



New Testament Bible Characters

By
Mark Dunagan
And
David Phillips

Table of Content

Lesson	Page
1 Zacharias and Elizabeth	1
2 John the Baptist	3
3 Mary and Joseph	5
4 Nicodemus	7
5 The Samaritan Woman	9
6 Peter I	11
7 Peter II	13
8 John I	15
9 John II	17
10 Matthew	19
11 Judas	21
12 James the Brother of John	23
13 James the Brother of Jesus	25
14 Zacchaeus	27
15 Mary Magdalene	29
16 Herod and Herodias	31
17 Annas and Caiaphas	33
18 The Pharisee and the Publican	35
19 The Rich Young Ruler	37
20 The Rich Man and Lazarus	39
21 Mary and Martha	41
22 Blind Bartimaeus	43
23 The Thief on the Cross	45
24 Pilate	47
25 The Man Born Blind	49
26 The Sinful Woman	51

Zacharias and Elizabeth

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 1

“Zacharias”: “Remembered by Jehovah” (the Greek form of Zachariah).

“Elizabeth”: “The oath of God” or “My God is an oath”

Text: Luke 1:5-25; 39-45; 57-80

At the beginning of the New Testament the Lord sends an angel to announce the coming of the one who would prepare the way for the Messiah. That angel was sent to a man named Zachariah, one of the priests of Israel. We find that part of the reason this man and his wife were chosen to raise this child was because of their obedience to the law of God (Luke 1:5-7). The man that Zachariah and Elizabeth would raise would be named John the Baptist. Though both people were old in age before conceiving John, God is able to do great things, and He expects his servants to believe that (Luke 1:20). We see how Zachariah’s faith is tested, and though he wavered slightly, God’s grace and mercy is great. This godly couple would instill their characteristics in the raising of their son who would become a mighty prophet of God. Let us instill these same characteristics in our lives as well that we may learn to “walk in all the commandments of the Lord.”

Lessons:

- Luke 1:5-7: In spite of their hardships Zacharias and Elizabeth remained faithful to God and obedient to His law. The character of these two is comparable to that of Noah (Gen. 6:9; 7:1), and Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 15:6; 17:1-5). Like Abraham and Sarah, Zacharias and Elizabeth were childless even into their old age. In their culture to have no children was a reproach (vs. 25). In spite of this their faith in God remained. Let us take note:
 - Even though it had been over 400 years since God had spoken to the people through prophets, these two people were still able to “walk in all the commandments of the Lord blameless” (vs. 6). Today we are in the same situation as the people were back then. We have God’s word in writing and must rely on that as our guide for obedience to the Lord. We must, therefore, be like Zacharias Elizabeth and strive to “walk in all the commandments of the Lord blameless” using the word of God – The Bible.
 - Zacharias and Elizabeth did not have to wait for God to speak directly to them in order to be obedient. There are some today who say that they will not do anything to be saved unless God tells them personally what they need to do. Zacharias was faithful even before the angel appeared to him. He had faith in God’s word (which endures forever – Ps. 119:160), and that was enough for Him.
 - Though Elizabeth was without child they did not use this as an opportunity to turn from God. Often people will use any hardship in their lives as an excuse for not

obeying the word of the Lord. But we learn from this example that we do not face hardship because God does not love us. In fact it is quite the opposite (Heb. 12:1-11). Though they had no children we find that God was pleased enough with this couple that He chose them to be the parents of the one who would prepare the way for the coming Messiah (Luke 1:13-17; 3:1-6). Are we striving to live in such a way that God would think so highly of us (2 Tim. 2:15)?

- Luke 1:8-25: Notice that though Zacharias has been faithful all his life by merely obeying God's written word that when he was approached by an angel he did not believe (vs. 20). Zacharias' reaction can be a good thing and a bad thing. In a good way it shows a bit of skepticism that we all need if faced with such an experience, or stories of such an experience (Gal. 1:8). But in Zacharias' circumstances such skepticism was unjustified for the simple fact that 1) he was in the presence of the Lord (in the Holy place of the temple – 1:9-11) where anything unclean or unholy was not permitted. 2) The angel knew His prayers which were offered to God (vs. 13). There was ample evidence that this angel was indeed from God, and therefore the words that he spoke were from God as well. When we question God's word in the same way that Zacharias did (vs. 18) God becomes displeased with us just as He did with Zacharias. There is ample evidence throughout the scriptures that show us God's power and faithfulness. One instance in particular that applied to Zacharias' situation is Gen. 18:10-15. God is able to grant children even to the aged. When we are told to either do something or believe something that God has said, before we doubt let us ask ourselves this question, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Thus, we shall live our lives by faith (Rom. 1:17).
- Luke 1:24, 25: Let us not forget to thank God and praise Him when He blesses us all the days of our life (Acts 17:27-29).
- Luke 1:39-45: We see the joy of these two women even before the messiah had come into the world. Think of what our joy ought to be now that the Messiah has not only come, but He has accomplished His purpose and has brought salvation to all who believe. Do we live our lives having this joy within us? Do we share this joy with as many people as are willing to hear it?

John The Baptist

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 2

“John”: “Gift of God”

Text: Matt. 3; 11:1-6; 14:1-12; Mark 1:1-11; 6:14-29; Luke 1:14-17, 44-45, 57-80; 3:1-22; John 1:14-36.

The story of John the Baptist is short, but full of meaning. John was chosen by God to be “the voice of one crying in the wilderness” before he even entered into his mother’s womb. He was filled with the Holy Spirit before he even came out of his mother’s womb (Luke 1:15; 39-45). As the angel said to Zacharias, he was “great in the sight of the Lord.” We find in the scriptures that John was a humble man and that did not need comfort and physical possessions in order to do the Lord’s work. John had the clothes on his back and a zeal for God and that was all that he needed. There are many lessons that we can learn from John’s life, from his character and from his preaching. Let us all consider these things and strive to apply them to our lives.

Lessons:

- Matt. 3:11-4: Looks can be deceiving. In today’s society often more respect is given to preachers who have the fancy clothes and big suites. Let us learn from the life of John the Baptist that many of God’s most faithful servants were of no reputable background and had very little to their name except the clothes on their back. And in John’s case even the clothes on his back were not much to speak of. Nevertheless John preached the truth and fulfilled the duties that God gave him to do. Remember, God is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34) and neither should we be (James 2:1, 2).
- Matt. 3:2; Luke 3:1-20: Notice that John did not “dance around the subject” like many of today’s more “philosophical” preachers do. Rather, John said what God gave him to say and he did not waste time or his breath getting to the point. This is a good lesson to learn when we are teaching people what they need to do to be saved. We need to make sure that the message that we are teaching people is clear and gets the point across.
- Matt. 3:13-17: John knew and understood that he was the one prophesied of in the Old Testament as “the voice of one crying in the wilderness” (Isa. 40:3; John 1:22, 23). It is comforting to see that this man was humble enough that though he knew that he was one chosen to fulfill prophecy, he was not puffed up or proud or haughty toward other men. Indeed, John the Baptist was a very humble man, as we see both by his lifestyle and his interaction with men (especially Jesus). When Jesus comes to John in Matthew 3 we see John’s humility and willingness to listen to Jesus. Let us learn from this, for though we are God’s chosen people we have no right to be puffed up against those who are in the

world. On the contrary, like John, we have an obligation to humble ourselves and strive to teach them the gospel of Jesus Christ so that they too may become a part of God's people.

- Matt. 11:1-6: John was a man who was seeking and anticipating the coming of the kingdom of God. His entire life was spent preparing the way for the coming of that Kingdom. For us today the kingdom of God has already come and those who are obeying the gospel of Jesus Christ (Christians) are being "conveyed" (or translated or transferred) into that kingdom (1 Cor. 1:13). If John was seeking the Kingdom of God before it was even established, how much more should we be seeking to enter and to remain in that kingdom now that it has come (Matt. 6:33)? See also Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; 1 Thess. 2:10-12.
- Matt. 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29: John's faith in God was proved by the fact that he was willing to give up his life for the cause of the kingdom of God and he was willing to preach the truth even when he was in danger of death. Let us understand that the kingdom of God is worth our lives. John believed that it was, and Jesus said that we must believe it as well (Luke 14:26; Matt. 10:38, 39; 2 Tim. 3:12).
- Mark 1:6-8: Notice that John preached only what he was commanded to preach, that is, he prepared the people for Christ's coming. He did not add his own "I think so's." This is a good lesson for us when we are teaching and preaching God's word. We have everything that we are supposed to preach and teach written in the scriptures (2 Peter 1:3). *"If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen"* (1 Peter 4:11). To speak as an oracle of God is to speak only words from God. Our only record of the word of God is the bible, it is therefore of utmost importance that we speak only that which God has revealed to us in the scriptures. John was willing to do that, Let us learn to do that as well.
- Luke 1:15; 39-45: So much for the Abortionist's excuse of the child not having life in the mother's womb.
- Luke 1:80: It does not take prominent men or men highly educated in the schools of this world to successfully preach the gospel. Remember, it is by the wisdom of this world that men are drawn away from God (1 Cor. 1:18-21). Our knowledge and understanding must come from Christ for "we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16) and we are commanded to "grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter. 3:18). It is not bad to have a public education, but we should never substitute that for training in righteousness (Acts 4:13).

Mary and Joseph

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 3

“Joseph”: “Increase”

“Marry”: “a tear”

Text: Matt. 1:18-2:23; 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 1:23-2:52; Acts 1:14.

At the beginning of the life of the Messiah while He is on this earth God gives us a glimpse into the lives of those who brought the Savior into the world and cared for Him as He “grew and became strong in spirit” (Luke 2:40). By the small glimpse that we have into the lives of Joseph and Mary we get a big picture of the faith, trust, and thankfulness that God’s people should have toward Him. We learn of the justice, mercy and kindness befitting godly people and how these characteristics shine forth in the lives of those who “find favor in the sight of God.” As we read of the lives of these two individuals let us strive to apply those things that are pleasing to God to our own lives.

Lessons:

- Matt. 1:18, 19: It is no wonder why God chose Joseph to raise His son, Jesus the Christ. For God to say a man is just is no small thing. Consider Rom. 1:17 where Paul rights that the “just shall live by faith.” This is the same description given to Noah who “walked with God” and was chosen to be the father of all living after the flood (Gen. 6:9). Joseph was a just man, and therefore lived his life by faith. There is ample evidence of this from the response he gave to the angel who spoke to him concerning Mary’s pregnancy, the flight to Egypt and avoiding other persecutions (Matt. 1:24). Can we say that we are just, that we live our lives by faith? In 2 Peter 3:14 it says that we are to be diligent to be found by God in peace, “without spot and blameless?” Let us learn from the life of Joseph to do this very thing.
- Luke 1:26-33: Like her husband, Joseph, Mary also “found favor in the sight of the Lord.” Indeed, what manner of life must one live in order to be greeted in such a manner as was Mary? Though we are not given much insight into the character of Mary we can know this, that her faith was great and because of that she found favor in God’s eyes. When Sarah heard that she was to bear a child in her old age she laughed in unbelief (Gen. 18:12-14). When Zachariah was told that his wife would bear a child in her old age he wavered in unbelief (Luke 1:20). But Mary was not so unbelieving. It is one thing believe that one can bear a child in old age, it is another thing to believe that a woman can bear a child without ever having relations with a man, yet Mary did not waver in unbelief as did the others (Luke 1:38). Let us be like Mary who understood that nothing is too hard for the Lord.

- Matt. 1:18, 19: We are expected to approach those who have sinned and to “reprove rebuke and exhort” those who are unruly (2 Tim. 4:5). But Let us learn from Joseph that some amount of mercy is required in bringing our brethren out of sin. When a brother or sister is in sin we are not to use that as an opportunity to lift ourselves above them as though we are better than them, but to fulfill God’s command with a love for that person’s soul applying discipline where discipline is needed and mercy where mercy is needed.
- Matt. 1:20-25: When Joseph was commanded by the angel he did not ask questions or attempt to reason with the angel. We find that Lot had this problem when commanded by the angles to depart from Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:18-22). But Joseph was not so defiant. He asked no questions nor did he give any resistance. When the angle gave him the command he arose and obeyed. What is our attitude toward the scriptures? Do we find ourselves trying to reason around them or saying “it isn’t so” as Lot did? Or do we obey as soon as possible as Joseph did? Joseph was a just man on account of his faith (which included his obedience). Let us strive to be just, as Joseph was just.
- Luke 1:46-56: Consider the praises that Mary gave to God for the tremendous blessings that He bestowed upon her. Do we remember to give God the glory in all things in this life? Consider the passages that mention the thankfulness that we are to have. 1 Cor. 15:57; 2 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:15; 2 Cor. 9:12; 2 Cor. 9:15; Eph. 5:20; Phil. 4:6; Col. 1:3,12; Col. 2:7; Col. 3:17; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:16-18; 2 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 13:15; Rev. 7:2. As a study to help us be more thankful consider the following statements that Mary made in her song and think on how you can apply them to your life. “My soul magnifies the Lord” (vs. 46), “For He who is mighty has done great things for me” (vs. 49), “His mercy is on those who fear Him” (vs. 50), “He has shown strength with His arm” (vs. 51), “He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty” (vs. 53). When we can understand all the ways in which God blesses mankind we cannot help but be filled with gratitude.
- Luke 2:19, 51: “Mary never forgot about these incidents and seemed to dwell upon the meaning of them from time to time. She kept a mental scrapbook of all these astonishing sayings and happenings. The mysteries were beyond her comprehension (at that moment), yet she treasured them and sought to understand. Unlike the skeptic who disbelieves, rejects, or seeks to explain away everything he or she cannot understand at the moment, Mary regarded such things as her dearest treasures. How about us? Are we looking for a supposed contradiction in the Bible? Are we looking for a reason not to believe or at least not to be fully committed? Or, are we like Mary?”

Nicodemus

New Testament Bible Character: Lesson 4

“Nicodemus”: “Conqueror of the people”

Text: John 3:1-21; 7:45-52; 19:38-42.

