the money owns him – Judas actively seeks an opportunity to hand the Lord Jesus over.

The amount they pay him is prophesied by Zechariah (Zec 11:12-13). It is the price of a slave (Exo 21:32). From the point of view of the leaders it is a bargain, it only concerns a slave. From God's side, it is a glorious price, for it concerns His Servant, the Chosen One.

Mt 26:17-19 | Preparations for the Passover

17 Now on the first [day] of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?" 18 And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is near; I [am to] keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.'"" 19 The disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover.

It is the first day of Unleavened Bread. On that day, the whole house is swept with brooms and everything is removed from it that could make someone unclean according to the law, which would mean the Passover could not be celebrated. It is a picture of how our life should be. Our lives should be unleavened, that is without unconfessed sins. Then we live in fellowship with the Lord and can also participate in the Lord's Supper. The Passover is a picture of Christ Who died for us. We remember Him in the Lord's Supper (1Cor 5:7).

As faithful Jews, the disciples want to prepare everything to eat the Passover. It is beautiful to see that they ask the Lord where they can prepare it for Him. This should also be our question when it comes to where we want to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

The Lord gives His directions. He has a place where He keeps the Passover with His disciples. As the Teacher He has access to that place and the disciples have to say that to the owner of the house. The Lord governs everything, including people's hearts. He knows that His time is near. He knows that the Passover speaks of His own suffering and dying that is imminent.

The disciples obey the command and prepare everything for the Passover.

Mt 26:20-25 | Passover Celebration

*20 Now when evening came, Jesus was reclining [at the table] with the twelve disciples. 21 As they were eating, He said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me." 22 Being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him, "Surely not I, Lord?" 23 And He answered, "He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me. 24 The Son of Man [is to] go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." 25 And Judas, who was betraying Him, said, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" Jesus *said to him, "You have said [it] yourself."*

In the evening the Lord joins them with the ten other disciples. There He reclines with the twelve disciples, among whom is also Judas. The Passover is a meal for disciples, for students of the Teacher, for followers of the rejected King.

Food is a picture of fellowship. In that fellowship is an element that does not belong there. Among the twelve disciples is one who will hand the Lord over. The Lord here shows not only that He knows who will betray Him. He already knew this when He called Judas as an apostle. He says: "One of you." That is what has an impact on His heart and He wants it to have an impact on the others.

The disciples are all saddened. One by one, they wonder and ask Him this as a question: "Surely not I, Lord?" This shows a beautiful character trait

that is present in all of them. None of them feels above it. No one says, 'It could be another, but not me, Lord!' The Lord does not answer by naming Judas. He answers that He will show who will betray Him with a gesture. With this He appeals to their spiritual insight.

It presents two sides that are present throughout the Bible. On the one hand He says that He, as the Son of Man, fulfils what God has determined, as it is written about Him. On the other hand He makes the man who makes himself available as an instrument of the evil one fully responsible for that deed.

No one but He knows better how terrible the deed is that Judas is going to perform. As the Creator He has given Judas life. As a dependent Man, He says it would have been better for Judas if he had never been born. God gives life to man and tells him how to use it. He leaves it to man to do what he does with it. Never will a man be able to blame God for the deeds he has done himself.

How much Judas' heart is hardened is shown by his reaction. He also asks: "Surely it is not I?" However, he does not call the Lord 'Lord', but "Rabbi". It indicates that he has never bowed to the authority of Christ as Lord. The Lord answers his question in the affirmative.

According to the Gospel according to John, Judas leaves the room at this point (Jn 13:30). Judas indeed did *not* participate in the Lord's Supper which the Lord institutes after this.

Mt 26:26-30 | Institution of the Lord's Supper

26 While they were eating, Jesus took [some] bread, and after a blessing, He broke [it] and gave [it] to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." 27 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave [it] to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; 28 for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. 29 But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." 30 After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

While they are eating the Passover, the Lord institutes the Lord's Supper. He wants His disciples to remember a dead Savior. It is no longer about a

living Messiah. That is all over. They should also no longer think back to the liberation of Israel from the slavery of Egypt. With Christ, and with a dead Christ, a totally new order of affairs begins.

He institutes the Lord's Supper by taking "bread" – not a piece of the Paschal lamb. That bread speaks of His life as Man on earth. It represents His body that God has prepared for Him (Heb 10:5-7; Psa 40:6-8). After He has taken the bread, He gives thanks, not for the bread, but to God. As the Messiah, He leads His disciples in praising God.

Then He breaks the bread as the symbolic act for surrendering His body to death. And so He gives it to the disciples. Only Matthew explicitly mentions that He gives it "to the disciples". Matthew presents the Lord Jesus as the Messiah. The Messiah takes as King, the lead in everything and His disciples follow Him.

But they can only follow Him if they unite themselves with a dead Messiah. We see that in the words which the Lord then speaks. He invites them to take and eat of His body that has been surrendered to death. By taking it they receive part in everything He is. They do not need to look at their own unworthiness. By eating of it – only Matthew mentions this – that is to say, by feeding spiritually on Him, it also becomes part of them internally and they become conformed to Him.

The cup is also a symbol of what He is going to do. He knows that the cup for Him means that He will shed His blood. Yet He gives thanks for it because He looks at the result. He will shed it "for many for the forgiveness of sins". The fact that the blood is shed 'for many' indicates that it goes beyond only Israel. The new covenant is made only with Israel, just as the old covenant was made only with Israel (Heb 8:8). The foundation of this new covenant is the blood of Christ.

However, the powerful effect of the blood of Christ reaches far beyond Israel alone. Among the "many" who will receive the forgiveness of their sins on the basis of the blood of Christ are all people of all times who have, with remorse, repented to God for their sins. It also applies to all who belong to the church. That's why the Lord's invitation is: "Drink from it, all of you."

The Lord's Supper is the commemoration of a dead Jesus Who, by dying, broke with the past, laid the foundation for a new covenant, secured the forgiveness of sins, and opened the door for the Gentiles. They are all allowed to drink from it.

The Lord Himself does not participate in the cup. The cup speaks not only of His suffering, but also of the joy of the result of His work. In Matthew, that result is the establishment of His kingdom in public glory and majesty. It has not come that far yet. He is rejected by His people, and thus He is separated from His people as far as their joys on earth are concerned.

They must expect Him as a Companion in better days in the joy He has gained for them, for He will come back to be their Companion in that joy. Then He will drink it "new" with them, which is in a new way, of "the fruit of the vine". He will do this with them in "My Father's kingdom", which is the heavenly part of the kingdom.

After these assurances, they end the meal with the singing of a hymn. That hymn consists of singing Psalms 113-118. Then they all go outside, where it is already dark, on their way to the Mount of Olives.