Though there is little written about the man Nicodemus, what is written about him is enough to show us his character as a godly man. The first look that we have of Nicodemus is of him coming to Jesus at night wanting to ask Jesus for an explanation of some things that had been on his mind. Whether Nicodemus went to Jesus at night because he was afraid of persecution or because he wanted to be with Jesus by himself we do not know. What we do know is that this was a man who had questions and sought to find the truth concerning those questions. By the other passages that speak of Nicodemus we find that he was indeed a man who sought to know the truth and hungered and thirsted for righteousness. In some places in the scriptures we read of people who teach us great lessons in the few verses that speak of them. Nicodemus was one such person.

Lessons:

- John 3:2: The records that we have written for us in the scriptures of the life of Christ and the revelation of God’s word are written so that all may believe that Jesus Christ is Lord (John 20:30, 32). The evidence that we have of Christ’s deity ought to be enough for anyone who is willing to accept the facts and listen to reason. Even Nicodemus, who was a ruler of the Jews, confessed that the signs and wonders that Jesus performed were indeed real and that they could only be performed by someone who had access to the power of God. The fact is that we have the truth laid out before us, and we also have a choice. We can see the evidence and believe, as Nicodemus did, or we can not believe as many of the others Jews did (John 12:37-41). Whatever we decide, God will judge us based on that decision (John 8:24).
- John 1:4: Like all godly men, Nicodemus was humble. Even the greatest teachers ought to be willing to ask questions when they do not understand. Let us humble ourselves enough to ask about what we do not understand. By this we can come to know the whole truth.
- John 3:1; John 7:50-52; John 9:22; John 12:42; John 19:38-42: In John 3:1 we find that Nicodemus was one of the rulers of the Jews, one probably having much wealth (John 19:39). During Christ’s ministry some of the other leaders of the Jews had conspired together and decided that any who followed Jesus would be cast out of the synagogue (John 9:22; John 12:42, 43). These circumstances created a difficult situation for many Jews, especially those who were of high standing among the people (John 12:42; John

19:38). It is interesting to note that in spite of such threats and danger looming over the people Nicodemus was still willing to follow Jesus (John 19:38-42). Even before the climax of Jesus' life on this earth (the crucifixion) Nicodemus was willing to accept the evidence before him (John 3:2) and believe that Jesus was sent from God. During Christ's ministry Nicodemus even went so far as to question judgments of the other leaders who were so violently adamant against Jesus. Nicodemus was willing to search for the truth and take a stand for what was right, even when his social status was threatened. This is an attitude that is rare among people today, but must be commended for it is one that God expects His people to have (Luke 9:23; Mark 8:34, 35; John 12:25-26). Let us take courage from Nicodemus' example and strive to stand for the truth.

The Samaritan Woman

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 5

“Samaritan”: Inhabitant of the District of Samaria located between Jerusalem and Galilee on the west side of the Jordan River.

Text: John 4:1-42

History of Samaritans: 2 Kings 17:24-41; Ezra 4

Evangelism is one of the most important works that Christ’s church is to accomplish. The church as a whole and every individual in their own personal lives have a responsibility to teach those who are in the world. In the story of the Samaritan woman Jesus helps us to understand how we are to teach people, the attitude we are to have in teaching people, and the great need for teaching people. As we read through this passage let us consider the attitude that Jesus had when teaching this woman, and the fulfillment He received from it. Also, let us consider the character of the woman who was being taught. The manner in which she received Christ’s teaching, with eagerness and readiness, is the same manner that all Christians (both young and old) are to receive God’s word.

Lessons:

- As we read through the text it is good for us to notice that Jesus was willing to take the time to teach one lost soul with whom most of His own people would not have much to do, even when He was tired and “wearied” (vs. 6). He was not prejudiced (vs. 9, 10), but He had a concern for the woman’s soul more than her social standing and condition. Jesus spent time with just one person; He felt that she was worth spending time with and teaching. What is our attitude toward teaching the gospel? Do we let our prejudices get in the way of sharing the good news of salvation which was first preached to us by someone that cared for us as Jesus did this woman? Let us strive to be like Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).
- John 4:31-34: After Jesus had His discussion with the Samaritan woman His disciples were surprised that He was no longer hungry, knowing that He was hungry before they went to buy food (vs. 8). Jesus derived spiritual benefit from spiritual work. He took pleasure in teaching people and planting the seed of God’s word on their heart just as we take pleasure in eating a well prepared meal. When Jesus said to Satan in the wilderness that “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God,” He meant that for all men and Himself (Matt. 4:4). Even in the beatitudes we see that “blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matt. 5:6). We must understand that the value of God’s word and the value of teaching God’s word are far greater than anything we can gain from this earth. Let us learn to take pleasure in spiritual things.

- John 4:10-15: Jesus said that He brings the living water, and that when we drink it we will never thirst. The water that Jesus was speaking of is figurative of the life that He gives (John 1:4; 3:16, 36). Once the Samaritan woman heard that Jesus was able to give this life she was eager to ask Him for it. Are we as eager as this woman was to drink of the “Living Water” that is in Christ? Let us not take for granted the great blessings we have with Christ as our Savior. Let us strive to drink from this water (John 3:16; Mark 16:16).
- John 4:16-19: Notice the attitude that the woman had when Jesus confronted her about the sin in her life. She did not become “offended” as so many people do when told they are wrong. She did not become insulted and refuse to talk to Jesus any further. On the contrary, she was eager to ask more and to learn more concerning spiritual truths. Let us strive to be like this woman in that, we too must not be insulted when we find that we are doing something that is not according to God’s law. Let us rather seek to learn more and to live according to the law of Christ.
- John 4:19-24: There are many people today that believe that God has designated a specific location for all of His people to worship in order for their worship to be acceptable. This may include a temple or some sort of building “sanctified” by the governing body of that denomination. Let us understand however that Jesus said that there was to be no designated place for worship when He is raised from the dead. Rather our worship is to be in “spirit and in truth.” That is to say, the place does not matter, but the method and the motive behind it. Let us strive to worship God in spirit and in truth.
- John 4:35-38: The fields are white for the harvest and we need to be busy working. Jesus was eager to teach this one woman. How eager are we to teach other people? Just as workers are sent out into the fields to reap the fruit of that field, Christians are laborers in God’s field, which is the world. If we are not working then we will be punished. The fields are white for the harvest and so we must be working diligently until that harvest is over.
- John 4:7ff: Notice how Jesus turned situations into conversation instead of waiting for people to come to Him. Often Christians will fail to teach people because they will only teach those who contact them first. We learn from Jesus in His interaction with the Samaritan woman that we ought to learn to use every situation as an opportunity to teach God’s word. We must seek to work the fields of harvest no matter how tired we are or what situation we are in.
- John 4:16-26: If the Samaritan woman with all of her marital problems could understand the truth then any person can.
- John 4:10-15: When she questioned Jesus He did not get frustrated or walk away, He rather reminds her that if she really knew who He was that she would be asking Him for living water. We have God’s word which reveals that living water. What is our reaction when people ask questions concerning what we believe? 1 Peter 3:15.

Peter - 1

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 6

“Simon”: “Hearer”

“Peter”: “Stone” or “Rock” (John 1:42)

Text: Matt. 4:18-20; 14:22-33; 16:21-17:27; 19; 26:31-75; Mark 5:35-39; 8:27-14:72; Luke 5:5 - 11; 8:43-9:36; 12:41; 22:8-62; John 6:68, 69; 13.

Peter was a man who was zealous for truth and for God. No matter how good zeal may be, we learn in Peter that zeal is not all that it is cut out to be if we do not have knowledge to go along with it (see also Rom. 10:1). Throughout the gospels we see Peter struggling with his faith. At times Peter was greatly honored by our Lord, and at other times he was strongly rebuked. It is through this instruction by Jesus and Peter’s continued efforts that Peter is able to prevail over his weaknesses and allow his zeal to help him grow strong in the Lord. There is much we can learn from the life of Peter, from his character and from his reactions to given circumstances. Let us consider these things as we read the accounts of his life.

Lessons:

- Matt. 4:18-20: Disciples of Jesus are called to be “fishers of men.” That is, we are to strive to save the souls of men through the gospel (Matt. 28:18-20).
- Matt. 14:22-33: Peter could not walk to the Lord on the water because of his lack of faith. Today we are not called to walk on water, but we are called to live for God and obey His word under all circumstances. Let us strive to be faithful that on the day in which we are called before the judgment seat we are not told, “O ye of little faith.”
- Matt. 14:33: “Truly you are the Son of God.” It is as plain as day if we will but open our eyes and see.
- Matt. 16:13-20: When asked who Jesus was Peter made a confession that Jesus said would be the rock upon which His church is built. We find in other passages that this confession is referred to as “the good confession” (1 Tim. 6:12, 13) and that all men everywhere will make this confession either in this life unto salvation or at the judgment (Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:9-11). Let us understand that those who confess Jesus as Lord while on this earth and live with Him as their Lord will have eternal life with Him in Heaven. But those who do not confess Jesus as Lord in this life will reap eternal punishment for their unbelief and disobedience (Matt. 10:33).
- Matt. 16:21-23: Even the faithful can become stumbling blocks in their zeal if it is not according to knowledge. Some may say that when a person is zealous to do something

which is wrong, if their motives are pure then they should be praised and not rebuked. Notice that Peter sincerely showed a concern for Jesus' life, but instead of praising him Jesus rebuked him. It was no small rebuke either for Jesus said, "Get behind me Satan." Let us understand that those who hinder the will of God, whether intentionally or unintentionally are aiding in the work of the devil. Ignorance is not an excuse for sin; it never has been (Isa. 56:10; Rom. 10:3; Heb. 5:2). Let us therefore strive to not be a stumbling block to our brethren (Rom. 14:13).

- Matt. 17:24-27; Luke 20:22-25: All governments have their power and authority from God (Rom. 13:1). God commands that His people submit to the authority that He has given to these governments (Rom. 13:2). There are some who believe and teach that since we are under Christ's law then we do not have to submit to our civil government. Let us note that Jesus teaches that we are to submit to our government, for even He submitted Himself. As Christians therefore we have an obligation to "Render therefore to (our government) the things that are (our government's) and to God the things that are God's" (Luke 22:25) through our obedience and monetary requirements (taxes).
- Luke 22:31-34; 54-62; Compare to Matt. 27:3-5: Peter wavered in his faith from time to time. There is no doubt that this man was not perfect and that he had his weaknesses. Peter had a strength however, that enabled him to overcome those weaknesses; that is, Repentance. Jesus foretold Peter of his denial, yet Peter insisted that he was stronger than that. In spite of this, when the pressure was on Peter did in fact deny Jesus and was remorseful unto tears. Let us learn from Peter that we should not allow our sins to drive us into "the depths of despair." Peter wept over his sin, just as we all should, but he also repented and ended up being one of Christ's most faithful servants. Judas on the other hand allowed his grief to overtake him and rather than striving to turn his life around he ended it. Peter was forgiven. Peter was also the more righteous of the two. Let us strive to be like Peter and repent of our sins strengthening our faith in Jesus Christ.
- Matt. 16:19; Acts 2:14-41; Acts 10:34-48; Acts 15:7: Jesus told Peter in Matthew 16 that He would give Peter a key to the kingdom. Some have used this verse to show authority for the Pope. Let us note from our other passages what exactly Peter did with that "key." What are keys for? To open doors which are locked. In Acts 2 what do we find that Peter did? He opened the door to the kingdom for the Jews through his preaching the gospel on Pentecost. In Acts 10 we find that Peter opened the door to the kingdom for the Gentiles through his preaching the gospel to them. From these examples we see that Peter used the key to the kingdom to open the door of salvation to all men, both Jew and Gentile. We must conclude therefore that there are no more doors to be opened to the kingdom by Peter and his task with that key is finished. There is therefore no pope, and no authority for this pope found in the scriptures.

Peter – 2

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 7

Text: Acts 2-5; 8:14-24; 9:32-12:19; 15:6-11; Gal. 2:11-21

Though Peter was a disciple (learner) in the first part of his story, the second half of his story shows him to be quite the opposite. Peter goes from being an ignorant learner under the wing of Jesus Christ to being one of the more prominent teachers in early church history. It is Peter that opened the gate of heaven to the Jews and to the Gentiles in Acts 2 and Acts 10. One of the great things that we learn from Peter however is that even though he became a great teacher of the faith, he was still always learning. Yes, even the most experienced teachers of God's word ought to be continually learning. That is what makes us disciples. We will find that even years after Peter preached his first kingdom sermon at Pentecost in Acts 2, He was still making mistakes, learning from them and "growing in the grace and knowledge of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). Though he continued to make mistakes as an apostle he did not let that drag his faith down. Indeed, Peter was tested, and he proved to be true.

Lessons:

- Acts 2:14ff; Matt. 16:19; 18:18: In the gospels Jesus told Peter and the other apostles that what they bound on earth would be bound in heaven and what they loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven. There are some who have taken this to mean that "Peter could tell men whatever he wanted to and God would then bind in heaven the things that Peter said. Therefore the church leaders have more authority than the scriptures." In response to this let us look at several things. 1) Peter was inspired by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13; 2 Pet. 1:21). From this we understand that whatever Peter "bound on earth" was first revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. 2) Since the Holy Spirit was sent from Jesus Christ, who is in heaven (Acts 7:55, 56), the words that Peter spoke first came from heaven and then were delivered to Peter by the Holy Spirit (John 12:49). 3) From this we must conclude that the things Peter spoke were bound in heaven by Jesus Christ then delivered to Peter by the Holy Spirit; not the other way around. The scriptures therefore have authority over the church; for what is written in the scriptures was revealed before it was written down in order to establish the church. Every command in the New Testament is given as a guideline for Christ's church. To say that the church has more authority than the revelation of Jesus Christ would be rebellion (1 Cor. 14:37).
- Luke 22:54-62; Acts 2:14ff: Peter was one who was zealous to do the will of God, yet at times his weaknesses got the best of him. Yes, Peter the apostle sinned. He denied Jesus three times and when he came to the realization of what he did he "wept bitterly." But however weak Peter had become in his temptation he became that much stronger when he repented of that sin and had opportunity to confess Jesus before the nations. Indeed in Acts 2 we see the fruit of Peter's repentance in that when men were accusing him and the other apostles of being drunk he stood up in their midst and boldly proclaimed the gospel to them and confessed Jesus as Lord and the Son of God. Let us learn to be bold in making this good confession as well, for if we are willing to make it by faith we can be saved (Luke 12:8; Rom. 10:9; 1 John 4:3).
- Acts 8:14-24: Some have twisted examples such as this one in order to accuse Christians of being hard nosed or hateful people. Let us notice a couple things however that will prove quite the

opposite. 1) Look at the reason for Peter's comments toward Simon. "Repent therefore for this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you." It is seen that Peter's concern for Simon the sorcerer was a general concern for his soul. With such a desire for this man to have salvation we can understand the urgency with which Peter rebukes the man. 2) Look at the response from Simon. "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me." Simon knew that Peter was not being hardnosed. Simon understood that Peter was making him aware of his sin in order that he would repent and come out of that sin. Simon's request in verse 19 showed both a misunderstanding of the nature of God's power and the wrong motive for wanting that power. From this we can understand that his heart was not in the right place and therefore he was in sin (vs. 20). The only way one can have salvation is if his heart is right with God. Thus, Christians preach the gospel and make people aware of their sins, not because we are hard nosed and bitter people, but because like Jesus and like Peter we desire that every soul be saved.