Mt 26:31-35 | The Falling Away Foretold

*31 Then Jesus *said to them, "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.' 32 But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." 33 But Peter said to Him, "[Even] though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away." 34 Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you that this [very] night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." 35 Peter *said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You." All the disciples said the same thing too.*

The Lord knows His disciples both in their desires and in their weakness. They love Him, but are not able to follow Him on the way to the cross. In this night, when he is captured, they will flee from Him. They cannot bear the opposition with Him. They show their weakness in the hour of trial. He warns them in advance. He has written it down in His Word Himself. They flee not because the Word has to be fulfilled, but because they are

afraid. At the same time it is apparent that the Lord knows them and His Word bears witness to this.

He also testifies that He will gather the scattered sheep again and that He will go ahead of them to Galilee (Mt 28:7,16). That will be when He is risen and all the work, in which they could not participate, is accomplished. His death is not the end and the disciples' unfaithfulness is not the end.

Peter testifies that he does not believe the Lord. The reason is that he does not know himself. Sincere, but without self-awareness, he swears his absolute faithfulness to Him. He relies on His own strength to stand, detached from the Lord. However, we will only stand if we do not rely on ourselves, but only on Him.

The Lord must reprove him. He tells Peter in advance how he will deny him three times. He also gives an additional sign: if Peter has denied him, the rooster will crow. But Peter maintains his attitude. He disputes the Lord's truth in favor of his own faithfulness. He is supported in this by all the disciples. The Lord does not go into it any further.

Mt 26:36-46 | Gethsemane

*36 Then Jesus *came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and *said to His disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." 37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. 38 Then He *said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me." 39 And He went a little beyond [them], and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will." 40 And He *came to the disciples and *found them sleeping, and *said to Peter, "So, you [men] could not keep watch with Me for one hour? 41 Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." 42 He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done." 43 Again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. 44 And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more. 45 Then He *came to the disciples and *said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into*

the hands of sinners. 46 Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!"

The place where the Lord comes with His disciples is expressly mentioned: Gethsemane. That means 'olive press'. He designates a place for His disciples to sit down. They may rest. He goes to fight the toughest prayer battle ever.

He takes three disciples further into the garden: Peter, the principal, and the two sons of Zebedee, these are John and James. John and James are not specifically named, but referred to as "the two sons of Zebedee". In Matthew 20 they are not mentioned by name either, to emphasize their parentage there too (Mt 20:20). Because of their parentage, they ask for things that do not belong to them. It will soon become apparent that because of their parentage they cannot keep watch with the Lord either.

As He goes further, He sees what awaits Him and that makes Him grieved and distressed. He makes them partakers of His grief, but not of His fear, and appeals to their compassion. He asks them to keep watch with Him at the place where they have now arrived.

Then He also leaves the three disciples behind. The last bit, "a little beyond", he goes alone. No one can follow this distance. Then He falls on His face. He sees before Him the full horror of what awaits Him on the cross. What happens here is described in Hebrews 5 (Heb 5:7). The Lord does not drink the cup here, but this is what He sees. On the cross He drank the cup filled with the wrath of God when He was made sin for us and forsaken by God, which He felt in the depths of His soul.

It is impossible that He could desire to come into contact with sin. It was a horror to His soul. It is His perfection that He asks the Father to let that cup pass Him by. Equally perfect is His submission to the will of the Father. If we were to be saved, if God was to be glorified in Him Who had taken our cause upon Himself, the cup could not pass Him by.

After this prayer He stands up and goes to those who He asked to keep watch with Him. They have fallen asleep. His prayer didn't last that long, did it? However, they have no awareness of the seriousness of what awaits their Lord. They have their own thoughts about everything that is connected to Him. The Lord gently reprimanded Peter for his false self-confidence,

and reminded him of his weakness. But Peter is too filled with himself to take advantage of it. He awakens from his sleep, but his self-confidence is not shaken. A sadder experience is needed to cure him.

While the soul of the Lord is so busy with the horror of the sins that He will have to bear, and with the horror of God's judgment over them, He thinks of the wellbeing of the disciples. He tells them to keep watch and pray with themselves in mind. He no longer asks them to think of Him. He knows that it is not their unwillingness. Their spirit is willing, but they have still oh such little awareness of the weakness of the flesh.

We do nothing other than look at the Lord with admiration here. We see His fear of the cup which He has not yet drunk, but experiencing a fore-taste of that which He sees ahead of Him as He presents it to His Father. We see how He then turns in complete peace to His disciples and then returns to the same terrible spiritual battle that frightens His soul.

That He prays again is proof even more of His perfection and the perfect abhorrence He has of sin. He is not looking for a way out, of not having to drink the cup. He follows the will of God. He does not seek the consent of the Father, as if He did not know what His will was. It is not about asking Him if He could be dismissed from His task, but He as Man seeks the complete support of His Father.

Again He rises from prayer and comes to His disciples whom He finds asleep again. They are not able to keep watch with Him. He doesn't wake them up this time. He leaves them. He is also Divinely perfect in His dependence. Therefore, once again, for the third time, he prays. He is not looking for other words. He seeks to bring the whole weight of what awaits Him to His Father.

After He has fought the battle, there is perfect peace. He goes to His disciples and tells them that they can now continue to sleep, that is, that they no longer have to keep watch. He oversees the future and goes to meet it in perfect peace. He is ready to do the great work. He perfectly knows every facet of everything that awaits Him. The first aspect is imminent. It is no surprise to Him that Judas is coming, whom He tellingly points out as "the one who betrays Me".

Mt 26:47-50 | Judas Betrays the Lord

47 While He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a large crowd with swords and clubs, [who came] from the chief priests and elders of the people. 48 Now he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him." 49 Immediately Judas went to Jesus and said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and kissed Him. 50 And Jesus said to him, "Friend, [do] what you have come for." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him.

Judas is so close by that he appears on the scene while the Lord is still speaking. With his arrival he interrupts Him, as it were, in His teaching of the disciples. But the Lord is ready for it. Judas is emphatically named "one of the twelve". It has been particularly painful for the Lord that it is someone from the company that He had gathered around Him and that has experienced Him so closely.

Judas doesn't come alone. He heads up a large crowd armed with swords and clubs. It is this great crowd that has listened so often to the Lord and has been amazed by His words and has experienced His acts of blessing. They come because the chief priests and elders of the people have sent them. It is that easy to influence the crowd.

Judas, again called "he who was betraying Him", had given them a sign to indicate Who they should seize. Was it possible that they would be mistaken with Him Who had been with them for so long? It was dark and the Lord was not a particularly remarkable Person when it comes to His outer appearance. The other disciples are men of His age group.

The agreed sign is the most painful sign that could be conceived. The kiss is a sign of love. Judas uses this sign of love to betray Him. He can no longer be stopped by anything and carries out his wicked and hypocritical work of betrayal. He kisses the Lord intimately. How hardened must the traitor have been, being completely in the grip of satan.

The Lord's reaction, as His whole activity in this event, is of a special nature and substance. He doesn't start to swear or hit, but speaks to Judas with His Divine love for the last time. He addresses Judas with "friend". Then He asks the revealing question: "What you have come for"? He offers

Judas a last chance to reflect. But Judas is no longer reachable by any of His words.

The crowd goes to Him, lays hands on Him and seize Him by force. It is as if they want to prevent Him from leaving. What foolish, nonsensical actions a man can come to if he is blind to the glory of Christ. He is the One Who gives them the power to perform their wicked deeds; He gives them the power to seize Him.

Mt 26:51-56 | To Fulfil the Scriptures

*51 And behold, one of those who were with Jesus reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. 52 Then Jesus *said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. 53 Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? 54 How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, [which say] that it must happen this way?" 55 At that time Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me as [you would] against a robber? Every day I used to sit in the temple teaching and you did not seize Me. 56 But all this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets." Then all the disciples left Him and fled.*

One of His disciples wants to defend His Lord. He also does not realize Who He is, as if He were not able to defend Himself. The disciple does not help, but causes damage to one of the opponents, i.e. the slave of the high priest. The fact that the high priest has a slave means that he is served by someone he has subdued. But isn't it the task of the high priest to serve others? The high priest has sent his slave to participate in this evil work of capturing the Son of God.

Matthew does not mention that the Lord heals the ear. He does mention that the Lord reproves His disciple. The sword should be in the sheath and not pulled out. Whosoever takes up the sword shall perish by it (Rev 13:10). It is now the time of suffering. Going the way of suffering is the way of the Father.

He could have prayed to the Father to send angels. These angels are ready to carry out the judgment of all those who offend the Son at one wink of

the Father. The angels will have held their breath in watching this scene in which their Creator is being captured by puny creatures. However, it is not the execution of the verdict on evil that is at issue, but the fulfilment of the Scriptures of the prophets.

After the Lord has addressed the betraying Judas and His straying disciple, He addresses the crowds. He also asks them a question that must awaken their conscience. Why do they come to capture Him as if He were a robber? What has He stolen from them? He did nothing but give, didn't He? And why do they come with swords and clubs? Have they ever seen Him fighting? Did His performance ever frighten them? Has He not always been kind and full of love for them? And why are they coming now? He was with them daily in the temple and they heard and enjoyed His teaching. He wants to wake them up and make them realize that they have been persuaded to commit a crime.

He Himself gives the explanation of their actions, without diminishing their responsibility to any extent. He is perfect Lord and Master of and in everything that happens. Nothing comes as a surprise to Him because He takes the Scriptures as His guide. If we know the Scriptures and let ourselves be guided by them, there will be fewer things in our lives that will upset us. We learn through the Scriptures that God is above everything and nothing gets out of His hand. We learn that we can trust Him in all circumstances (Rom 15:4).

At this moment, the disciples can no longer bear it. The threat of superior numbers makes them flee. With this they forsake Him and leave Him alone. They let Him down.

Mt 26:57-61 | Many False Witnesses

57 Those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together. 58 But Peter was following Him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and entered in, and sat down with the officers to see the outcome. 59 Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death. 60 They did not find [any], even though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward, 61 and

said, "This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.'"

Those who have taken the Lord prisoner believe that they have Him in their power and can do with Him what they want. But the Lord allows Himself to be carried away like a lamb led to slaughter (Isa 53:7). They bring Him to the high priest Caiaphas. It was there that the scribes and elders gathered. The religious leaders had determined that He would stand trial before them. The Son of God would be judged and condemned by these people, for the outcome was certain.

Peter, who had previously fled with all the other disciples, wants to know what is going to happen to his Lord. In his curiosity and also out of love for Him he follows Him. Only, he follows Him "at a distance". That is the portent of his fall. If we do not remain close to the Lord, the fall is near.

After a brief look at Peter, Matthew takes us back to the trial against the Lord. Never has there been such a trampling of justice as in the trial against Christ. And that's just if we read how the 'judges' look for false witnesses. We are not dealing here with people who misjudge a case or are misled, but with people who consciously seek false witnesses. That is how corrupt they are. What court case has ever started in such a way that judges diligently seek liars to convict the accused? That's how it is here, and Christ is silent. The testimony of the Scriptures is brief: "They did not find [any]".

And how they did their best to condemn Him on the basis of false testimony, for they brought "many false witnesses" forward. None of these false witnesses is mentioned by name, but God knows them all. What a responsibility to make a false testimony against Christ. They are not ignorant people, but people who distort the facts to give false judges a reason for conviction. It doesn't have to be true, as long as it sounds plausible. But nothing is found.

At the very end, two false witnesses come up and say something the Lord has almost said in this way (Jn 2:19). Only they do not quote Him well, nor do they understand what He said. They think he spoke of the temple building, while He spoke of His body. Indeed His body is the temple of God in the true sense of the word. The fullness of the Godhead dwelled on earth and dwells forever bodily in Him (Col 1:19; 2:9).

Mt 26:62-68 | Convicted for the Truth

*62 The high priest stood up and said to Him, "Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?" 63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." 64 Jesus *said to him, "You have said it [yourself]; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN." 65 Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; 66 what do you think?" They answered, "He deserves death!" 67 Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him, 68 and said, "Prophecy to us, You Christ; who is the one who hit You?"*

During all the false accusations, the Lord has said nothing. The high priest can't stand this. He wants to force Him to make a statement. But the Lord does not allow Himself to be forced. He is, as always, perfect Master of the situation. Then the high priest takes refuge in the oath and adjures Him by the living God. The man is so blind and so far from God that he does not realize that the living God is before him. He wants the Lord to say whether He is the Christ, the Son of God. If He were to say so, they would have proof that He blasphemed God and thereby have a reason to condemn Him.

The Lord now opens His mouth to confess the truth about His Person. He confesses the glory of His Person as Son of God. He adds, however, that from now on they will no longer see the Son of Man in the meekness of Someone Who does not break the bruised reed (Isa 42:3), but as Someone Who sits at the right hand of power and comes with the clouds of heaven. He points to the position of glory that He will take in heaven, as it says in Psalm 110 (Psa 110:1), and to His coming in glory from heaven to earth, as spoken about in Daniel 7 (Dan 7:13).

This confession is what the high priest needs. In hypocrisy he tears his robes as if he has heard something awful that plunges him into mourning. He pronounces and asks for approval. The scribes and elders agree with

the accusation and judge the Lord guilty of death. Thus the Lord Jesus is condemned on the ground of the truth, the testimony of His own Person.

As if they had not gone low enough, the high men are falling to their lowest level ever. To their blatant condemnation of the Righteous, they add the most brutal insults that can be given to a human being. The high priest does not intervene, but enjoys it and may have himself participated.

The Lord has not been spared any humiliation. Not only did they hurt Him physically, but their questions also hurt His soul. They mock Him as the Prophet. They mockingly call Him "Christ". They challenge Him to say who hit Him. One day He will answer this question to their great dismay when they appear before the great white throne. Hopefully there will be those who have come to repentance and therefore have discovered before then that He knew who was hitting Him.