- Acts 9:32-35: Peter remembered to give God the glory for the work that he did. So must we (1 Pet. 2:12; Acts 12:23).
- Acts 10:9-28: Often we will come across a passage in the scriptures that we do not understand at first. There were also times when Peter did not fully understand the words of the Lord, such as in his vision (vs. 17). Some who do not have the diligence to search the scriptures thoroughly have turned their own confusion into misunderstanding and then when others do not agree with that misunderstanding claim that we cannot all understand the bible alike. Notice though that even Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, did not understand what the word of the Lord meant at first. But Peter did not give up like many people do. He pondered the words of the angel and connected the dots when further information was given (vs. 20). In the end Peter was able to come to a full understanding and his confusion on the matter was no more (vs. 28, 29). Today we have all things that we need to know for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). Let us not cut God's word short and become like those who twist it to their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:16). Let us be like Peter and strive to understand the things that God has revealed. The information is there, we just need to look for it: it is the command of God to do so (Eph. 3:4; 2 Tim. 2:15).
- Acts 15:6-11: Notice that Peter did not get frustrated at the people with whom he was reasoning, even after "much dispute." Often it is easy for Christians to become frustrated when discussing scripture with other people who do not see eye-to-eye with them. Even in the midst of opposition Peter was willing and able to stand up and patiently reason scriptures, and though the discussion took a long time, his patience paid off (vs. 22ff). Paul gives Timothy instructions in 2 Tim. 4:2 to "reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." As Christians we must also be willing to do this. Peter was willing and able to contend earnestly for the faith, let us learn to be willing and able as well (Jude 3).

John - 1

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 8

“John”: “Jehovah is gracious”

Text: Matt. 4:21, 22; 10:2-4; Mark 3:13-19; 5:35-43; 9:2-10, 38-41; 10:35-45; 13; 14:32-42; Luke 5:9-11; 9:28-36, 51-56; John 21:18-25.

Like Peter, this first part of John’s story shows him as a learner of Christ. Along with all of the other apostles John is trying to understand the nature of God’s kingdom and trying to do what he can to get into that kingdom. At times we see John’s ignorance, but at the same time we see humility. When Jesus corrects him he does not rebel, but accepts Jesus’ correction with humility. There is much we can learn from John, but from his life and from his epistles.

Lessons:

- Matt 4:21, 22; Luke 5:9-11: Consider the way in which John and his brother followed Jesus Christ. There are many today who claim to follow Jesus, but when we compare the way the most people follow Him and the way that John followed him, we will see a big difference. Jesus said in Matt 10:37 that if we love anything more than Him (mother, father, self, whatever) then we are not worthy of Him. John followed Jesus in the manner that He expects all men to follow Him. Forsake all and follow Jesus. The reason being, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, 30 who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life” (Luke 18:28-30). It was worth it to John and his brother to forsake all and follow Jesus. Is eternal life worth it to you? See also Phil. 3:7-11.
- Mark 3:13-19: In this passage the writer clearly states that Jesus selected the twelve apostles, among who was John, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach. With their preaching these apostles would perform numerous signs and miracles and heal the sick and do other such wonders. Notice that it says Jesus specifically chose these men to do this, and not all of His disciples. There are many today who will claim that all of Jesus’ disciples would be able to perform miracles through the Holy Spirit and therefore those who are truly His disciples today will be able to perform miracles today. Though it is true that several of these miraculous gifts were given to other disciples after Jesus’ resurrection, it was not given to all (Acts 8:38-40). Also, what powers were given other disciples could only be given them through the laying on of the apostles hands (Acts 8:14-18). The name apostle means “ambassador.” It is very clear that the twelve apostles had a specific task that was assigned to them alone. And as we read in this passage, the power that went along with that task was given to them alone as well, not to all of Christ’s disciples.
- Mark 10:35-45: James and John wanted what many people who believe in God want. They wanted to be in Christ’s kingdom, but more than that they wanted to be seated on

either side of Christ's throne. These men were not wrong in their desire to be with Christ in His glory; however it is not what they wanted that was wrong but why they wanted it and how they went about getting it. Jesus said that in order to have that honor one must drink the same cup that He was to drink. This cup refers to the suffering that Jesus went through both before and while on the cross. Even after that though, Jesus said that it was up to the Father to give the honor to them, not Him. Also, James and John wanted to be counted as great in the kingdom of God. But Jesus said that "whoever desires to be great among you will be your servant." James and John wanted glory without service. If we are to be counted worthy of God's kingdom, we need to learn to serve all men and humble ourselves as Jesus did (Phil. 2:8).

- Mark 14:32-42: We find several times where Peter James and John were selected out of all of Christ's disciples to join Him when He wanted to be along. These three became some of Jesus' closest companions during His life on this earth. Notice however that even though these men were closest to Jesus, they never really comprehended the seriousness of what Jesus was doing. When Jesus brought them into the garden in this passage He told them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch." In spite of this urgent request when Jesus came back from praying He found the men sleeping. This same thing happened three times. There are time we maybe we do not fully grasp the seriousness of our mission here on earth. Like these three apostles, we may "fall asleep on the job" from time to time. Let us learn from their example and realize that the work that is set before us in God's kingdom is of utmost importance. We need to be watching, waiting, working, ready to respond to every opportunity to do the lord's work (Acts 20:30, 31; 1 Cor. 16:13; 1 Thess. 5:6-10).
- Luke 5:9-11: When Jesus called John and his brother they were fishing. Jesus told them that they would no longer be fishermen, but "fishers of men," or that they would "catch men." These men then "forsook all and followed Him." Today we have this same calling from our Lord. He calls all men who are willing to obey His gospel to be righteous before God and to strive to "disciple all nations" (Matt. 28:18-20). How well are we walking according to the calling with which we have been called? (2 Tim. 1:9; Eph. 4:1).
- Luke 9:28-36: In this passage we get a glimpse of what Jesus is like in His glory and splendor. Part of the hope that we have as Christians is that we go to heaven we will be made like Jesus is now (1 John 3:2-3). God has not given us a blind hope. He has made very clear how great our reward will be in heaven if we diligently serve Him while on this earth. Let us strive to achieve that reward (1 Cor. 9:24).
- Luke 9:51-56: Let us be more concerned with trying to save lives than with wanting to destroy them.

John - 2

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 9

Text: Acts 3-4:31; Acts 8:14-17; 12:1, 2; Gal. 2:9; 1 John; 2 John; 3 John; Rev. 1:9.

Like Peter, John's role of being a humble learner under the feet of Jesus Christ was changed to that of a great teacher of God's people. Let note in John that even though he was an apostle and preacher of the gospel that he humbled himself, even in his old age. He viewed himself as a child of God with all other Christians (1 John 3:1) and brethren and companions with them (Rev. 1:9). John did not see himself as greater than anyone else on account of his position in the kingdom, he was not puffed up or arrogant. If anything he fulfilled the words of Jesus where He said, "*But he who is the greatest among you shall be your servant*" (Matt. 23:11). John shows us the necessity of refuting error using the scriptures. He reminds us that the truth is that which was revealed to us through God's word, and that it does not change no matter who tries to change it (1 John 2:24-27). Let us learn from John how to be a faithful servant of God.

Lessons:

- Acts 12:1, 2: John proves to be an example of one who holds true to his faith even when that faith results in the persecution and the loss of his loved ones. We know from the gospels and from Acts 12:2 that James was John's brother. Sadly there are some Christians whose faith is not as strong as John's in situations such as this. Many have used the loss of loved ones as reason to be angry with God. Notice that even though John lost his brother on account of his faith John remained faithful to the very end of his days. John even went on to write the three epistles of John and the book of Revelation. Let us take courage in John's example. John shows true faith in God as Paul describes that faith in 1 Thess. 4:13-14. "*But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep (died), lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.*"
- Rev. 1:9: Not only was John able to remain faithful when his loved ones were being killed, but also when he himself was in the midst of great persecution. During the time that John wrote the book of Revelation we find that he was in the middle of "tribulation" on account of the kingdom. John even encouraged those to whom the book is written in that he claim to be the brother and companion of those who were also in tribulation who were of the "kingdom and the patience of Jesus Christ." We see by John's eagerness to strive along with his brethren in times of tribulation that his faith was not "superficial" but that it had become his way of life. Let us strive to have this same attitude, especially when in persecution (Heb. 12:3-11).
- 1 John 3:24-5:21: At the time that John wrote his epistles he was dealing with men who held to a belief system known as Gnosticism. The philosophy behind Gnosticism is that

men have salvation through knowledge and not through Jesus Christ. “According to the Gnostics, the aim of salvation is for the spirit to be awakened by knowledge so the inner man can be released from his earthly dungeon and return to the realm of light where the soul becomes reunited with God. As the soul ascends, however, it needs to penetrate the cosmic spheres which separate it from its heavenly destiny. This, too, is accomplished by knowledge. One must understand certain formulas which are revealed only to the initiated.” (from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright (c)1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers) Because of this belief the Gnostics taught that “Jesus Christ was not God and that God did not come in the flesh but that we have salvation through knowledge and not through Jesus Christ.” Thus in John’s refutation of these false teachers he referred to them as “the antichrist” (1 John 2:22; 2 John 7). Observe John’s willingness to refute any and all error that stood in the way of the spread of the gospel. By this John did his duty in the church as Paul describes it in 1 Tim. 3:15, “the pillar and ground for the truth.” Let us learn to be like John so that when men come in teaching error concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ we too can know now to act as a pillar and ground for the truth.

- 1 John 1:1-3: John makes it very clear that he was among those who witnessed Jesus in the flesh, witnessed Him in his resurrection, saw Him, heard Him, talked with Him and touched Him. John knew Jesus. In Acts 1:8 Jesus sent His apostles to be witnesses of Him to the whole world; John was one of those witnesses. Thus we have John’s testimony written in this passage. There are many who are not willing to believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. But let us remember that we have many witnesses (more so than is need to prove Jesus’ existence in a court of law) to testify of the validity and power of Jesus Christ. We have no reason not to believe. In fact, we have every reason to believe.
- 3 John 1:9-11: Consider how John described Diotrephes. Today there are many members of the church who “do not receive” other brethren even though those brethren are not in sin. These are like Diotrephes who “loves to have preeminence” among the brethren. John refers to this type of attitude as “evil.” Let us pay attention to the attitudes that we develop in the church and toward our brethren. Arrogance can do a lot of damage both to other people and to our selves as we see in this passage. Let us learn to be humble and strive to have a love for the brethren and not be eager to refuse our brethren because of our own opinions.
- 1 John 1:5-2:2; 3:4-9: John always stressed obedience to the truth. He understood the God’s nature, he understood our need to strive to achieve that nature and how that striving should affect our lives as God’s children. Let us learn to walk with all obedience so that we may walk in the light and not in the darkness.

Matthew

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 10

“Matthew”: “Gift of Jehovah.”

“Levi”: “wreathed” or a “joining”

Text: Matt. 9:9-13; 21:31; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32;

Though there is little written about Matthew we learn some great lessons concerning Christ’s kingdom and the power of His salvation. We learn from the character of Matthew that Jesus requires that all men follow Him willingly and joyfully. God looks highly upon those who are willing to give up everything to follow Jesus. After Jesus called Matthew, Matthew held a feast. Matthew then continued in service as a disciple of Jesus and after Jesus ascended into heaven Matthew continued faithfully preaching the gospel. He even wrote his own account of the gospel, that is, “The Gospel According To Matthew.” Let us learn to have the obedience that Matthew had.

Lessons:

- Concerning the list of apostles which Matthew himself wrote in Matt. 10:3, “Matthew himself gives it, and humbly puts himself after Thomas, an undesigned mark of genuineness; whereas Mark (Mark 3:18) and Luke (Luke 6:15) put Matthew before Thomas in the list of apostles. (From Fausset's Bible Dictionary, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1998 by BibleSoft). This is just a good reminder of the humility we ought to have as we compare ourselves to others.
- Matt 9:9, 10; Mark 2:13, 14: When Jesus saw Matthew (also known as Levi) Jesus said to him, “Follow Me,” and Matthew got strait up and followed Jesus. Most people who hear the call of Jesus to follow Him are not as willing as Matthew. Let us learn from Matthew that Jesus is calling all men to His side therefore we must follow Him wherever He leads us (Matt. 9:27-30). “*And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it*” (Matt 10:38-39).
- Matt. 9:10-13; Mark 2:15-17: Notice that Jesus was not ashamed to sit and eat with the lowly sinners of the world. Often we will see other Christians (or even ourselves) shunning people of the world because they do not meet our standards. Something that

most people do not think about however is that that is exactly what the Pharisees were rebuked for in this passage. Jesus did not come to care for and to entertain those who were already righteous. He came to “*seek and save that which was lost*” (Luke 19:10). The only way Jesus could have taught the lost sheep of Israel is by going to where they are and teaching them. Does this mean that He had to share in their sin so that He could understand where they are coming from? Of course not! (1 John 3:5). We need to realize that our mission is the same as that of Jesus; to “seek and save that which was lost.” The only way we can bring the gospel to the people of the world is if we get off of our high horse and talk with and teach men of the world. Jesus humbled Himself from being equal with God to being a man (Phil. 2). The least we could do is humble ourselves enough to talk to other human beings about the gospel of salvation.