Mt 26:69-75 | Peter Denies the Lord

*69 Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came to him and said, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean." 70 But he denied [it] before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about." 71 When he had gone out to the gateway, another [servant-girl] saw him and *said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." 72 And again he denied [it] with an oath, "I do not know the man." 73 A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Surely you too are [one] of them; for even the way you talk gives you away." 74 Then he began to curse and swear, "I do not know the man!" And immediately a rooster crowed. 75 And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, "Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.*

Peter, who followed the Lord at a distance, has arrived in the courtyard of the high priest. There he has taken a seat among the enemies of the Lord who are warming themselves by a fire. He thinks he can stay there unnoticed to see what is happening to his Lord. Then a servant-girl comes to him who recognizes him as someone who was with "Jesus the Galilean". What must have gone through Peter's mind when the servant-girl said this to him. He wanted to be unknown, he hoped no one would recognize him

in the dark. Because of this observation he has to show his true colors. The girl did not ask a question, she established a fact.

Then the great apostle, the first of the twelve, seeks an excuse. He pretends not to know what the servant-girl is talking about. This is tantamount to denial. It is a denial that he belongs to the Lord Jesus. All who are there hear him express his denial.

Because it has become dangerous for him there, he moves away from that place. He wants to leave the court and goes to the front gate. But there too is a servant-girl who recognizes him. She says that he belongs to "Jesus of Nazareth". In the first case Peter is addressed personally. In this case, the woman's comment is addressed to all those who are there. Peter again denies that he knows Him. This time his denial is stronger. He swears that he does not know Him. He also calls Him "man", as if the Lord were no more than that.

Peter is not yet at the low point of his denial. The fall has yet to be made complete, as the Lord foretold. It is not a moment of weakness. It is a situation in which Peter has voluntarily entered. The Lord uses that situation to teach Peter what is in himself and that he is no better than the other disciples.

For the third time there will be a recognition of his relationship with the Lord Jesus, this time from a whole group. They come to him and confirm what the woman has noticed. They recognize Peter not only by his appearance, but also by his accent. Peter betrays himself through his accent which he cannot deny.

Then the fall of Peter becomes complete. In even more powerful terms, in which he even curses, he repeats his earlier statement and declares under oath that he does not know the "man".

As soon as Peter has pronounced his third denial, the rooster crows, as the Lord foretold. That reminds Peter of the word of the Lord. This word is now doing its work in his conscience. Crushed by guilt, he goes out and weeps bitterly. His conscience is deeply touched and convinced of sin.

This is the result of the work of the Lord Jesus as the Advocate with the Father (1Jn 2:1). "Jesus Christ, the righteous", prayed for him that his faith

would not fail (Lk 22:32). Therefore he goes out to weep bitterly and not to hang himself, like Judas (Mt 27:5).

His tears cannot erase his guilt, but they prove by grace the existence of the sincerity of his heart. They testify of that powerlessness for which even sincerity of heart is no remedy. Only close attachment to Christ, faith in His word and distrust in ourselves save us from falling.

I may find myself in situations where I deny the Lord and treat Him as nothing more than a 'man'. When I put forward my own views on a matter because I am afraid to say what the Lord thinks about it in His Word, I deny Him. Then to me He is no more than a man, that is, no more than I am. In reality I am lowering Him and not giving Him the rights He has over my life. Christ wants to remind me of this in His grace, and I must confess that. Then restoration can follow.

Matthew 27

Mt 27:1-2 | Delivered to Pilate

1 Now when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death; 2 and they bound Him, and led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor.

The Lord was questioned and mocked all night long by the religious leaders of the people, the people to whom He came to set free from their sins. But they do not want Him. He was also betrayed by one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, abandoned by all His other disciples and also denied by Peter.

How lonely He is in all that happens to Him. And what a defamatory and humiliating treatment He has yet to face. In all this He knows that One has not forsaken Him. Yet He knows that when He hangs on the cross, He will finally be forsaken there by His God. He has accepted the cup and will drink it until the last drop.

The chief priests and elders deliberately find Jesus guilty and decide to kill Him. Their deliberations are the result of their own importance. The ego of the religious man comes to the conclusion that Christ, the Son of God, must be murdered. Because they are not allowed to carry out a death sentence themselves, they hand Him over to Pilate. They would have wanted to kill Him themselves, but they are afraid of the people. They seek the support of the government to make it seem a legal conviction. To bring him to Pilate they bind the almighty God Who has always been a blessing in their midst and lead Him away from the house of the high priest. He does not resist.

Mt 27:3-10 | The Death of Judas

3 Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, 4 saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See [to that] yourself!" 5 And he threw the pieces of

silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself. 6 The chief priests took the pieces of silver and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the temple treasury, since it is the price of blood." 7 And they conferred together and with the money bought the Potter's Field as a burial place for strangers. 8 For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 9 Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "AND THEY TOOK THE THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER, THE PRICE OF THE ONE WHOSE PRICE HAD BEEN SET by the sons of Israel; 10 AND THEY GAVE THEM FOR THE POTTER'S FIELD, AS THE LORD DIRECTED ME."

Judas followed the 'trial'. When he sees that the Lord is condemned, he wants to withdraw from the plot. During the interrogation and mistreatment he did nothing. It seems he has been waiting for the moment when the Lord would miraculously rid himself of His assailants. But Judas is blind to Who Christ is and to the work He will do. The money has him in its grip. Therefore, all his considerations are in vain. Nor is his repentance a repentance for his crime, but for the outcome that he did not estimate.

Judas knows that the Lord is innocent. His conscience, deceived by satan, needs to bear witness to the innocence of the Lord. The hardening of the chief priests and elders is, if possible, even worse than that of Judas. Judas acknowledges that he has betrayed innocent blood. The leaders are unscrupulous, people without any feeling. They want to get rid of Christ whatever it costs them in money or people.

After the complete insensitivity of the leaders Judas sinks into complete despair. What he seemed to have won with his betrayal, he throws back for nothing into the temple sanctuary. Tempted and completely overwhelmed by the devil, he then loses himself as well. He goes away and hangs himself. It is no redemption from his tormenting conscience. His deed will torment him forever in the pains of hell (Jn 17:12; Mt 18:8-9).

The chief priests have the silver back in their hands. It reveals their supreme hypocrisy. The money that they themselves have paid out for the betrayal is now labelled as blood money. It betrays their blindness. They themselves are the cause of this blood money. In so doing, they condemn themselves. They confer what to do with this money. Every deliberation

is based on the idea that they want to get rid of the Son of God, while pretending to themselves that they want to keep clean hands.

As always, God is above this event and uses the outcome of their deliberations as a testimony against them. By buying the field they have created a permanent memorial of their own sin and the blood they have shed. Through the murder of God's Son, the world has become a Field of Blood.

The plan to use the pieces of silver for the purchase of the Potter's Field was also foretold by God in His Word. The citation comes from Zechariah 11 (Zec 11:12-13). [That it says "which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet" may have been the result of a later insertion, for it is possible that originally there was nothing but "the prophet".]

Mt 27:11-14 | Questioning by Pilate

*11 Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor questioned Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And Jesus said to him, "[It is as] you say." 12 And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He did not answer. 13 Then Pilate *said to Him, "Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?" 14 And He did not answer him with regard to even a [single] charge, so the governor was quite amazed.*

The Lord Jesus stands there before the governor. An impressive scene. There the Creator of heaven and earth, the ruler of the universe, stands before a corrupt vassal of Rome, the representative of Roman authority to which Israel is subjected by its unfaithfulness. The governor questions Him. What a position of humiliation Christ takes. He Who is the Judge of all the earth, let Himself be questioned by a corrupt public servant. Pilate asks Him if He is "the King of the Jews". That is the important question for him and not whether he is the Son of God. Because it is again a question about His Person, the Lord also answers this question (cf. Mt 26:63-64).

While the Lord stands before Pilate, the chief priests and elders do their best to convince Pilate of His guilt. They are tireless in their efforts to get Him sentenced not to imprisonment, but to death. The Lord does not respond to all their accusations. Pilate finds it strange that He doesn't react to everything that is testified against Him. He is not deaf, is He? Pilate does

not get an answer either. He remains as if deaf. Pilate has never had such a prisoner before. He is very amazed about His attitude.

Mt 27:15-21 | Jesus or Barabbas

15 Now at [the] feast the governor was accustomed to release for the people [any] one prisoner whom they wanted. 16 At that time they were holding a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. 17 So when the people gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" 18 For he knew that because of envy they had handed Him over. 19 While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him [a message], saying, "Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him." 20 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death. 21 But the governor said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas."

The governor is looking for a way to release the Lord. Now he thinks of his custom of releasing a prisoner of the people's choice on the occasion of a feast. As the Passover is drawing near, as a good politician he can use his custom to see if he can release Him that way. These are the excuses of the natural human being not to choose for himself but to pass the responsibility on to others.

As the executor of justice, Pilate failed completely. But God will use Pilate's custom to make the absolute will of the people to kill His Son even clearer. The unjust representative of the authority of the nations is powerless against evil because he is guilty of the same evil. He too thinks only of himself and his own interests.

Ironically, Pilate has a certain Barabbas in mind as an 'alternative' to the Lord. The irony lies in the meaning of his name. Barabbas means 'son of the father'. His father is the devil. This 'son of the father' is placed next to the Son of the Father. Pilate thinks he is making a smart move with Barabbas. He knows that Barabbas is a big criminal in the eyes of the people. They would certainly want him to release Jesus. His thought stems from the right conclusion that the Lord was surrendered out of envy. But he has

no eye for their deep hatred of Him, just as he is blind to the corruption of his own heart.

In order to dress his proposal up with authority, he sits on the judgment seat. What an exhibition! The puppet of the people and the servant of Rome represents the official authority and must do justice. He is convinced of the innocence of Christ, but he refuses to express it clearly.

He even receives a warning from his wife. She sends him the message that God has given her in a dream. She calls Him "that righteous Man". She also says that in her dream she suffered a lot because of Him. This can only be done by the Spirit of God. She listens to the message of God and wants to keep her husband from the greatest iniquity ever. With this she shows herself to be a real help, as a wife is meant to be for her husband.

But Pilate is just as unattainable to his wife as his attempts to release the Lord are to no avail. He will bow to the boundless wickedness and murderousness of the chief priests and elders. They manipulate the crowds to choose Barabbas, while at the same time inciting them to demand the death of the Lord Jesus.

Pilate's weak answer consists of the choice he announces to them once more. But there is no consideration among the people. The choice is fixed. It doesn't matter who is released, as long as Jesus is killed.

Mt 27:22-26 | Sentenced to Death

*22 Pilate *said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all *said, "Crucify Him!" 23 And he said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they kept shouting all the more, saying, "Crucify Him!" 24 When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see [to that] yourselves." 25 And all the people said, "His blood shall be on us and on our children!" 26 Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.*

Now that the choice of the people has proved unshakeable, Pilate asks what to do with "Jesus who is called Christ". Which judge has ever asked the people what to do with a prisoner? It happens to the Lord Jesus. No

injustice, no humiliation has been spared him. And in the midst of this whole pretense, this sham trial, He remains silent.

Pilate tries to bring them to reason with the question of what evil He has done. The people are not open to reason. They want to see blood, *His* blood.

Pilate realizes that he has to stop his attempts to free Him. His first concern is to keep the people quiet. When there is a revolt, he gets into trouble with his boss in Rome. And he wants to avoid this at all costs, at the expense of justice, at the expense of truth, at the expense of Him Who is the truth.

At the same time, he also wants to exonerate himself. Therefore he takes water to wash his hands as a sign that he has clean hands and is therefore innocent of His blood. As if physical water can take away the great sin that he commits out of his selfish heart. The fool. He believes that he can pass on his own responsibility and place it on the people by saying that they have to see to that themselves. His guilt is fixed forever.

The people are also one hundred percent guilty. They pronounce the word that in the following centuries has become true in a horrible way. It will also become true in the most horrible way in the great tribulation that will come upon them.

Pilate washed his hands, but that doesn't change the fact that his hands are tied to the will of the people. His hands are covered in blood. He releases the murderer Barabbas and he scourges the Lord. Even if his soldiers actually do it, he is responsible for it. Similarly, he is responsible for crucifying the Lord.

Mt 27:27-31 | Mocked

27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole [Roman] cohort around Him. 28 They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. 29 And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 30 They spat on Him, and took the reed and [began] to beat Him on the head. 31 After they had mocked Him, they took the [scarlet] robe off Him and put His [own] garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.

The governor's soldiers, soldiers over whom he has authority, take the Lord with them into Pilate's official residence. These soldiers call on all their comrades to gather "around Him". Before He is crucified, He becomes the target of the mockery of an entire cohort. Everything that constitutes His dignity as Man is taken from Him. The stripping will not have been done gently. Then they dress Him up as King by putting a scarlet robe on Him.

To make His confession that He is a King even more ridiculous, they twist a crown of thorns and put it on His head. The Lord is not spared any humiliation. Thorns are the result of sin that has come into the world (Gen 3:18). By putting a crown of thorns on Him, it is as if they declare Him to be the cause that sin has come into the world. They also give Him a reed as a scepter in his hand. And the Lord holds it.

Mockingly they fall on their knees before Him and greet Him as King of the Jews. And that He is. One day they will fall to their knees before Him. Then it will not be to mock Him, but to confess Him in truth as Lord (Phil 2:10).

Their contempt knows no bounds. They spit on Him with slanderous spittle. He has not turned His face away from it (Isa 50:6). Is there anything that expresses greater contempt than spitting in someone's face? The reed they had put into His hand as a mocking symbol of government, they take away from him again, beating Him on His head crowned with thorns. The reed is not one that breaks easily, but a real stick. A sponge can be put on it to lift it up to give in that way a drink to the Lord (verse 48). When their lust for mockery is satiated, they take off the robe of mockery and put his own garments back on Him. Then they lead Him away to crucify Him.