- Matt. 10:3; Matt. 21:31: In Matthew 21 Jesus lumps the tax collectors and harlots into the same classification. His point to the chief priests and the elders was that these terrible sinners were more likely to enter into the kingdom of heaven than they were. “Tax collectors were ranked with murderers and robbers, and a Jew was permitted to lie to them if necessary. The attitude found in the gospels is similar. Tax collectors are lumped together with harlots (Matt 21:31), Gentiles (Matt 18:17), and, most often, sinners (Matt 9:10). They were as offensive to Jews for their economic and social practices as lepers were for their uncleanness; both were excluded from the people of God.” (From Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright (c)1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers). It is interesting to note that Matthew, who was one of these tax collectors, ended up being one of the apostles. This just goes to show that any person from any class of human society can obey the gospel and become a great servant for our Lord. In light of this consider the following passages: James 2:5; 1 Cor. 1:26; James 3:13-17; 1 Cor. 3:18-20; James 1:9-11. Let us remember these things when we begin to think that we are being “good Christians.”

Judas

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 11

“Judas”: “Praise of the Lord”

Text: Ps. 41:9; 109:8; Matt. 10:2-4; 26:1-27:10; Mark 14:10, 11, 43-45; Luke 22:3-6, 47, 48; John 6:70, 71; 12:1-8; John 13; 18:1-9; Acts 1:15-20;

The account that we have of the life of Judas is one that is sad and troubling. Judas was a man who had spent much time with our Lord. He witnessed most, if not all of the miracles that Jesus performed. He was there when Jesus taught the multitudes concerning the kingdom of heaven, righteousness and judgment. In spite of this Judas allowed his love for money to influence him to betray Jesus for a mere 30 pieces of silver. Judas is an example of the life and the outcome of a person who puts their love for the things of this world before their love for God and His righteousness. Let us remember the example of Judas that we may learn to love God first.

Lessons:

- God is able to use every man for something whether we are good or evil. *“But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. 21 Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work”* (2 Tim. 2:20, 21). Judas is one example of a vessel for dishonor. Let us strive to be a vessel for honor, pleasing to God.
- John 12:42, 43; Acts 1:15-26: There are many people who claim to follow God or do the Lord’s work, but do not have a love for God (John 5:42-43). Instead their love is placed things of darkness (evil) which they do not want to give up (John 3:19-20). Many also love the glory of men or to be praised by men more than God (John 12:42-43). These are those who work to fulfill their own desires and not the will of God. Judas was one such man (John 12:3-6). Some questions that may come to mind when considering men such as Judas are, “How long will Christ endure members who do not perform their function,” or “are these men saved because of their belief in God even though they do not love God?” Jesus says that these types of men will not last long, and will not be saved. *“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit”* (John 15:2, 6). A member of Christ’s body that does not function as it ought to is often better removed lest it becomes a hindrance to the working of other members! Christ is always adding new members to His body for He is adding daily those who are being saved (Acts 2:47). Christ can always replace non-functioning members with those willing to serve, just as Judas Iscariot was replaced by Matthias (Acts 1:15-26). Let us strive to have a love for God and His Son that we do not become one of the branches that are cast into the fire.

- The character that we see in Judas is one that is common to a hypocrite. Hypocrites are those who say or teach one thing, but practice something completely different. Judas was an apostle, he was among those who taught that men should be righteous and obey the gospel. However Judas was much less than righteous. He was a thief and he was selfish (John 12:3-6). There are some men today who have accused some church members of being hypocrites. Because of their dislike for these hypocrites many have refused to assemble with the saints to worship God. Let us notice however then even though Judas was a hypocrite Peter, James, John and the rest of the other apostles did not leave Jesus because of this. Jesus did not refuse to worship in the synagogues though the religious leaders were hypocrites. If a Christian is a hypocrite then they will be judged for that on the judgment day. But like Jesus and like the apostles we must realize that other people's hypocrisy is no excuse for us to be disobedient to the word of God (Heb. 10:25). Rather than deserting people in such a condition, let us strive with them to help them come out of their sin.
- Matt. 26:1-27:10: Repentance is not just sorrow for our sins. Paul told the Corinthians in 2 Cor. 7:10 that "*godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.*" Repentance is not gloom or despair. When Judas sold his master for thirty pieces of silver, he was filled with gloom and despair, so much so that he committed suicide, but he did not repent. Repentance is not quitting a sin for a season, it is totally turning from that act of sin. It is a complete one hundred –eighty degree turn.
- It is sad to say that television and Hollywood have both contributed to the idea that when a person kills himself he enters a happier place. Many have taken to this idea and often we hear of people who decide to end their life so they can end their misery and go to that "happier place." But God has never said in His word that a person has right to end his life and escape this life. Those in the Bible who chose such a course of action were deplored for their rebellion. Judas, who betrayed the sinless Son of God, died in this form of shame. "*And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself*" (Matt. 27:5). Thus, he committed suicide with the gloom of disgrace against his soul only to face the judgment in despair. What we learn from the bible however is that this good life does not come just because we die. It only comes to those who truly live. Let us consider the following:
 - We are made in the image or likeness of God (Gen. 1:26, 27) and that gives our life dignity and value that sets us apart from all living things.
 - For every man God has a plan. Being made in God's image He wants us to use our bodies as his representatives here on earth. He wants us to learn from His word, the bible, how to live to please Him.
 - We can have total confidence in the grace and forgiveness of God to remove all the shame and guilt of sin in our life. King David said, "*When my father and mother forsake me, then Jehovah will take me up*" (Ps. 27:10). You can be clean from every sin of your life by obeying the gospel of Christ, becoming a New Testament Christian. (Author Unknown).

James

The Brother of John

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 12

“James”: The Greek form of Jacob which is translated, “Supplanter.”

Text: Matt. 4:18-21; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11 / Matt. 9:18-26; Mark 5:35-43; Luke 8:49-56 / Matt. 10:2; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16 / Matt. 17:1-9; Mark 9:1-9; Luke 9:2-36 / Matt. 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45. Luke 9:49-56. Acts 12:1, 2.

James was most likely the cousin of Jesus as we find that their mothers were sisters (compare Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25). A fisherman by trade (Matt. 4:21), James was called by Jesus to be a fisher of men. James proves to be a good example of how any person can become a faithful servant of God. We find that his character was such that Jesus nicknamed him and his brother “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17), which is in reference to their tempers. James was able to overcome that. He showed us how to conform our faith and personality around Christ, and not the other way around.

Lessons:

- Matt. 4:18-21; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11: Notice in these passages that as Jesus went along the shore while he was teaching He called on the people to follow Him. This same task, calling people to follow Jesus, is also a responsibility of Christians (Matt. 28:18-20). When Jesus called James along with the others the scriptures say that “*immediately they left the boat and their father, and they followed Him.*” This same pattern of following Jesus is required of all men. We find in other passages that there were men who would have been willing to follow Jesus, but had other things that they wanted to take care of first. Jesus said that unless we are willing to forsake all and follow Him then we are not worthy to follow Him (Luke 9:57-62). Paul understood this and taught the Christians in Philippi that this is how all Christians are to follow Jesus (Phil. 3:7-11). Let us learn to follow Jesus in this way; giving up the things that we love that are of the flesh in order that we may follow Him. He is our reward (Matt. 6:19-21).
- Matt. 9:18-26; Mark 5:35-43; Luke 8:49-56: In the incident of the resurrection of this little girl it may seem that the gospel writers are merely telling a story. When we look into some of the things that Jesus says however we will find that there is much more to learn than the fact that Jesus resurrected a little girl. Consider the following observations:
 - Mark 5:36-37: Notice that when unbelief rears its head Jesus always has an answer, “Trust Him.” Also consider the fact that courage and faith are linked together. Often unbelief is nothing more than being afraid of what other people

think. Many people reject Christ, not because of a lack of evidence, but because of a lack of courage to stand out and stand alone with Him (John 12:42-43).

- Mark 5:39: Now, the text says the child has died, so Jesus is not contradicting the diagnosis. Rather, “They had perhaps viewed her death as a cessation of existence, whereas Jesus affirms contrarily, that she is very much alive elsewhere and can be recalled as easily as nothing more than a temporary sleep. In John 11:14, Jesus called “death” a sleep, not because the soul is asleep, but because the body resembles someone who is sleeping.
- Matt. 9:29: “And they began laughing at Him.” The same would be true today. If Jesus returned and once again lived as a man His views would be ridiculed by the world. Note their scornful laughter does serve the purpose of revealing to us that the child was dead, that is, this was not a set-up or some sort of false advertising for Jesus. “If it were a pretended death and revival, we would expect to see an anxiety on the part of Jesus to make it appear that the girl was dead, and a disposition on the part of the unbelievers to question this fact. But the reverse is true: it is the unbelievers who insist that the girl is dead, while Jesus alone raises a question about it” (Matthew-Mark, McGarvey, p. 85). “Without intending to do so, then, these scorers among the mourners established this fact of a real resurrection from the dead beyond all doubt” (Fowler p. 196). (Dunagan).
- Matt. 17:1-9; Mark 9:1-9; Luke 9:2-36: Many have tried to argue that Jesus did not rise from the dead and that He is not sitting at the right hand of God in His glory. Within these passages we have a glimpse of the glory of Jesus before He was crucified. Peter, James and John are witnesses to this glory. We see evidence of the resurrection in this passage because not only was Jesus transfigured, but with Him were Moses and Elijah who could not have been there unless there is a resurrection. Along with this fact is the lesson that “death, or removal from the earth, is not the final end of one’s place in God’s plan. The disciples should have been reminded that death does not bring man to an end, nor does it necessarily terminate his mission and service to God.” (Dunagan).
- Matt. 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45. James and his brother John wanted glory and honor. Indeed, this is something that most people would like to have. But we must consider Jesus’ instruction on how to have that honor. “*Whoever desires to be first among you – let him be your slave.*”
- Acts 12:1, 2: James was willing to die for his faith and for the cause of Christ. Let us consider our own faith so that if or when the time comes we may be willing to stand firm to the very end as James also did.

James

The Brother of Jesus

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 13

“James”:

Text: Matt. 12:46-50 / Mark 6:1-6; Matt 13:53-58 / John 7:5; Acts 1:13, 14; Gal. 2:9 / Matt. 10:1-4; Gal. 1:19.

The brother and servant of our Lord, James was one who did not believe in Jesus Christ at first. It is in the life of James that we can see the true power of the resurrection to cause a person to believe in Christ for it was not until then that we see James and his other siblings holding any belief in the divinity of Jesus. James proves to be an example of how the word of God can change a man with little or no faith into a faithful teacher and servant of God. Let us learn from the spiritual growth that we see in James and know that we too can and must grow in this same manner.

Lessons:

- Matt. 12:46-50: We know from other passages in the gospels that Jesus’ family did not believe in His divinity at first, among whom was James. Jesus knew of their unbelief when they wanted to speak to Him while He was teaching in this passage. The statement that Jesus makes in response to their wanting to speak with Him is one that every Christian must understand for there may come a time when we need to say the same thing. “*‘Who is My mother and who are My brothers?’ And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, ‘Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.’*” As Christians we are the children of God (1 John 3:1). As such, other Christians are our family. These are the ones who do the will of our Father who is in heaven. We must understand and remember this because at times there will be Christians who do not do the will of our Father and we are commanded to “withdrawal” from them (2 Thess. 3:6). Some of those members may be our physical family. However, like Jesus, we must hold true to our spiritual family first, for of that family God is the Father.
- Mark 6:1-6; Matt. 13:53-58: “In the third and fourth centuries A.D., when the idea of the perpetual virginity of Mary gained ground, a number of church fathers argued that James was either a stepbrother to Jesus (by a former marriage of Joseph) or a cousin. But both options are forced. The New Testament seems to indicate that Mary and Joseph bore children after Jesus (Matt. 1:25; 12:47; Luke 2:7; John 2:12; Acts 1:14), and that the second oldest was James (Matt. 13:55-56; Mark 6:3). (Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers).” Mary therefore was not a

virgin all of her life and many of the popular denominational doctrines that rely on that are overthrown.

- John 7:5; Acts 1:13, 14; Gal. 2:9: As mentioned in a previous point James along with the rest of Jesus' siblings did not believe in His divinity. Some may wonder how it is possible for Christ's own family members to not believe in Him. Why they did not believe we do not know. What we do know is that though James was among those who did not believe at first, he was able to come out of that unbelief and prove to be a faithful servant of our Lord (James 1:1). By the time Jesus ascended into heaven James' believed as we see Him with the apostles in Acts 1:13. Not only did he believe, but according to Gal. 2:9 he became what Paul called a pillar. That is, he was sturdy in his support of the truth within the church. Let us learn from the example of James. Though he was unbelieving and weak in the beginning, he grew through the years to become a great servant. We too can grow as James did.
- Matt. 10:1-4; Gal. 1:19: Notice in the gospels that James was never mentioned as being one of the apostles. We know this to be true also because he did not believe in Jesus Christ at that time. How is it then that Paul calls James an apostle in Gal. 1:19? Some have taken this to mean that we have apostles today who have the same power and authority as the apostles in the New Testament. To help us understand this matter let us look at the difference between the twelve apostles of Jesus and the apostles in the sense that James was one.
 - In the gospels we find that Jesus personally chose His apostles and gave them a specific task that only they were to fulfill (Matt. 10:1, 2). Paul was also chosen by Jesus in this same manner (Acts 9) and set to do a specific task (Gal. 2:9; 1 Cor. 1:1; 9:2). We find too that after Jesus was raised from the dead it was only the apostles that had the power to give these miraculous gifts to other believers (Acts 8:9-17 – Philip baptized, but only the apostles could impart the miraculous gifts).
 - Since the twelve apostles were the only ones who could impart these gifts to other Christians we must conclude that after all the apostles died there would be no one to impart the gifts to other Christian. After those who had their gifts from the laying on of the hands of the apostles died, there would then be no miraculous gifts left to perform at all.
 - There are no apostles today with the same power as the original twelve and therefore no miraculous gifts. How was James an apostle? An apostle in the most literal sense is an ambassador, one who is “sent out,” or a messenger. The twelve and Paul were specifically “sent out” by Jesus, but now their task is finished. Barnabas and James however were ones who were “sent out” as “messengers” from one or more churches (Acts 13:2, 3). It was in this sense that both Barnabas (Acts 14:14) and James (Gal. 1:19) are referred to as apostles. We have no record of the twelve in Acts chapter one and two ever being succeeded.