It is poignant that the Lord is completely silent during all the mistreatment and ridicule. There is not even a threatening look. This does not mean that He has allowed everything to come over Himself stoically, numbly, as an inevitable fate. He has felt every mistreatment and ridicule deeply, both physically and in His soul. In several psalms He expresses His feelings about what is done to Him (Psalms 22; 69; 102; 109). He is truly perfect Man, but He is also the perfect Man because He trusts Himself completely to God and knows that He is supported by God in this terrible suffering inflicted upon Him by men.

Mt 27:32-38 | The Crucifixion

*32 As they were coming out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon, whom they pressed into service to bear His cross. 33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull, 34 they gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall; and after tasting [it], He was unwilling to drink. 35 And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots. 36 And sitting down, they [began] to keep watch over Him there. 37 And above His head they put up the charge against Him which read, "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS." 38 At that time two robbers *were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left.*

That the Lord is perfect Man is shown by the fact that He almost collapses under the weight of the cross He has to carry to Calvary. His strength is dried up like a potsherd (Psa 22:15). He is so weak, that He can hardly do it. The soldiers see that and want to prevent that He succumbs along the way. Simon of Cyrene has the honor – although he did not see it that way at the time, for he must be pressed to do so – to carry the cross of the Lord Jesus on his back.

When they have passed through the streets of Jerusalem and left the city, they arrive with their Prisoner at the place called Golgotha. This is the place of execution. Because of its shape or perhaps also because of the many executions that have taken place, it has been given the name "Place of a Skull". A gruesome place, conceived by man to allow criminals to die a horrible death. But what a tremendous blessing has proceeded out of this terrible place through the death of the Savior.

Crucifixion causes indescribable pain. It is a torturing death. To alleviate the suffering to some extent, a kind of anesthetic, wine, mixed with gall, was given to drink. It is also given to the Lord to drink. After having tasted this medicine momentarily, He does not want to drink it, for He wants to taste death in all its fullness.

Matthew says nothing about the crucifixion itself. It must have been awful for the Lord to be laid on the wood and to be attached to the cross with nails through His hands and feet. Then the cross is erected and placed in a hole that has been dug for it. The soldiers who do that work would not

have done it gently. The suffering of people in general and of this Man in particular does nothing to them.

After this terrible treatment they sit under the cross casting lots for His garments. Who would have worn His garments later? What they do to have fun is a fulfilment of the Scriptures (Psa 22:18). God fulfils His Word to the letter, also in the evil of man. The soldiers guard Him to prevent His disciples from taking Him off the cross before He dies. Again such a foolish act in the light of God's plan.

An inscription hangs above his head: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." The inscription is meant as a mockery and an accusation, but how true it is. He hangs on the cross because He is. Two more criminals are crucified with Him. Matthew expressly mentions that they are crucified to the right and left of Him, so that He hangs in the middle, as if He were the greatest criminal.

Mt 27:39-44 | On the Cross

39 And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads 40 and saying, "You who [are going to] destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." 41 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking [Him] and saying, 42 "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. 43 HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE [Him] now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" 44 The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words.

Even when He hangs on the cross, the slander continues. People, His people, despised Him. They pass Him by shaking their heads and slandering, underlining, as it were, the verdict being carried out upon Him. This is how they mocked Him Who had been such a blessing among them.

The content of their slander is a corruption of what He said about the temple of His body (Jn 2:19). How much dishonor the Lord is done today by changing His words, by interpreting them differently than He intended. It is my prayer that He will keep me from doing so.

The religious leaders of God's people cannot stop with their mockery. In the euphoria of victory they call out to the Lord with fresh slander, while He hangs there in great pains and deep humiliation. In their mockery they pronounce a great truth. He has indeed saved others and He cannot save Himself. He can't save Himself because His love for the lost doesn't allow Him to do so. His obedience to His Father also commands Him to stay there. In their great hypocrisy, they add that they will believe when He comes down from the cross. As if they haven't seen enough miracles to believe.

It is also true that He has trusted in God and still does and that He is God's Son. They also challenge God to show that He is with Christ. But God is also silent and does not answer by killing all the murderers and opponents of His Son with lightning from heaven. However much appearances may contradict, God has the greatest pleasure in His Son, Who is there to carry out His will completely.

Even the murderers who have been crucified to the right and left of Christ and are also in agony, turn against Him.

Mt 27:45-50 | Forsaken by God

45 Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. 46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" 47 And some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, [began] saying, "This man is calling for Elijah." 48 Immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink. 49 But the rest [of them] said, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him." 50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.

Everyone has turned against the Lord. Now the creation follows. There is three hours of darkness coming. Every outlook is taken away from Him. He hangs indescribable lonely between heaven and earth. The earth does not want Him and lifts Him up. Heaven now closes itself above Him as well.

The darkness is not just an abnormal natural phenomenon, because it is in the middle of the day. This particular darkness is also a sign of what happens in those three hours of darkness. In these hours there is also darkness in the soul of the Lord Jesus. He is burdened with the sins of all who have believed in Him since Adam and of those who will believe in Him until He has established the new heaven and the new earth. He is made sin, the source from which all sins have come forth (2Cor 5:21). Thus the holy God judges everything that has come into creation against His will in His only beloved Son. He did not spare Him (Rom 8:32).

At the end of those hours that are inscrutable for us, the cry sounds: "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani". We cannot fathom the profundity of this exclamation. Christ was always in perfect fellowship with His God. There has never been anything between Him and God. He was God's Associate (Zec 13:7) and walked with Him in perfection. The Father has once and again testified of the pleasure He has in His Son (Mt 3:17; 17:5).

All the time the Lord Jesus has been on earth, He has given God full joy. He, the Son of God, has been the only Man Who has perfectly obeyed all commandments. And He has done so much more. The Son has also been obedient in everything the law does not require. At the same time, the Son not only does what God has asked for obediently, but He also does it out of complete love for the Father. It is His food to accomplish the Father's will (Jn 4:34).

And this Son, Who has honored God in all things, is made sin by God. God repels Him from Himself as the most horrible object on earth. The sword of His righteousness awakens and strikes Him (Zec 13:7). After the three hours of darkness in which He was made sin and received God's judgment on it, He expresses the magnitude and depth of His grief in the most striking way in His question: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

It is one of the few times that the Holy Spirit has rendered a statement of the Lord Jesus untranslated. He adds the translation for us. The fact that the Lord's lamentation is reflected in the language in which He spoke deepens the feeling of His suffering. In the language of familiarity He expresses His deepest feelings about the rejection He is now undergoing. Everything that people have done to Him, He has tolerated quietly and silently. But

now His God has forsaken Him. This is intolerable. God was always with Him. He feels to the depths of His soul that God has turned against Him. He turns to God as His God. God has always been ‘My God’ for Him. The Lord says twice: “My God, My God”. It strengthens the lack of contact with His God. Then he asks why God forsook Him. This also results from His perfection. He also did the will of God in carrying our sins. At the same time God could not have any contact with Him. Sin always brings separation between man and God. That was true in the hours of darkness in full intensity for Christ. We know why God had to leave Him: it is because of our sins that separated us from God. He destroyed that separation by experiencing that separation for Himself. What grace!

Bystanders deliberately misinterpret His words. What He calls to God in His greatest need is mockingly interpreted as a call for Elijah. Then there is someone who does feel sorry for Him. Touched by what he sees and hears, this bystander wants to give him a drink to soothe his suffering. At the same time he thus fulfils the word from Psalm 69 (Psa 69:21). God fulfils His Word in every detail and the Lord Jesus is the fulfilment of it.

But His haters know no mercy. They stop the man who wants to give the Lord a drink and continue their mockery. They want to see if Elijah comes to save Him. They have gone through the darkness, but the frightening impressions of it have immediately disappeared when the darkness is gone. This is how many people react to situations of fear. It does not bring them to God, but they go forth in the same ungodliness because for them the situation has changed for the better.

Then the Lord calls again and for the last time with “a loud voice”. His ‘loud voice’ indicates that the strength of His spirit is unbroken. Then He yields up His spirit, which indicates that it is a conscious action, wanted by Him Himself. It completes His obedience. Until His death He does everything that is written about Him in the Scriptures. His death is supernatural and is accompanied by the supernatural signs described in the following verses.

Mt 27:51-56 | Effects of the Lord’s Death

51 And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs were opened, and many

bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many. 54 Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" 55 Many women were there looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee while ministering to Him. 56 Among them was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

The first consequence of Christ's death is that the veil of the temple tears in two. The way to the sanctuary is now open (Heb 9:8). His death is the basis for approaching God. God, Who has always been hidden behind the veil, reveals Himself completely through the death of His Son. The whole Jewish system, the connections with God under this system, the priesthood, everything falls away with the tearing of the veil. The believer is in the presence of God, without a veil in between. The holy God and the believer who has been cleansed of his sins, have been brought together through the death of Christ. What took place in the temple as a symbol of what took place in heaven was not perceived by anyone. Faith may know this wonderful result.

The death of Christ also has consequences for material creation. The whole of creation comes into motion. His death there too will bring a great change (Heb 12:26-28). These signs are a forerunner of that.

There is a third consequence, a third sign. This concerns the fallen asleep saints. The work is completely finished and accepted by God. His resurrection has yet to take place, but the omens of it we see in the opening of the tombs and the revival of the bodies of many saints. It is the first proof that death has been conquered. For man, death has the last word. Through the death of Christ the power of death is broken and "life and immortality" is brought to light (2Tim 1:10).

The saints who have been raised by the death of Christ only come out of the tombs when He is risen. He is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep (1Cor 15:20; Acts 26:23). They are the first fruits of His victory and follow Him. As He appears to many (1Cor 15:5-8), they appear to many.

A pagan centurion with those keeping guard over the Lord Jesus acknowledge, through what they have seen in Christ, that He is the Son of God. They confess their faith in Him (1Jn 4:15).

Where men lack courage and dedication, we often see it in women, as here. The disciples have disappeared; the women are standing, even though from a distance, at the cross to see what is happening to their beloved Master. Three women are described in more detail. Two of them are called Mary. Two of them are reported to be mothers. With one, the name of the person to whom she is married is mentioned. These are all details that have to do with life on earth. The death of the Lord does not change the earthly circumstances. The relationships remain as they were. Mary Magdalene is the woman who loves Him dearly because He has freed her from seven demons (Lk 8:2).

Mary of Bethany is missing. She doesn't have to be here. Just as she waited at home for the Lord when her brother Lazarus had died (Jn 11:20) because she knew Him, so she is at home now because she knows Him. She has already said goodbye to the Lord and she knows He will rise again (Mt 26:6-7,12). She knows Him through her relationship with Him, by sitting at His feet to listen to His word (Lk 10:39).

Mt 27:57-61 | The Burial

57 When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. 58 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given [to him]. 59 And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away. 61 And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave.

Now a man comes forward who was earlier hidden. He has the courage to make himself one with the dead Christ. He acts so that it may be fulfilled that the Lord Jesus will be with the rich in His death (Isa 53:9). God allowed him to be born to fulfil His Word. No doubt he will have done more for the Lord that God has not mentioned in His Word, but has written down in His book of memorial.

He is not ashamed to make Pilate aware of his desire regarding the body of the Lord Jesus. Pilate allows his desire to be carried out. Then Joseph takes the body in his arms, as Simeon did when the Lord was newly born (Lk 2:28). Then He was wrapped in cloths, here Joseph wraps Him in a clean linen cloth. Then he lays Him “in his own new tomb”.

It is *his* tomb, but instead of Joseph being laid in it himself, he lays the Lord in it. This is a beautiful symbol of the place the Lord has taken to free Joseph from the consequences of sin. It is also a *new* tomb, which means that this place has not yet been in contact with death. It indicates the completely new state of affairs that is beginning with the death and burial of the Lord.

At the grave two Mary’s are also present. They do not depart from the Lord Jesus. They want to be where He is. Their love and dedication to Him are touching, although here too Mary of Bethany is missing. She is not missing because her love and dedication are lesser. They are greater. She has Him in her heart and is always with Him. What is more, she is aware that He is always with her, despite the fact that He died, because for her He lives, even though He died. She believes that.

Mt 27:62-66 | The Guard at the Grave

62 Now on the next day, the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, 63 and said, “Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I [am to] rise again.’ 64 Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last deception will be worse than the first.” 65 Pilate said to them, “You have a guard; go, make it [as] secure as you know how.” 66 And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.

The religious leaders continue to chase the Lord in their hatred, even now that He has died. In their folly, they also want to prevent His Name from continuing to live on. They want to wipe out any thought of Him. So they go to Pilate and ask for a guard at the grave. They also determine the duration of the guard: three days. They do so in response to what the Lord has

said about His resurrection. They never listened to His word or accepted His works. Now they are afraid that what He said of His resurrection will be true. They remember this better than the women and His disciples. Unbelief does not trust itself. It distrusts everything because it fears that what it denies might be true. But their unabated unbelief and hatred are revealed in continuing to blaspheme Christ stubbornly and resolutely, calling Him “that deceiver”.

The proposal that they make in the folly of their unbelief will become an additional proof for the resurrection of the Lord. Had there not been a guard, after His resurrection they could have spread the rumor that His disciples had stolen Him. Now that they have the grave secured, there will be witnesses that in any case His disciples did not come, but that a supernatural act, an act of God in power, has made Him come out of the grave. Their plans will be destroyed and God will use them to fulfil His plans.

Pilate agreed to their request. He is a characterless man who satisfies everyone if he can prevent further harassment. Therefore, as with Joseph, he accepts the request here as well.