Zacchaeus

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 14

“Zacchaeus”: “Pure”

Text: Luke 19:1-27

When Jesus visited Jericho on His way to Jerusalem, Zacchaeus, who was "of short stature" (Luke 19:3) climbed a tree in order to see Jesus. Jesus asked him to come down and then went to visit Zacchaeus as a guest. As a result of Jesus' visit, Zacchaeus became a follower of the Lord, repented of his sins, and made restitution for his wrongdoing. He gave half of his goods to the poor and restored fourfold to those whom he had cheated through over-collection of taxes. In associating with people like Zacchaeus, Jesus showed that He came to call sinners to repentance. (Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary)

Lessons:

- Luke 19:2, 9, 10: Notice in this passage that Zacchaeus is mentioned as being a rich man. No doubt his being a chief tax collector had a large part to play in his riches. By this fact we learn a great lesson in repentance from Zacchaeus. As a tax collector he was looked down upon by most of the other Jews for they always associated tax collectors with sinners (vs. 7; Matt. 9:11). It is evident from John's instruction on repentance for tax collectors that many of them exacted excess taxes from the people (Luke 3:12, 13), which would account for the dislike toward them. Being moved by the visit from Jesus Zacchaeus repented of his sins that he had committed as a tax collector just as John had instructed in Luke 3. What we must notice however is that the repentance that Zacchaeus had was not merely a sorrow for taking excess taxes. Zacchaeus not only changed his mind concerning these things, but he "bore fruit worthy of repentance." He tried to repay those to whom he did wrong (vs. 8). We must learn that when we repent we too are required to "bear fruit worthy of repentance" (Matt. 3:8).
- Luke 19:5, 6: Notice the hospitality of Zacchaeus toward Jesus, and the joy that he took in giving Him that hospitality. Remember that Jesus said "*You did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me*" (Matt. 25:40). Today we are commanded to have brotherly kindness toward fellow Christians (2 Peter 1:7). However we treat our brethren, such is the manner in which we treat our Lord for they are His. Let us learn to be hospitable to all just as Zacchaeus was toward Christ. This is a characteristic of all godly people (Gen. 18:1-8; 2 Kings 4:8-10; 1 Pet. 4:9).

- Luke 19:5-7: Jesus was not afraid to associate with the sinners in His generation. Today many people have taken Christ's example and have twisted it in an attempt to fulfill their own lusts. Some have said that, "since Jesus associated with sinners we need to go to the bars and try to study with the people in them." One person, a preacher who held this view, often went to these bars "to study with the people" but when he came out it was evident that he did more than just study. He was drunk. Others have shunned Christ's example in that they refuse to even speak with people who they think are of a lower status in life than they are. Let us observe from this passage that Christ's purpose in coming to this earth was to "seek and save that which was lost" (vs. 10). In doing so it was necessary for Him to go to where the lost sinners would be (the tax collectors and sinners). Christ humbled Himself so that He could save these people, but in doing that he did not join them in their sins. He did not sin in His association with them; rather, He caused them to come out of their sins (vs. 8). We must put on the pure motives that Christ did when striving to convert souls. *"Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted"* (Gal. 6:1).
- Luke 19:9; Matt. 3:8, 9: In Romans 4:11, 12 we find that those who walk by faith in God have Abraham as their father because the faith that they have is like the faith of Abraham. In Luke 19:9 Jesus says concerning Zacchaeus, *"Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham."* By this Jesus was not only affirming that Zacchaeus was a physical descendant of Abraham (this was of little value in terms of salvation - Matt. 3:8, 9), he was also affirming that because Zacchaeus believed in the Lord Jesus and repented of his sins his faith was like that of Abraham. Thus Jesus said, *"Today salvation has come to this house."* Only those who are children of Abraham according to faith can have the salvation that Jesus spoke of. We too can become children of Abraham when we believe in God and repent of our sins and obey the commands of God (Rom. 4:16-18; Gal. 3:26-29).

Mary Magdalene

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 15

“Mary”: “Obstinacy, Rebellion” or “tear.”

“Magdalene”: “Of Magdala” (a small town or village believed to be near the center of the west slope of the Sea of Galilee). Mark 15:41 would support this.

Text: Matt. 27:55-51, 59-61; Mark 15:40-41; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 8:1-3; Luke 23:55; 24:1-12

Mary Magdalene was a woman who was strong in her faith in Jesus Christ and was devoted to Him in the work that she did. Any person who honestly considers the example that Mary has set will be encouraged and strengthened by the devotion that she manifested toward Jesus and the work that He did on this earth. Mary was one who received both salvation and healing from the Lord. In return she devoted her life to His cause. We see from her example that she was one who truly denied herself and followed Him (Luke 9:23). There is much that we can learn from her faith, her work, her courage and her zeal for the Lord. Let us take to heart these things as we consider them.

Lessons:

- Luke 8:1-3: Mary Magdalene had been demon possessed and Jesus healed her. Let us take notice of how the works that Mary did in return show the gratitude that she had for what Jesus did.
- Mark 15:41; Luke 8:1-3: See the manner in which these women, among whom was Mary Magdalene, contributed to the support of Jesus and His other disciples. Consider the lessons that we can learn from this example:
 - We find from other passages in the New Testament that women are not to have authority over a man, and a teacher is one such position of authority (1 Tim. 2:12). In holding with that pattern Mary and the other women give us an example of how women can be involved in teaching and the ministry of the gospel without “exerting authority over a man.” That is, by supporting those who labor in the gospel and caring for their needs.
 - It is evident that some of these women had access to some wealth through their circumstances in life such as Joanna, who was the wife of a steward of Herod. This was a high position and no doubt a lucrative one. These women used what means they had to support and minister to those who were preaching the gospel. We find too that the help that they provided was not without cause, for these woman had also been ministered to by Jesus in that He not only brought salvation to them, He also healed many of them from their infirmities. From this we see that these women are (in part) expressing their gratitude to Jesus for the work that He

did. Jesus illustrates this principal by saying, “*the laborer is worthy of his reward*” (Luke 10:7). Let us also learn to be grateful to those who devote their lives the work of the gospel, for the work that they do is of great value. See the value that Paul puts on what work in Philemon 18, 19.

- Though these women were so eager to aid Jesus in His ministry Jesus did not take advantage of them. Many of the “Tele-evangelists” and “charismatic evangelists” today are always asking for more and more money even though they already live in great houses and have fancy cars. Jesus was not so greedy in His ministry. He only used what believers gave of their own free will. At times this meant that He would go without the comforts of life (Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:58). Jesus trusted in God to supply what He needed, He was not greedy, nor did He worry whether or not the Lord would supply (Matt. 6:28-30).
- Though Jesus had disciples who were willing to support Him let us understand that He did work. Some men who claim to be preachers use Luke 8:1-3 as a reason to make their wives work so that they do not have to. Let us understand that the woman who supported Jesus did it of their own free will in part because He too ministered to their spiritual needs. Jesus did not use their aid as an opportunity to not work. His work was the preaching of God’s word, which has far greater rewards and can be far more taxing at times than physical labor (Mark 14:33-34). Paul said that, “*If anyone will not work, neither let him eat*” (2 Thess. 3:10). Jesus worked, and what he received was the “reward” for His labor. (As a side note, it is the responsibility of the husband to supply the needs of his family, not the wife – 1 Tim. 5:8; 1 Pet. 3:7)
- Matt. 27:55; Mark 15:41; Luke 8:1-3; Luke 23:27-31: Notice the value and care that Jesus placed upon these women. He did not shun them, nor did he look down on them. Jesus was willing to teach women just as much as He was willing to teach men. There are many who believe that because a woman is not to exert authority over a man (1 Tim. 2:12) that she is of lesser value than man. But we see from Jesus’ example that women are just as valuable and have just as much need to be taught. We see from the Samaritan woman that Jesus was willing to take time out of his own struggles to teach a woman (John 4:5-26). It is true that these women served Jesus and his other disciples while He ministered on this earth, but Jesus did not diminish the value of these women on account of that. On the contrary, He exalted them (1 Pet. 3:7). And such will God do to all who fulfill their God given role in humility and godliness (Matt. 23:12).
- Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-12: At times Mary displayed more courage and faith than the men who followed Jesus. How devoted are we to our faith in Jesus? Do we believe with all of our heart as Mary did? Or do we doubt the power of God as many of His other followers did? Let us strive to have faith as Mary Magdalene.

Herod and Herodias

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 16

“Herod”: “Hero-like” or “heroic”

“Herodias”: Wife of Herod

Text: Matt. 14:3-12; Mark 6:17-29/ Matt. 14:1, 2; Mark 6:14-16; Luke 9:7-9 / Luke 3:15-20 / Mark 8:15 / Luke 23:6-12

Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great and Malthace, a Samaritan woman. Half Idumaean, half Samaritan, he had therefore not a drop of Jewish blood in his veins, and "Galilee of the Gentiles" seemed a fit dominion for such a prince. He ruled as "tetrarch" of Galilee and Peraea (Luke 3:1) from 4 BC till 39 AD. The gospel picture we have of him is far from prepossessing. He is superstitious (Matt 14:1 f), fox like in his cunning (Luke 13:31 f) and wholly immoral. John the Baptist was brought into his life through an open rebuke of his gross immorality and defiance of the laws of Moses (Lev 18:16), and paid for his courage with his life (Matt 14:10; Ant, XVIII, v, 2). Included in his immortality was his marriage to his half brother's wife, Herodias, a scheming and ravenous woman. (Dunagan)

Lessons:

- Matt. 14:5: Like many worldly people, Herod is a man filled with contradictions. On the one hand, sheer political expediency demanded the death of any enemy so dangerous, and yet extraordinary measures must be taken to avoid public displeasure. Note: if one doesn't have a fear of God, then one will be subject to a host of lesser fears, including the fear of public opinion and peer pressure. (Dunagan).
- Matt. 14:3-12; Mark 6:17-29:
 - Note the rashness and foolishness that happens when one ignores God. Riches, honors, kingdoms, and people are given for a mere dance!
 - Evil people will take advantage of doors and opportunities that we leave open. If we leave something up in the air, like Herod did, evil people will eventually exploit our mistakes. It is for this reason that we are instructed to not make such rash vows (Matt. 5:33-37; James 5:12).

- When faced with the truth some people think that by “stamping it out,” as Herod tried to do with John, it will just go away. Herod was confounded when he heard of Jesus’ teaching and the signs that he did for we know that Jesus taught many of the same things that John did. Herod could not be rid of the truth. No matter how hard we try the truth is always there. We can either hide from it, or accept it.
- Mark 8:15: God makes it very clear that we are to respect authorities and leaders. *“Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work”* (Tit. 3:1). See also Matt. 23:2; Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-14. We are to respect our leaders, but respecting them does not mean practicing their evil deeds (Matt. 23:2). It is for this reason that Jesus said to be ware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. These people were leaders and had authority over the people, but Jesus still warns us to not be influenced by their wickedness. We must always strive to live godly in our present generation (Tit. 2:11, 12).
- Matt. 14:1, 2; Mark 6:14-16; Luke 9:7-9: We need to remember that when we do things that we know are wrong we will face the guilt of our actions for the rest of our lives. Herod seemed to be “paranoid” when he heard of the teaching of Jesus because of what he had done to John the Baptist. Having the guilt of what he had done on his mind Herod thought that Jesus was John come from the dead. Let us therefore strive not to be persuaded to do evil when others try to persuade us (as Herod’s wife and step daughter did with him). We will face the consequences.
- Luke 3:15-20; 9:7-9: When Herod heard the truth He tried to close it up and hide from it. What will you do when you hear the truth? Children can become angry with their parents then they get in trouble. Little do the children realize that they are doing basically the same thing that Herod did when John rebuked him for his sins. Adults tend to do the same thing. Often, instead of repenting, some Christians will become angry when approached about a sin. Let us learn from the example that Herod gives us, and strive to not be like him. Let us also learn from John’s example in that when we do see sin, something needs to be done about it.
- Luke 3:15-20: Often we will hear people say “Christ’s law doesn’t apply to non-believers, it only applies to Christians.” Let us learn from this passage that John was able to rebuke Herod for his sins because God’s law applies to all men, even laws concerning marriage. Jesus teaches us that laws concerning such things as marriage, murder, thievery etc. have been in place for all mankind since the beginning (Matt. 19:4-8).

Annas and Caiaphas

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 17

“Annas”: Grace of Jehovah

“Caiaphas”: A Searcher

Text: Luke 3:1-6 / Matt. 26:3-5; John 11:45-54; Mark 15:10 / Matt. 26:57-68; 27:1, 2; John 18:12-14; 19-24 / John 18:28 / Acts 4:5-22

When one thinks of the Lord's High Priest one may think of a person who is devoted, loyal to God, careful to observe all of the Lord's commands and understanding of God's word. Not so with Annas and Caiaphas. Though these two were high priests during the life of Christ and the beginning of His church (Luke 3:2; Acts 4:6), they were far from loyal and certainly not understanding of God's word (John 8:39-43). Full of lies and deceit these men would not submit to the fact that Jesus was sent from God (John 7:32-53; 10:31-33). From the account of their lives we see how selfishness and hardheartedness can blind a person's heart from seeing the truth (John 12:40). Let us learn from these men to seek understanding from the Lord and not our own understanding (Mark 12:32-34; Prov. 2:3-6).

Lessons:

- Matt. 26:3-5; John 11:45-48, 53; Mark 15:10: Rather than using the word of God Annas and Caiaphas merely used their own presumptions as their true guide. They were unwilling to change their way of life to conform to the truth. Because of this hard heartedness they were unwilling to believe in Christ in spite of the miracles that He did and the scriptures that he taught and fulfilled. How open are we to the truth? Do we only follow God's word so long as it agrees with what we want? Let us strive to not be like Annas and Caiaphas who appeared to serve God, but only did it out of selfishness.
- Matt. 26:57-68; 27:1, 2; John 18:12-14; 19-24: The fact that the high priest and the other leaders were willing to lie and accept lies as testimonies against Jesus in order to condemn Him proves that their motives were not right. Here were men accusing Jesus of blasphemy (Matt. 26:64, 65) and at the same time they were bearing false witness and accepting false witness (vs. 59, 60). Unlike these priests we must first consider ourselves before we bring accusations against our brother (Luke 6:42; Gal. 6:1). When we find ourselves to be true, then we use the word of God to “*reprove, rebuke and exhort with all longsuffering and instruction*” (2 Tim. 4:2).

- Matt. 26:59-66: Notice that no matter how hard they tried the Jewish leaders could not find fault with Jesus. Though many false witnesses came forward their accusations were unsupported and therefore unusable by the Jewish leaders. This alone tells us much about the perfect character of Jesus. In fact, He lived such a perfect life that the only way the Jews could accuse Him was by twisting His words which were meant as a prophecy of what would happen, and indeed it did happen. Jesus exemplified the type of character Paul says all Christians are to strive for (Matt. 5:11, 12; Titus 2:6-8; 1 Peter 3:15, 16).
- The above passages also give us another example of how to test the sincerity of our own hearts. The Jewish leaders twisted Jesus' words to mean something that they did not as a means of "winning" an argument. Often people do the same thing today. When a person gives an illustration or description of a spiritual principal there are many who will twist the meaning of that in order to make it mean what they want it to mean. Many people do this same thing with the scriptures. This is what Peter was talking about in 2 Pet. 3:16. "*as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.*" Let us strive for truth and understanding, for it is only those who are sincere who will have salvation (2 Cor. 1:12; Eph. 6:24; Col. 3:22).
- Acts 4:5-22: Some people just never learn. Annas, Caiaphas and the others thought that through their trickery, deceit, and lies they could do away with Jesus and His teaching. It is evident that they believed that if they killed Jesus then His followers would disperse. What they were not counting on however was that what Jesus was preaching is truth and those who were faithful followers of Him would continue preaching the same thing. The leaders rejected Jesus Christ without realizing that He would be the corner stone of that great nation that would overthrow all others (Dan. 2:34, 44; Rev. 11:15, 16). These men saw the great signs that Jesus did which were meant as proof of His divine mission (John 14:10, 11), and they had the scriptures with them to test Jesus' words (Luke 24:25-27). In spite of these infallible proofs the Jewish leaders still would not believe the truth. Now, in this passage, they again had come face to face with the truth. What did they do with it? Did they learn the lesson? No! Even with a man before them who had been blind 40 years who could now see they would not believe. Instead, they threatened those who taught Jesus as the Christ and hardened their hearts even further. Let us learn to honestly test all things (1 Thess. 5:21) so that we do not make the same mistake as these Jewish leaders and refuse to listen to God's word.

The Pharisee and the Publican

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 18

“Pharisee”: “Separated ones.” “A religious and political party in Palestine in New Testament times. The Pharisees were known for insisting that the law of God be observed as the scribes interpreted it and for their special commitment to keeping the laws of tithing and ritual purity.(from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright (c)1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

“Publican”: A tax collector

Text: Luke 18:9-14

It was not common for Jesus to teach people using parables, or stories that illustrate spiritual truths (Matt. 13:13). The story of the Pharisee and the Publican is one such parable. Whether this story is based on an actual event or is made up we do not know. What we do know however is that it shows us some very important truths that we must understand if we want God to hear our prayers. In this passage Jesus contrasts an arrogant, self righteous Pharisee with a humble and lowly tax collector to illustrate the type of attitude that is pleasing to God when men come before Him in prayer and an attitude that is not pleasing to God. Let us understand the lesson that Jesus has illustrated for us that we may learn to be pleasing to God and that our prayers may be heard.

Lessons:

- Vs. 9: Notice the description of the people to whom Jesus spoke the parable. “*Some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.*” So often this is true among men. Those who are righteous according to their own standards tend to be puffed up, or arrogant toward others. Paul warns Christians to not have this attitude in Rom. 11:17, 18. “Christians need to have confidence concerning their own saved status (1 John 1:7; 3:19-22; 5:13). The key word in the above passage is the word ‘themselves.’ This man’s trust was not in God, His goodness, fairness, or mercy, but in self.” (Dunagan) We must always remember that we do not support Christ who brings righteousness but Christ (the root) supports us. We must be humble therefore and have a love toward all men as Christ did (Matt. 5:43-46).
- Vs. 11: “What this man says is not an exaggeration. The Jews had a saying that every Jewish male ought to thank God every day of his life that he was not created a Gentile, not one of the common people, and that he was not born a woman. “It is on record that Rabbi Simeon Ben Jochai once said, ‘If there are only two righteous men in the world, I and my son are these two; if there is only one, I am he’” (Barclay p. 233). “I am not”: Notice that the Pharisee’s prayer begins with negative goodness. People often forget that abstaining from the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21) is only half the battle. Do we have any of the fruit of the Spirit? (5:22-23) Even today people think they will end up saved

because of what they have not done. It is true he was not a swindler, dishonest cheat, or adulterer, but on the other hand he was not truly loving his neighbor as himself either. This is a classic example of having our minds so focused on the sins of others that we miss our own, or measuring our saved status by how we measure up to others.” (Dunagan)

- There is a connection between verse 9-14 and the previous passages in this chapter. Verse 9 starts with the word “and.” The first parable (18:1-8) stressed that prayer must be earnest and persevering. This parable teaches us that behind prayer and all other religious acts there must be a humble heart, which completely depends upon God. “Some see it (this parable) as a condemnation of the Pharisees, while others feel that it is directed toward certain disciples in whom the attitude of Phariseeism was at work. At any rate, the lesson is the same” (Jackson pp. 59-60).
- Vs. 13: The tax-gatherer did not take comfort in the fact that there are many other sinners and some who had even sinned more than himself. The publican was not complaining about all the hypocrites in Judaism, he was not arguing that He was better than those religious people, and neither was he justifying his lack of participation in spiritual things because he may be a sinner, but at least he is honest about it. Let it be noted that confession of sins does not remove the obligation to obey whatever else God commands. The publican’s confession would be meaningless if he did not intend to change his life and obey God in all things (Luke 6:46).
- Vs. 12, 14: Notice that the Pharisee, in spite of the list of good things that he said that he did, is still the “other” that was not justified. The publican however, who was humble and exceedingly sorrowful for his sins, was justified. We learn from these men that all the good deeds in the world can never bring salvation to those who do not do them out of love (1 Cor. 13:1-3) and sincerity (Col. 3:22). “The Pharisee was not justified because he did not ask for God’s mercy. God opposes the arrogant (James 4:6, 10), for there is no legitimate ground or basis of boasting before God, for all have sinned (Rom. 12:3). Every man is in need for God to justify them. One needs to take stock of his own life before being critical of others (Matt. 7:3-5; Rom. 2:21-22). Our sins ought to make us deeply ashamed before a Holy God. God can and God will cut every person down to size. God will not hear a person unless they are humble and whenever we are viewing others with contempt we are placing ourselves in a situation in which our prayers will not be heard. Humility should come natural, for the real measurement is not, “am I as good as other men,” but rather, “how do I measure up with a holy God?” (1 Pet. 1:14-15). (Dunagan).

The Rich Young Ruler

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 19

Text: Matt. 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-23

Jesus said “*How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!*” The story of the Rich Young Ruler is one example of why this is so true. We have examples of men who are not willing to follow Christ because of their unwillingness to give up something else (John 12:42; Acts 26:27-28; Luke 14:33). In this passage Jesus explains why this is so. Those who belong to God must wholly belong to Him. The Rich Young Ruler was not willing to accept this. If we are to be God’s people we must learn to put on the proper attitude in our service to God. Let us use this young man’s example to do just that.

Lessons:

- Matt 19:16, 21-22: It is sad to see people who desire eternal life but are not willing to do everything it takes to get it. People such as this can be compared to the person who wants to be rich, but is not willing work that he may become rich. Because of this attitude many try to take short cuts such as stealing so that they can get rich without honestly working for it. Yes, there are many who treat Christianity in this same way. In fact, it was for this reason that Paul said, “*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap*” (Gal. 6:7). There were some who thought that they could practice some sin and still be saved by their faith in God. There are many today who believe and practice this same thing. They want salvation, but like the rich young ruler, they are not willing to do everything that it takes to have that salvation. Let us learn from this that “*God is not mocked.*” We cannot sneak our way into the kingdom of heaven (John 10:1). God knows those who are His (2 Tim. 2:19) and if we want to be His we must submit completely to Him (1 Pet. 5:5-7).
- Matt 19:18-26: Notice that though the young man kept all the commandments confidently he was still not perfect. There are many who think that they are perfect because they do everything that God says to do. They read their bible, attend every assembly of the saints, pray, teach people, etc. Indeed this is almost exactly what the Rich young ruler did. In fact, he kept all the commandments even from his youth. But was he perfect? No! And neither is the person who does all the things that a Christian must do if their heart is not in the right place. Though the rich young ruler was obedient in all these things his heart was in his positions (Matt. 19:22). Are you perfect, or rather striving to be perfect? If so, remember that perfection cannot be

attained unless our attitude is right. To be perfect requires more than just doing what God. It requires devoting ourselves to God both in truth, and in spirit (Mark 12:30).

- Mark 10:17; 21, 22: Many come to Jesus who are eager to have everlasting life. Like this young man many come running, but in spite of their initial zeal many turn away when they find out that salvation requires more than what they are willing to give. Jesus described these people in his parable of the Sower. *“But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles”* (Matt. 13:20-22). Let us understand that when we become Christian we proclaim our faith and submission to the will of God. We become servants to God (Rom 6:20-23). And when our heart is in the right place (as mentioned above) we will be willing to give up everything for Christ’s sake.
- Luke 18:22-30: There are some who have misunderstood this passage to mean that Jesus is telling us that it is wrong to be rich. Let us understand that there is nothing wrong with being wealthy with physical wealth. In fact those who are wealthy and still faithful are able to do good by caring for their brethren who are in need (Philemon). The point of Jesus’ instruction to the rich young ruler was not that it is wrong to be rich, but that we cannot be attached to our riches and be perfect at the same time. Notice the emphasis that these passages put on what the young ruler cared for rather than what he actually possessed (Mark 10:24). Paul gives some insight on this principle in Phil. 4:11, 12. *“Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.”* (NASV) Paul knew how to live in prosperity and in humble means because he did not put his faith in those things that he had possessed, but in God. So we too must learn to put all of our trust in God, no matter what our physical circumstances (Prov. 3:5-7).

The Rich Man and Lazarus

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 20

“Lazarus”: “God helps,” or “God has helped.”

Text: Luke 16:19-31

The Rich man and Lazarus is a sad story that Jesus used to try and prick the hearts of the Pharisees who had hardened their hearts because of their love for money and other worldly pleasures (Luke 16:14). We find that one of the major problems that the Jews had when it came time for them to believe in Jesus and what He taught was that their hearts or there desires were not in spiritual things, but in fleshly things. In this story Jesus shows us that what we sow in this life we will reap in the next life (Gal. 6:7). Let us learn to sow things in this life that will build up treasures in heaven rather than treasures on earth (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

Lessons:

- Vs. 16:19-21; 25: "This man is not spoken of as an oppressor of the poor, or even a glutton. There is nothing to make us think of him as other than a reputable (for people seem to have been attending his banquets) one who desired to remove from himself all things painful to the flesh, and to surround himself with all things pleasurable" (Trench p. 3). Nothing is said about him being unfaithful to his wife or cruel to his children. Here is simply a man that had made a priority of avoiding uncomfortable situations. He tried to force this life to be his heaven. Here we learn that "loving pleasure rather than loving God" (2 Timothy 3:4), does not have to involve grave immorality. This rich man had fallen into the trap of "trying to save his life", that is, of avoiding all uncomfortable and painful situations at all cost, like helping a fellow Jewish man in need (Luke 9:24). (Dunagan)
- Vs. 20-22: Notice that while this rich man was clothing himself in very costly clothing and living in the lap of luxury that every day right underneath his nose was an opportunity to do good, but he never took it. Jesus says nothing about the rich man taking even a small portion of the wealth that he had to help this poor beggar who would come to his gate every day (1 John 3:17; 1 Tim. 6:18:19). It is evident that this man's failure to do good to those in need was part of his condemnation. There are many people today who believe and profess that since they are good people (that is to say they are not murderers, thieves, fornicators, etc.) they will not go to hell. Let it be understood from this passage that it is more that just the "very bad" people who will be sent to the lake of fire. Even those who may not do bad, but simply fail to do good will be in hell as well (James 4:17; Prov. 10:26).
- Vs. 22: It does not say in the passage that the rich man was meaning to go help Lazarus, but just never got around to it. Nevertheless the point can be made for those who

“procrastinate” when it comes to doing good. Often we may say, “Oh, they will be there tomorrow I will help them then.” Or, “Now may not be the right time, let’s wait till later.” We see from this passages that there may never be a later for the procrastinator. Though this rich man had opportunity knocking at his door it so happened that one day Lazarus was dead that the opportunity was gone. When the rich man finally came to his senses he had to face the fact that it was too late. Let us not wait until it is too late before we decide to do good to someone in need. Whether we need to teach someone the gospel or take them a bag of groceries, the time is now (Eph. 5:15, 16; Col. 4:5, 6).