The absurdity of their precautions will prove itself. Its effect will become an unequivocal testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Everything they do only makes them involuntary witnesses and gives us the certainty of the fulfilment of the fact they are so afraid of. They are a testimony against themselves and thus unintentionally bear witness to the truth of the resurrection. The precautions Pilate might not have taken, they push so far that any mistake about the fact of his resurrection is excluded.

Matthew 28

Mt 28:1-8 | The Lord Is Risen!

1 Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first [day] of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. 2 And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. 3 And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. 4 The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. 5 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. 6 He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. 7 Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you." 8 And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples.

The two Mary's do not depart from the Lord. They want to be where He is. That's why they come to see the grave, His grave. They do so on the evening of Saturday, the Sabbath, when according to the Jewish calendar – where a day begins at six o'clock in the evening – the Sabbath has ended. As the women stand there, everything seems to be over, finished.

Then, early on Sunday morning, the great miracle of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus takes place. That great event is accompanied by a reaction from the earth in the form of a great earthquake. An angel comes out of heaven to earth. He walks to the grave, rolls away the stone that seals the opening and sits down on it, as if to prevent anyone from rolling it back.

Earthly powers had sealed the grave (Mt 27:66), a much higher heavenly power breaks that false seal. By sitting on it, the angel becomes, as it were, the new seal on the stone for the new situation. No one can roll it back until an adequate testimony of the resurrection of Christ has been given. That testimony will be given by people who have seen the empty grave. Christ already left the grave before the stone was rolled away. The rolling away is

not to let Him out, but to let people in, so they can see that He is no longer in the grave.

The shape of the angel radiates the judgment and purity of heaven. The effect of his appearance on the soldiers guarding the grave is that their heroism turns into deathly fear. They become stiff with terror. What they are experiencing now, does not exist in their world. Yet they experience it because what does not exist to them is reality. Every person who only believes in what he can see, will one day be overwhelmed by this fear when he comes face to face with the Judge of the living and the dead.

The women have also become afraid, but the angel speaks to them the comforting words: "Do not be afraid." Then he tells them that he knows that they are not enemies of the Lord Jesus, but that they are here to seek Him. The angel speaks of "Jesus who has been crucified", referring to the Lord as they last saw Him and as He lives on in their minds. He has good news for them, namely that He is risen, as He had also said. They could have known this. Then he invites them to look into the tomb to the place where "the Lord" was lying. They were witnesses that He was laid there (Mt 27:59-61).

Then the angel commands them to tell this joyful news to His disciples. They must add that they will see Him in Galilee, because He has gone there ahead of them. The disciples are asked, just as before his death, to follow Him also now. Following Him is also the precondition to seeing Him. The angel emphasizes his words by saying to them that he, the messenger of God from heaven, has said it to them. They are not dreaming.

The women react immediately. Still afraid because of the impressive appearance of the angel and on at the same time very happy they rapidly leave the tomb and quickly go to the disciples of the Lord to bring them this wonderful message.

Mt 28:9-10 | Appearance to the Women

*9 And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. 10 Then Jesus *said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me."*

While the women are on the way to tell the disciples that the Lord has risen and where they can see Him, the Lord appears to them. It is “Jesus”, for He is the same as before His death. They recognize Him immediately. They fall down before Him and take hold of His feet which are so lovely because He is the messenger of joy who proclaims salvation (Isa 52:7). They pay homage to Him, He has overcome death and brought to shame all of the expectations of those who killed Him. Their faith has not been in vain.

The Lord also speaks the word “do not be afraid” to them and repeats what the angel has said. Only the angel spoke of “His disciples”, while the Lord speaks of “My brethren”. This is a wonderful expression of the new relationship that has come about in grace through His work on the cross and His resurrection.

Mt 28:11-15 | The Deceit of the Chief Priests

11 Now while they were on their way, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. 12 And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, 13 and said, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.’ 14 And if this should come to the governor’s ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble.” 15 And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, [and is] to this day.

It is not only the women who left the grave with a message for others concerning what they saw and heard. Some guards also leave the grave with a message about what happened. Only they do not go to the disciples, but to Jerusalem where they seek out the chief priests to report to them about their experiences.

What the soldiers are saying is an unexpected disappointment for the chief priests and elders. They discuss how to solve this new problem. Just as so many dark things are covered up with money, so too they resort to bribing the witnesses. They gave Judas only thirty pieces of silver for delivering up the Lord Jesus, but to the soldiers they give “a large sum of money” to spread a lie about His resurrection.

They tell the soldiers what to say when questions arise. The truth must never be known. The lie must prevail. This is the way these wicked people act, who should teach God's truth to the people of God. They even guarantee the soldiers that they will convince the governor that the soldiers are speaking nothing but the truth. This is the false testimony that the leaders of God's people present to the Gentiles. How great their responsibility is for this horrible, thoroughly false testimony.

The leaders know what kind of man Pilate is and so do the soldiers. Pilate is as easy to bribe as they are. When the soldiers hear that they don't have to be afraid of Pilate, they just accept that. The soldiers are also people without conscience who do everything for money. They do what they have been taught and spread the lie that that is gladly accepted by the Jews. The Jews, too, do not want to be confronted with the truth and prefer to persist in believing in lies. How very sobering it will be for all who are involved in this lie the moment they will see Him Whom they have pierced and Whom they denied after He was risen.

Mt 28:16-20 | The Great Commission

16 But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. 17 When they saw Him, they worshiped [Him]; but some were doubtful. 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The women have conveyed the message. Then "the eleven disciples" – Judas is no longer there – go to the mountain in Galilee, where the Lord said He would meet them. When the eleven see Him, there appears to be a distinction in faith among the disciples. There are those who are immediately convinced that it is the Lord. There are also some who doubt. The Scriptures do not mention the names of the doubters, so that we can consider for ourselves whether we might also belong to that group. Do we always see Him, and do we constantly honor Him?

The Lord does not stand as one unapproachable and exalted. He draws near to them. He continues to be the Servant Who meets their needs. Then He speaks words that indicate His supremacy over the universe. In heaven and on earth, in both spheres, He exercises all power, and there is nothing that is not subject to Him.

From this authority over all things He commands His disciples to make disciples. That commission is now not limited to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt 10:5-6), but extends to all nations. Disciples are made by baptizing them. Baptism here is baptism in the Name of the triune God. To be a true disciple, teaching is also needed. They must do that too with those they have baptized.

The Lord concludes His commission – and this whole book of the Bible – with a word of great encouragement: “And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” This word has been of enormous support to countless believers throughout the centuries. Faith in this word is experienced by countless people during the most difficult moments and in the darkest periods of life that are the part of every believer.

This word is the echo of this book of the Bible. It follows anyone who, in faithfulness to the Lord’s command, is busy proclaiming the gospel by presenting the Person Who is the content of the gospel: Jesus Christ, the dead and risen Lord.

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