- Vs. 27-31: Many say that if God would just speak to them or give them a revelation then they would obey the gospel. Or, if God would just allow miracles to be done today like they were done in the New Testament then I would believe and obey the gospel. In light of these statements, consider Abraham’s answer to the rich man when he asked to raise Lazarus from the dead and send him to his brothers to warn them of the suffering of the unrighteous. Abraham said to him, *“If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.”* The point is that we have the scriptures, the written record of the will of God and the evidence that proves Him as God, and if men cannot believe based on that they will not believe. The Jews proved to be a perfect example of this when Jesus’ friend Lazarus was raised from the dead (John 11:43-54; 12:9-11). The Pharisees would not listen to Jesus when He reasoned the scriptures with them. They would not believe Him when he healed people and performed other great wonders. Now, Jesus raised a man from the dead (just as the rich man asked Abraham to do with Lazarus), and would the Pharisees now believe in Jesus? No! The words of Abraham stood true; that even though a man be raised from the dead those who would not believe God’s word in writing would not believe period. We must understand the importance of this. God’s word has been tested, it has been tried, and it has been proven (2 Sam. 22:31; Psalm 18:30; Heb. 2:2). His word is truth and we must believe it if we are going to have eternal life. We have a record of the great works of God and that is what we must put our faith in (Rom. 10:17; Matt. 16:14; 1 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 11:1, 2).
- Most people live this life with the thought that there will be no consequences when this life is over. “I can do whatever I want in this life, after all, I will be dead when it is over.” God has told us that there is much more than that. “Death is not cessation or destruction of one's existence; rather, death is a separation of the soul from the body (James 2:26). The same truth concerning death is found when the term death is used in reference to “spiritual death”. When one sins, the soul is not destroyed; rather it is separated from God (Eph. 2:1,12-13). “Eternal death”, is simply eternal separation from God (Matthew 7:23 “depart from Me”; 2 Thess. 1:9). (Dunagan) Thus, when the rich man died he had to pay for the way he lived by living in eternal torment (Luke 16:24). Understand that there are consequences for how we live in this life. Let us strive to make them good.

Mary and Martha

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 21

“Mary”: “Obstinacy, rebellion,” or “tear.”

“Martha”: “Lady,” or “mistress.”

Text: Luke 10:38-42; John 11:1-44; John 12:1-8

As faithful servants of the Lord, Mary and Martha prove to be wonderful examples of true submission, humility, service and faith. At times the value that Mary put upon the Lord Jesus should make us take a second look at ourselves to see if we put this same value in our relationship with the Lord (Heb. 10:29). Martha gives us an example of a devoted and faithful servant. The interaction between the two allows us to see a balance between physical service and spiritual devotion. There is much to be gained from these two women. Let us examine our attitude to see whether or not our faith is as strong.

Lessons:

- Luke 10:38-42: Notice the difference in attitude between Mary and Martha. Martha seemed to be more concerned with the physical preparation of food, but Mary took more joy in and placed more importance upon the teachings of Jesus. Between the two notice that Jesus favored Mary’s attitude over that of Martha (vs. 41, 42). We should compare this with the attitude that Jesus also had when it came to choosing between physical and spiritual things (John 4:1-33, esp. vs. 32; Matt. 4:4; John 16:26, 27). In what do we place more value? Remember that those who have been baptized into Christ have been baptized into His death and therefore are raised to walk in newness of life in the spirit (Rom. 6). Therefore, the attitude of every Christian should be such that we place more value in the spiritual things rather than the physical things of life.
- John 12:1-3: Mary was willing to humble herself in service to the Lord. Often today people have a hard time with humbling themselves and serving others. Even some in the church do not fully know how to humble themselves to their Lord Jesus Christ. But this woman gives us an example of showing her great appreciation and love for Jesus, the Son of God (John 11:27). “The hair is woman’s crown and glory. It is often enough abused in vanity and pride but is here used in deepest humility and devotion. Our highest and best belongs in the dust at Jesus’ feet” (Lenski p. 425)
- John 11:5: This statement is to inform the reader that Jesus is not turning His back upon their plea for help by His brief answer and intentional delay. This statement also infers that: 1. God is a social being. God came to this earth and God had human friends. 2. God does not simply tolerate mankind or save mankind because it is His job. God truly wants to have a good relationship with the individuals mentioned in the above verse, even

though, they were imperfect people. 4. Jesus had a fond affection for each one in the family, He individually loved each member” (Dunagan). God has this same love for us as well (John 3:16).

- John 11:21, 22: Martha expresses her faith. She had tremendous confidence in Jesus and she knew that Jesus could have healed her brother. Carefully note that there is no complaint from her lips, she does not say, ‘What is the matter with you, some friend you turned out to be, you healed others, but you could not even take the time to heal your friends.’ The statement of verse 22 seems to suggest that she is still hopeful, that even at this late hour, something, she does not know what, could be done. ‘Hints to her belief that even in the face of her brother’s death Jesus will somehow rectify the situation’ (Butler p. 145)” (Dunagan). Granted, God does not work through miracles today, but we must not fail to believe the miracles that were used so that all who read about them might believe (John 20:31). We must have the same confidence and the same faith in the power of God that Martha had here. True she did not know exactly what Jesus was going to do, but she had confidence that He had the power to do what He needed. This is the same confidence that we must put in God every moment of our life (Prov. 3:5). Only when we trust in God can we be truly confident in life.
- John 11:27: “Yes, Lord; I have believed...” “Be impressed that this great tragedy in the life of Martha had not hardened her heart. She refused to attach any blame to Jesus for the death of her brother. She may not understand why He could not have come in time, but she refuses to allow any unbelief, criticism, or murmuring into her heart! Even after the death of her brother, even after Jesus’ (seemingly) failure to arrive in time, she continues to believe that He is the Son of God, the Messiah. Is this our level of faith? Do we refuse to blame God, or are we looking for any reason why we do not have to serve Him? When life is hard, when it seems like God has not come through for us, what do we believe? See Hab. 3:16-19.” (Dunagan).
- John 12:1-8: Once again we find Mary anointing the Lord with oil. Notice that her gratitude and thanks for all that the Lord does is never ceasing. Her attitude throughout the gospels reflects the instruction that we have from Paul in Eph. 5:18-21. “...*giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” It is true that we cannot literally anoint Jesus’ head or His feet with oil today, but are there other acts of service and kindness that we can do for the Lord to show Him our gratitude for all that He does for us? (Matt. 24:34-40; Heb. 13:13-16).

Blind Bartimaeus

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 22

“Bartimaeus”: “Son of Timaeus” (Mark 10:46). Timaeus means “highly prized” or “honorable” thus Bartimaeus means “Son of the honorable.”

Text: Matt. 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43.

In this brief moment where Jesus heals a man from his blindness we see an expression of faith in God that is rarely seen among men today. Bartimaeus gives us an example of the effort true faith puts forth to seek after our Lord. Let us learn from the faith that Bartimaeus put in the power of Jesus Christ and from the glory and praise that he gave to God for the gift that he received.

Lessons:

- Harmony of the scriptures: “At this point Luke says that all this happened ‘*as He was approaching Jericho*’ (Luke 18:35). Mark says ‘*and they came to Jericho. And as He was going out from Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Temaeus, was sitting by the road*’ (10:46). While Matthew and Mark place the healing upon leaving Jericho, Luke places it upon arriving and then adds the account about Jesus interacting with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1). A possible harmonization is that Luke notes that the blind man detected the arrival of Jesus (18:35) because of the noise made by the multitude. Matthew and Mark may note that the blind man does not catch up to Jesus until He is on the other side of the city (Mark 10:46). Luke 19:1 might be the next day or when Jesus re-enters the city. McGarvey argues that Jesus went in advance to the crowd, and hence He had already entered Jericho before the sounds of the following \multitude roused the beggar to question its meaning. Knowing that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem, he resolved to avail himself of the opportunity to be healed by him before he left the neighborhood. Not knowing how long Jesus would remain in Jericho, and not being sure of his ability to find him if he entered the city, he appears to have passed around the wall till he came to the southern gate, by which Jesus would depart on his way to Jerusalem. Here he stationed himself and waited patiently for the coming of Jesus” (Fourfold p. 559) (Dunagan).
- Matt. 20:31: The hindrance that the people placed upon the blind men only “increased the intensity of their determination to receive help. Their persistence evidences their conviction that the Son of David is their only hope and help...They feared that the opportunity of a lifetime was slipping through their fingers” (Fowler pp. 945-946).
 - Do we have this much persistence when it comes to our own salvation?
 - Like Bartimaeus are we absolutely convinced that Jesus is the only answer for our problems?
 - Do we view our salvation as a one-in-a lifetime opportunity?

- What sort of things do we allow to discourage us from seeking God's blessings and favor? Do we give up too easily?
 - What do we do when the world tells us to remain silent?
- Are we like those who tried to silence the beggars? There are many people in the world who seem to be righteous but when put to the test it is only self-righteousness. Jesus spent much time teaching and healing the poor and sick. If given the opportunity would we be willing to take the time to convert those who are weak according to the world or do we strive to silence them, or rather having nothing to do with them as these people do in our story? Let us examine ourselves to make sure or pride does not hinder our efforts to spread the gospel (Mark 7:20, 22 – "*What comes out of a man, that defiles a man...pride.*")
 - Matt. 20:32: "*What do you want Me to do for you?*" Imagine, the son of God asking you what you want Him to do for you. This is the type of attitude that Jesus strove to engrain in the minds of His disciples. The greatest in the Kingdom will be the servant of all (Mat. 23:11). When men seek for your help how do you respond? Do you strive to silence them as the people did, or do you turn and as, "What do you want me to do for you?" See Romans 12:9-16.
 - Luke 18:42: Notice the statement that Jesus makes, "*your faith made you well.*" Several times Jesus heals people and then says "your faith has saved you," or a like statement (See Luke 7:36-50; Luke 8:43-48; Luke 17:11-19). There are many today who advocate a "faith only salvation" by teaching that as long as we believe we will be saved, but we do not have to actually do anything. Notice attitude of Bartimaeus and the others to whom Jesus spoke saying, "your faith has made you well." Bartimaeus cried out for Jesus' help and when the people tried to silence him he cried out even more out of determination. The woman who had a flow of blood (Luke 8:48) forced her way through a crowd with the hope that she could but touch the garment that Jesus was wearing and be healed. And the one Samaritan leper (Luke 17:19) who was healed but was the only one out of ten healed who came back to Jesus praising God and showing great gratitude for the gift that was given through Jesus. In each case it was the person that not only said they believe, but proved their faith by their actions. It was after they proved their faith in the power of God that Jesus said to them, "your faith has made you well." One thing that we must notice that the we must point out to those who believe that we are saved by faith only, it is only after we prove our faith to the Lord that we can be saved. We prove our faith by what we do with it (James 2:14-26). Bartimaeus proved his faith; let us also strive to prove ours.
 - Luke 18:43: "No wonder their exuberant joy pours itself out in unabashed praise to God! Their infectious enthusiasm and the exciting effect of the miracle opened the mouths of their fellow travelers who also took up God's praise for the miracle they had witnessed. These penniless beggars, rather than seeking first a stable income to care for their creaturely necessities, seek first the kingdom of God (Fowler p. 949).

The Thief on the Cross

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 23

Text: Matt. 27:41-44; Luke 23:39-43;

Lessons:

- Luke 23:39: Often today we will meet people who profess to have faith in God and even call themselves Christians, but when we look at the work that they do “according to their faith” we find that it does not wholly agree with God’s word. This is the same pattern that we find in many people in Jesus’ day, especially in the leaders of the people. In fact, Jesus often rebuked the Jews for their hypocrisy and for substituting the commandments of God with their own traditions (Matt. 15:7-9). The first thief that is mentioned hanging next to Jesus was a man who seemed to have this sort of faith. If we were to put a name with it we might call it a “selfish faith.” Notice that the thief that was reviling Jesus in Luke’s account did not have a humble and contrite heart before Him. Rather he spoke to him harshly saying, *“If you are the Christ, save yourself and us.”* Why was it that this man wanted Jesus to reveal Himself as an all powerful Christ? Was it because he desired to see the glory of God and His power to humble those who were persecuting Him? No! This man only desired Jesus to show his power that He might save Himself, *“and us.”* His intentions were wholly selfish. Especially as we compare them with the other thief who had the proper attitude toward God and the punishment that they were facing. Of what nature is your faith in God? Is it selfish like so many of the Jews in Jesus’ day and like the thief who ridiculed Him on the cross? Or is it a humble faith that is willing to do whatever God commands because He is your God?
- Luke 23:39, 40: Men who have a selfish faith in God do not truly fear God for if they did they would humble themselves before Him rather than arrogantly changing His words to please themselves. True and honest faith in God will cause an individual to fear Him for the God that He is. Consider Prov. 19:23; Prov. 22:4; 1 Pet. 3:15; Heb. 12:28, 29.
- Luke 23:41: The thief that was saved had a proper attitude toward punishment due him. Many today firmly believe that they have the right to do what ever they want and any punishment that they incur on account of their deeds is unjust (capitol punishment, the death sentence, etc.). Let us understand that men who have a humble heart and a true and honest faith in God are aware of the sin in their lives (Matt. 5:4; 2 Chron. 7:14) and understand that they are deserving of whatever punishment those sins may bring about (Ps. 37:30). The thief that was saved understood this and that is why he rebuked the other thief in verse 40 and 41. This thief also understood the righteousness of Jesus for suffering though He did not deserve it. *“For we receive the due reward for our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.”* The attitude that this man shows is one that is commendable before God (1 Pet. 2:20-22). Do you have a proper attitude toward

suffering? The thief that was saved was saved in part because of the righteousness that he showed on the cross. Let us strive to have this same attitude within us.

- Luke 23:43: Jesus had the power to forgive sins while on this earth.
- Matt. 27:41-44; Luke 23:39-43: The second thief repented and humbled himself and was therefore saved. Many today believed they are saved but they have not yet humbled themselves. Have you humbled yourselves before God? See. Dan. 10:12; James 4:7-10.
- What about the thief on the cross? “Some have argued that this is an example of a person being saved without baptism, and therefore baptism is not essential to salvation, yet the text does not say whether this thief was baptized or not. He may have been baptized under John’s baptism, for he knew about Jesus and the kingdom of God.” (Dunagan) He may have been baptized by one of Jesus’ disciples before Jesus’ death (John 3:22-26), yet we do not know this for sure either. When considering this matter we must ask, is the salvation of this thief relevant to the issue of baptism?
 - The Thief was saved before baptism was commanded
 - It was commanded AFTER Jesus died and arose (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16).
 - It is a baptism into Jesus’ death (Rom. 6:3-4). How could the thief have been baptized into Jesus’ death, when Jesus had not yet died?
 - The thief was never subject to this baptism.
 - Just like Adam, Noah, Moses, etc. None of these were baptized. But they all lived before the death of Jesus and like the thief, were never commanded to be baptized!
 - Yes, there was the baptism of John (Mark 1:4-5). But that was preparing people for the coming of Christ. And it was designed to be replaced by baptism into Christ and His death (Acts 19:4-5).
 - One might use the thief on the cross to say John’s baptism was not necessary, but the argument can’t be made regarding the baptism which Christ later commanded!
 - The thief on the cross died before Jesus gave His commandment in Matt. 28 and Mark 16. Since we live after Jesus commanded baptism, how can we use the example of the thief to say it is not necessary? We cannot! (Mark A. Copeland).

Pilate

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 24

“Pilate”: His surname, *Pilatus*, may have been derived from *pilatus*, armed with *pilum* (or javelin), or *pileatus*, the *pileus* (or cap) being the badge of freed slaves. (from The New Unger's Bible Dictionary. Copyright (c) 1988.)

Text: Matt. 27:1, 2, 11-26, 57-66; Mark 15:1-15, 43-45; Luke 23:1-7, 11-25; John 18:28-19:22.

Pilate shows us the weaknesses that befall men who value the praise of other men above the praise of God. Torn between a desire to free Jesus and the persistent cries of the Jews, Pilate attempts to “compromise” in his decision. He believed that he could allow an innocent man to be put to death, yet remain innocent himself by washing his hands. In his decision we see how men who know the truth but are not loyal to the truth can be torn between right and wrong when the pressure is on. In the end we can see how his worldly characteristics worked to bring his life to a bitter end. Let us learn from the example we have in Pilate to place our loyalty completely with God.

Lessons:

- Matt. 27:12-14: Like a sheep led to the slaughter (Isa. 53:7; Acts 8:32). It is amazing to read the accounts of the crucifixion and see what great control Jesus had over His life, even while in seemingly great despair. Not once do we read of Jesus “loosing control of Himself,” or even wavering under the great pressure that was upon Him. When Jesus spoke with Pilate we see His ability to teach, even while in the midst of the man who could send Him to his death. We also see the great self control that Jesus had when set before His accusers; how He said nothing in defense though he had the ability to not only overthrow every argument, but to also destroy those who cast their false accusations against Him. When we consider this as we read the prophecy of Christ's crucifixion as written by Isaiah, we can truly appreciate the faith and obedience of Christ as He was “*like a sheep led to the slaughter.*” What would it take for us to have this same faith self control in our lives today?
- Matt. 27:17-26: Notice that in spite of Pilate's obvious desire to have Jesus set free he was still willing to send Him to His death in order to please the Jews. Truly this shows how the weakness of men hinders us from doing what is right when faced with the pressures of this world. It is for this reason that we are taught in the scriptures to put our faith in God and to work as to please God and not men (Col. 3:23). Let us consider our obligation to our God and the outcome of those who do not put their faith in Him (see the history of Pilate's life after the gospels at the end of this document). Will our faith hold fast when the pressures of this world are upon us? What can we do to strengthen our faith in such situations?

- John 18:37: “What is truth?” What was the tone of voice Pilate said this? Was it with contempt and skepticism “for such high idealism??” To a Roman politician of his day truth was relative. Their view of what was good and truthful was cynical pragmatism” (butler P. 371). Pilate said this, not realizing that the truth was standing before him. The world is still filled with people like Pilate. To them the truth might catch their attention for a moment, they might listen to a sermon and like it, but after all, they have business to attend to and they are trying to accomplish so many things. To such people that truth might make a nice momentary diversion, but it is not very practical, it gets in the way of getting the job done, of doing business. Thus throughout the centuries, this question by Pilate has been viewed as an earnest inquiry, the inquiry of one who despaired, a scoffing question, and so on. (Dunagan) What would you do with the truth?
- John 19:11: It never fails that as leaders and authorities rise and fall from power eventually most become arrogant and haughty, allowing their authority to go to their heads. Many who do not put their faith in, or even believe in God, exalt themselves as if to place themselves higher than God. From the scriptures we have the example of Pharaoh in Exodus. There is also Ahab in 1 Kings 16-22. In spite of the authority that Pilate supposed that he had over Jesus’ life, notice Jesus’ response to Pilate. “*You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.*” Jesus shows Pilate where the true power is, even in light of Pilate’s undoubted self confidence. As we consider our government and the decisions it is faced with let us remember this fact which Jesus makes so very clear. Let us pray that our government does not exalt itself against God. See 1 Tim. 2:1, 2; Matt. 23:12; 2 Cor. 10:5; 2 Thess. 2:3-8.
- Consider Pilate’s outcome in life due to his character and deeds. “Here (at the end of the gospels), as far as Scripture is concerned, our knowledge of Pilate's life ends. But we learn from Josephus (Ant. 18, 4, 1) that his anxiety to avoid giving offence to Caesar did not save him from political disaster. The Samaritans were unquiet and rebellious. A leader of their own race had promised to disclose to them the sacred treasures which Moses was reported to have concealed in Mount Gerizim. Pilate led his troops against them, and defeated them easily enough. The Samaritans complained to Vitellius, now president of Syria, and he sent Pilate to Rome to answer their accusations before the emperor (ibid. 2). When he reached Rome he found Tiberius dead and Caius (Caligula) on the throne, A.D. 36. Eusebius adds (Hist. Eccl. 2, 7) that soon afterwards "wearied with misfortunes," he killed himself. (from McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 2000 by BibleSoft).

The Man Born Blind

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 25

Text: John 9

Though we know very little about the character of this blind man the story in which Jesus heals him is one that is full of lessons to build the faith and understanding of God's people. In this account we are able to compare the skepticism of the Pharisees with the sincere faith of the former blind man. We are able to see the boldness of the faithful as it is compared to the cowardice of those who seek the praise of men. As we study through this story let us seek to use it as a means to better understand how the power of God is able to work in the lives of those who diligently seek after Him.

Lessons:

- John 9:1-3: It is a common misconception that when we face hardships in life it means we are punished for our sins. In our country today the wealthy people believe that they are right with God because they have prospered greatly in this life. Even many of the poor of our nation believe that they are being punished for their sins. Let us understand however that God does not prosper people in this life based on works. Jesus taught in Matt. 5:45 that God sends the rain on the just and the unjust. It is not a matter of righteousness. If anything, trials in this life are just the opposite of what the world views them as. In Hebrews 12:5, 6, 9 we learn that when we face trials it means that God loves us because just as our physical fathers discipline and teach their children, God is disciplining and teaching His children. In verses 7 and 9 we learn that if we did not have these trials then it would mean that God is not disciplining us and that we are not His children. This is the attitude that we must have toward trials in life. Let us not become discouraged and lose our faith. Instead, let us use our trials to build patience and endurance know that we have God as our Father (Acts 14:22; Prov. 13:24; 1 John 3:1).
- John 9:4: Consider Jesus' attitude toward getting things done. He knew there were certain tasks that needed to be performed before His life on this earth was finished and He worked diligently to accomplish them. As Christians we must strive to have this same attitude (Eccl. 9:10).
- John 9:1, 6, 7: Notice the nature of the miracles that Jesus performed. The so-called miracles of those who claim to have the power of the Holy Spirit today just do not compare with the wonders that Jesus performed while on this earth. If one were to watch one of the "Healing Seminars" that the "Tele-Evangelists" put on they would see people who claim to have diabetes, or a drug addiction, or arthritis, or some other illness or disability that cannot be seen with the naked eye. The miracles that Jesus performed were not of this concealed nature. Jesus proves the power of God by healing people who had been lame since their birth. These were people who were known by almost all those who lived in the area to be crippled (John 9:8).

- John 9:11, 12: Why is it that modern day miracles workers are almost never sought after, but when Jesus was alive almost every person who heard of His name was eager to be healed by Him or see others be healed by Him (Luke 6:19)?
- John 9:16-18: Many people today say that they would believe in God if He would just perform a miracle that would astound them. The Pharisees show us that even when a great miracle has been performed, if a person does not want to believe they will not believe not matter how great the miracle. This is the same thing that Abraham said to the rich man in the story of “The Rich Man and Lazarus” (Luke 16:27-31). *“But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’* Like the Pharisees in verse 16, when a person does not want to believe they will take any part of the truth and twist it to their own demise (2 Pet. 3:16). We have all the miracles we need written throughout the pages of God’s word as proof that the bible is the word of God (John 20:30, 31). If we cannot even believe this then there is nothing that will cause us to believe unless we change our mind and decide to seek after God who is waiting (Acts 17:27).
- John 9:20-23: Fear can be a powerful force in keeping people from standing up for the truth. It is no wonder that even the cowardly will be cast into the lake of fire along with the murderers and idolaters as it says in Revelation 21:8. One thing that Christians need to remember is that if we truly fear God (Ps. 66:16) then we cannot fear anything else (Matt. 10:28). When it is required of us to give a testimony of the faith that is in us and of the gospel by which we are saved, we cannot allow the fear of men to hinder us in that duty (2 Cor. 5:12; 1 Pet. 3:15, 16).
- John 9:24-34: Notice the inability of the Pharisees to believe in the power of Jesus Christ even when the evidence was standing before their very eyes. Many people today claim that “we are unable to understand God’s will because men are always changing and with that our understanding is always being slanted. Because of this we need inspired men and scholars to interpret the scriptures for us today.” Notice that the Pharisees in this story claimed to have this same responsibility, that they had a perfect understanding of the Law of Moses (John 9:28, 29, 34). What do we see in spite of their supposed spiritual understanding? A poor man, a beggar who was born blind and had little education if any can understand the power of the Holy Spirit even though these great teachers could not. Could it just be possible that men today, like these Pharisees, do not have a proper understanding of God’s word, not because they are incapable, but because they have hardened their hearts to believe only what they want to believe? The fact that this former blind man could understand the power of God is proof that any person who softens their heart to the will of God is capable of understanding. This agrees with the teaching that men do not understand God’s word, not because of lack of inspiration, but because of the hardness of their hearts (Isa. 44:18-20; Matt. 13:14, 15).

The Sinful Woman

New Testament Bible Characters: Lesson 26

Text: Luke 7:36-50

The account of the sinful woman is a humbling one that should cause us to take a second look at how we view sin in our lives. It is so easy to feel that we are doing well and that we are not sinning as much as we used to and to become a little overconfident in ourselves. As we read through this story however we are reminded of the great debt that Jesus Christ paid in shedding His blood so that we can have the forgiveness of our sins. Let us always remember the humility of this woman and compare it to our own. Remember, *“Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall”* (1 Cor. 10:12).

Lessons:

- Luke 7:37, 38, 44-47: See the value that the Lord places upon people who are humble enough to admit their wrongs and offer their lives in service to Him.
- Luke 7:41-48: All men are debtors to God because all have sinned against Him (Rom. 3:23, 5:12). The Pharisee that Jesus was eating with believed himself to be a righteous man and therefore less guilty of sin (having less debt) than the woman. Indeed, this was an attitude that was common among the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day (John 9:28-34; Luke 18:10, 11). This is a trap that many people fall into. By comparing ourselves to the rest of the world, instead of God, we have a tendency to give ourselves a false sense of self-confidence saying, “at least I am not as bad as this thief, or as that adulterer.” Men who puff themselves up in such away also have a tendency to view the forgiveness of God as being of little value. “I have sinned little, therefore there is little to forgive.” Thus Jesus gives His parable which compares this type of pampas person (one who owed little) with a person who was fully aware of the multitude of sins they have committed (the one who owed much). Jesus compared the debtor who owed little to the Pharisee that He was eating with saying that he loved God little. But the woman who owed much loved God much because she had a greater debt. How do you view yourself as a sinner? Have you become puffed up against other men like this Pharisee? Are you aware that your debt of sin is just as great as every other person in the world? All have sinned; therefore all are lost and are in equal need of the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. Let us humble ourselves and love God much in return for the forgiveness of our sins.

- Luke 7:49: There were many people during Jesus' ministry who were astonished, and sometimes enraged, at the fact that Jesus claimed to forgive sins while on earth (Matt. 9:2-6; Mark 2:5-7). Considering one of the statements that was made in response to His forgiving sins we understand a truth that many people today will deny. "*Who can forgive sins but God alone?*" (Luke 5:21). Indeed, how could Jesus forgive sins unless He was God on earth? This throws a big hole in the doctrines of men who claim that Jesus was not God while on earth, and did not have the same power as God while on earth. Let us understand that Jesus was both God and a man and because of this He both had the power to forgive sins while He was in the flesh and He has the power to forgive our sins today (Col. 1:14; Eph. 1:5-7).
- Luke 7:50: Many people today teach that, "All we have to do is believe in Jesus Christ and we can be saved. We do not have to do anything, just believe." Those who hold to this doctrine will go to such passages as this one and say, "See! Her faith has saved her and she didn't have to do anything." In light of this of argument let us take a closer look at what really happened. At what point in the story was the woman forgiven? Before or after she humbled herself and washed Jesus' feet? It was after! Jesus did not say she was forgiven as soon as she walked in the door. This woman first showed the same humility that every person must show toward God in order to be saved (Prov. 11:2; Ps. 25:9, 10; James 4:10). It was then, after she served Jesus having remorse for her sins, that He forgave her of her sins (see also James 2:14-25). Have you humbled yourself before the Lord? Many people believe that they are obedient to God, and for the most part they are. But by their obedience they become arrogant, just as the Pharisee had become in our story. Let us always remember to "humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord."