The Kingdom Lifestyle

A Collection of Bible Study Outlines
from Peace House Discipleship Work

A Collection Of *Bible Study Outlines*
from Peace House Discipleship Work

the KINGDOM *Lifestyle*

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PREFACE

This book is actually an aid to Bible study. It draws an outline of thoughts to help the user concentrate and focus his/her mind on a systematic search for the truth in the Scriptures.

The commentaries after each question or point of discussion are not meant to precede personal inspiration and discovery. They are to help buttress and firm up the user's conviction and to provide further illumination and challenge.

Hence, in order to make the most of this Study outline, each participant must dutifully read through each text quoted, meditate deeply on the Scriptures and make personal note of whatever impressions the Spirit might make on his or her heart first. He should endeavor to pray over and over again, until the light personally dawns on the heart before he/she can now read through the comments.

Each outline comes along with some series of electronically recorded teachings that can be obtained on request. It is required for disciples going through this as a training, to listen to the messages so as to lay a foundation and a focus for the study. This is to create an atmosphere that is conducive for inspiration to flow.

At the end of each chapter of study are what we call **"Personal Assessment Questions".** They are to be handled after the study, to evaluate your personal experience as the Word is coming into your heart. They are not intended to be answered as mere academic tests.

No one should wish to give "a good answer" so to say . . . honesty, sincerity and a burdened prayerful response are the issues here. These Personal Assessment Questions are

meant to lead you into a deep evaluation of God's dealings on your life. They are also to aid your 'Disciplers' to know how to stand with you in prayers and in the further stages of your discipleship.

In all, we commend this book to the LORD that it may accomplish His purpose and fulfill HIS heart's desire among all people and especially in His Body.

Gbile Akanni

GUIDLINES TO THE DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING PROGRAMME

A. OBJECTIVES

The primary aim is to recruit and equip men and women for the work of the ministry and the corporate building up the Body of Christ in our land and in our age. To this end, we are believing God to accomplish the following in the lives of the participants:

i. A deepening of faith and of the knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

ii. A heart-knowledge and consciousness of God's definite calling on each life and a readiness to pursue it with all vigour.

iii. The receipt and daily exercise of the manifestations (enabling) of the Holy Spirit for the work of the ministry in the Body of Christ.

iv. The grace and vision to disciple other souls as God will provide opportunity.

B. PROGRAMME STRATEGY

1. General Focus

Not intended to assume the posture of a Bible school, the programme shall neither emphasize head-knowledge (intellectual excellence) nor theological prowess. Emphasis shall be laid on the actual impartation of the grace of God on the life of each individual participant as well as the practical

realization of God's purpose in the same.

Hence, the program shall take the form of an intimate personal relationship rather than an academic course program. Consequently, there shall neither be a graduation nor the award of a certificate.

II. Discipleship Materials

Apart from these Bible Study books, audio/video messages or such other instructional materials as may be judged relevant to the needs of the participants shall be used in the course of the program.

It is expected of every disciple to have at least one Bible and where possible, different versions to enhance understanding. Also, each participant is expected to have and use writing materials to take note of issues that touch his/her heart in the course of the bible studies.

III. Recommended Messages For More Understanding

Participants are expected to listen to the Livingseed Audio or video messages titled "THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT" by Gbile Akanni alongside these Bible Study Series to enhance understanding.

IV. Recommended programme for group discipleship meeting.

If this discipleship programme and the Bible study materials are adopted to be used in a group, fellowship, or ministry purposes involving more than two, three or more persons, we recommend a weekly meeting of at least 90 minutes and at most 2 hours.

Each meeting opens with a time of prayer and brief worship. Except when a class agrees to meet for praise

worship, a normal discipleship class is not to be dragged into prolonged singing and offering of special numbers, or sharing of long testimonies, except if occasionally judged to be relevant and necessary by the local leadership.

The meeting is gathered and put to focus by the coordinator, who previews the previous message and then launches the participants into the subject for the day:

⇒ 1. A listening session (30 minutes to 1 hour).

⇒ 2. A study session / Book review session / Discussion etc (30 minutes to 1 hour)

⇒ 3. Personal Assessment Application, Questions and Prayers (20-30min.)

⇒ 4. Personal Assessment: Each participant is expected to work through the personal assessment questions in writing after each study. This is to be submitted through the class leader/coordinator.

It may not be necessary to carry out each of the steps (1-3) at every meeting. The leading of the Holy Spirit must be manifestly followed while the other postponed aspect could be the first agenda of the next class.

A class could break off the teaching and Bible study to "pray down" the issues raised and to practically handle individual participant's experiences. Prayer meetings, ministrations, outreaches etc. could be scheduled as per the judgment of the local leaders.

Those leading the study session must meet to preview the outlines and secure a deep insight into the Scripture before coming to lead the meeting.

C. PROGRAMME DURATION

The duration of the programme as a whole shall not be fixed for each individual since our emphasis is not on head 'knowledge' but on the formation of Christ's life in each participant. The duration will therefore largely depend on the learning speed of each disciple. It depends on the response of each participant or group to the message.

Our prayer is that God's message in this Bible study shall come to you with grace to stir up your faith for action. You must therefore pray continually and be diligent to see to it that the day-to-day challenges that arise thereafter are used as stepping stones to put the lessons learnt into practice.

ON THE MOUNT WITH THE LORD

INTRODUCTION

Severally, as we study Scriptures and watch God's dealings with men and women whom He used to bear His word to others, each one of them was summoned up to the **'mount'** at one point or the other in their journey with God. He sat on their lives "on the mount", away from the crowd that would always stay back at "the foot of the hill". The content of His teachings and dealings with these men on the mount was usually unknown to multitudes in the valley. Most of the time, they came back with their faces shining because of some unspeakable experiences and deep visions of the Lord they were privileged to see.

But one thing is certain: ***men are never made in the valley or amidst the multitudes.*** This mountain-climbing experience into the fullness of God, the divine impartation as well as a sample of such teachings He gives His chosen men, shall be the focus of this Bible study series. As disciples ourselves, we long to climb up to Him on the mount for specific instructions for our lives, so that we can become vessels of honour in His hands.

Instructions on the mount are usually for the serious minded. God does not pamper any man who summons the courage to come up to the mount with Him. He does not waste their lives either. He could be so meticulous and painstaking with details of their lives, to the point that they feel the heat of His scrutiny but at the end, they come forth in His glory.

Details that most men overlook in our character and actions do not escape the scrutiny of the Lord especially for someone He wants to use for noble purposes.

Therefore, when in the course of these studies, details and minute issues of life and character are being discussed and you are required to act and bring your life into divine alignment and balance, do not be offended. Do not hesitate to rise up and act on these demands on your life. And do act fast, for that matter.

May these studies actually set your feet on a higher ground of God's dealings, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

INSTANCES ON THE MOUNT

Main Texts: Matt. 5:1-2; Gen.22:1-6, 9-10,14-19; Ex. 3:1-22, 4:1-17; 18:5, Ex. 19:3,11-25; Ex.24:12-18

Ex. 25 to Ex. 32, Ex. 32:15-16; Ex. 34:2-4, 29 are all lessons on the mount which afford us opportunity to study.

1. ABRAHAM ON THE MOUNT OF MORIAH
Gen. 22:1-6, 9-10, 14-19

This is a climax in Abraham's walk with the LORD. Abraham had waited for the child of promise for twenty-five years. Finally, Isaac came and his coming naturally brought untold excitement . . . until he took center stage of Abraham's heart and devotion.

For God to continue with him, God needed to deal with this "blessing that had become a distraction". Abraham needed to bring out of his heart, this Isaac, so that God might proceed with him into the fullness of His plan and purposes for his life and call . . . He needed to make a burnt offering of his **'Isaac'**, whom he now loved, obviously more than God.

This can not be done anywhere else but on the mount alone . . . Let us study the issues involved in this offering. Note:

✍ (A) "HERE AM I"

Gen 22:1 And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.

This was Abraham's response for this mountain top experience: Your availability is the first step to going and growing higher with the LORD. You have to be present to present yourself before the Lord. Those who are too busy and unable to free themselves from the issues of the valley cannot climb to be with God on the Mount.

✍ (b) "UPON ONE OF THE MOUNTAINS WHICH I WILL TELL THEE OF"

Gen 22:2 And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

Anywhere is nowhere with God! Places and points of commitments mean a lot in your walk with the LORD. There is a place to meet with God. There are characteristics of the place conducive to divine encounter. The mount is different from the valley. You have to go there to be where God can meet you. Places away from the familiar environment may add to your concentration.

✍ (c) "ABRAHAM ROSE EARLY...AND WENT UNTO THE PLACE OF WHICH GOD HAD TOLD HIM..."

Gen 22:3 And Abraham rose up early in the morning; and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.

Prompt obedience, early rising, and due preparations of heart and mind are necessary and common to all men who climb higher in their relationship with the LORD. Those who are slack in obeying God; those who delay and procrastinate their response to God's invitation to the mount; often find it impossible to obey later.

(d) "...on the third day Abraham saw the place afar off"

Gen 22:4 *Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.*

Persistence, perseverance, and purposefulness are matters to consider if you also would mount up with the LORD, as eagles. It is not the first step or the first attempt that takes you to the climax of communion with the LORD. When God seems not to be speaking and the answers we seek seem to be long in coming, as those who will experience God on the mount, we keep going, we keep on keeping on; . . . . we may still be on the first or second day of journeying into God.

(e) "To the young men, . . . Abide ye here with the ass; and I . . . will go yonder and worship . . . "

Gen 22:5 *And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.*

You cannot get to the mount in the company of men, acquaintances, and **'asses'**: These things in addition to people, though helpful, will hinder you from going yonder with the Lord. There is a 'yonder' to go. He who is not willing to go beyond human consideration cannot walk tall with the LORD. The braying of the 'asses' and the cry of sympathizers are always hindrances to a deep walk with God.

He had travelled three days, yet there was still a yonder he must go. What are your 'young men' and your 'asses' you must leave behind? And which 'yonder' must you go, in order to get on the mount where the LORD has been waiting to

bless you?

✍ **(f) Read VS. 14-19 and discover the peculiar blessings on the mount.**

Everyone who endures going alone to the LORD on the mount always comes back with a definite blessing and impartation. God's invitation to the mount is never without a purpose. Those who seek Him, find Him . . . and they even find blessings beyond whatever they had dreamed possible.

What challenges come to your heart as you study Abraham on this mount? Outline them for discussion and personal prayer.

2. MOSES ON MOUNT HOREB. EX. 3: 1-22; 4:1-17.

Though kept and preserved by the faith of his parents all through the difficult years in Egypt, Moses could not step into God's purpose for his life until he came alone, face to face with God on the mount.

He would have been spent and worn out behind the flocks of his father-in-law. He would have probably died as an ordinary man but for the encounter at the back side of the desert at the mountain of God (in the burning bush).

(A) HIS FIRST ENCOUNTER AND CALL INTO MINISTRY. EX. 3:1-6

✍ **(i) Look at VS 1-2 closely.**

In such a busy schedule, with the bleating of the flock and the search for green pastures (in a desert), Moses could never have heard the still small voice, if God had not arranged a spectacular scene before his very eyes . . . the burning bush. He

had transversed that mountain several times, but had missed the God of that mount . . . he had been too busy to hear God!

Dearly beloved, are you so busy and choked with affairs of this life that spiritual things elude you? Points where God encountered others and changed their destinies also came your way as well, but left you with no indelible mark . . . If you are too busy to create time for God, then you are too busy for a divine encounter; and you are too busy to be used of God.

(ii) ". . . I will NOW TURN ASIDE . . . why THE bush is NOT BURNT . . . And WHEN THE LORD SAW THAT HE TURNED ASIDE TO SEE . . . " (VS. 3-4)

The mountain experience is meaningless, until a man turns aside, with a deep search in his heart, asking: **"why is the bush not burnt?"** Only those that seek find; only the thirsty are filled; only those who ask receive . . . Until Moses turned aside, God would never have turned to him. It cannot be your turn with God in power and glory, unless you turn aside from your busy 'sheep tending' activities.

Does God see that you have turned aside to **'see'** into His purpose and plan for your life? Those who climbed to the mount, to be alone with God, are those who have turned aside to see God's will for their lives unfold at His feet.

(iii) '. . . God called UNTO HIM'

This is the essence of every mounting up to be with the LORD. It is to hear Him call you out of the tumults of this world, and for Him to show you the burdens of His heart. Have you heard His call? His call to salvation, to separation, to service, and to fulfilling your destiny?

(iv) ". . . HERE AM I . . . "

That was Moses' response. Remember that was Abraham's response too. What will yours be? Or rather what has yours

been? Many have terminated their mountain encounters with the LORD because of disobedience and lack of response.

✍ (v) **"...Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes... the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."**

Cleansing, sanctification, and purification only take place up there on the mount, alone with the LORD. All shoes of addiction, of worldliness, and of self-energy are removed only as a man encounters the LORD alone on the mount.

Trying to be holy and pure in heart in the valley or among the multitudes is to live a life of struggle and weariness. True holiness is only possible for men who are conversant with the mount.

(B) HIS PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. EX. 3:6, 13-15

Each time men encounter God, one paramount experience common to all is a definite, functional, precise, and accurate knowledge of God. On the mount, God reveals Himself, unveils His attributes and displays His glory before the eyes of the man He desires to use. No one can run an errand for God correctly, until he/she has taken time to know Him. It is only those who do know their God that shall be strong and do exploits.

Note God's personal introduction of Himself to Moses in Verse 6...

"I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob..."

What God says of Himself and by Himself is more authentic and more reliable than all the theories that men can propound about Him . . .

(1) "I AM THE GOD of thy father..."

This implies He is the same. He is **'I AM'** – NOT changing, NOT fading, NOT losing grip; ever so fresh though Ancient ... The fathers – Amram, Levi, Jacob, Isaac and Abraham . . . all knew Him as their God. They all grew and waxed old . . . and died . . . and were buried . . . and were forgotten . . . but HE, their God, remained (and still remains) the 'I AM'.

(2) 'I AM THE God' – NOT A God!

"The God of thy father, of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob!"

All you know, talk about, admire, and remember of these great patriarchs, I AM He who made them and brought them up . . . and what I did with them, I am still able to do (even with you and much more). No one else has persisted in living as I do! All come and go, I, God, remain.

What I promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, I am still around to fulfil... **'I am come to continue my covenant with them through you, Moses.'** " What an encounter! What a blessing and an assurance to hear God introduce Himself to an ordinary man. And this is what He still loves to do, even today. . . but ONLY when anyone is alone with Him on the mount.

Have you heard Him introduce Himself to you? What you know of Him, is it by His personal revelation to you or by some mere handed-down-stories? Moses stood tall among men and walked long with Him in such a deep intimacy because of this singular experience. It was the beginning of a forty-year walk with God after this Horeb encounter. You can also step into such an intimate knowledge of Him, even today!

(3) EXAMINE MOSES' RESPONSE AT THIS... (vs. 6)

i. "And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God..."

A sign of brokenness and contrition! He had seen a glory excelling, a blinding light, and heard an overwhelming voice

like the sound of many waters. Each time you gain a deeper knowledge of God, all self-arrogance must bow! Those who hold high their heads, boasting about with open-eyes, have not seen Him nor known Him. Even Paul was blinded to all his credentials when Jesus introduced Himself on the road to Damascus.

☞ *ii. "What is thy name?"*

Moses asked the Lord . . . "Who do I say You are, to men who would ask me (as I carry out this ministry)?" *(vv. 13-15).*

Humble yet bold! Broken yet brave! This is the rare privilege God grants His men on the mount. A humble probe into His person . . . yet without upbraiding. He lovingly answers an honest search for His secrets. **"... I AM THAT I AM!"** No one had ever heard that name. It had been there all along, but none knew it until Moses probed. What a revelation!

God's knowledge is becoming scanty and vague in our own generation because men (and even ministers) no longer press for a deeper knowledge of Him on the mount, alone and away from the crowd.

Look at what Moses pulled out of God's treasury for His own generation (and even ours)! What do you bring (as a contribution) to the church from your mountain encounter with the LORD? Some have brought hymns; others came down with divine patterns for service . . . what will you bring to your own generation?

What else is your challenge in this aspect of our study? Discuss or write down your personal thoughts here. How do you intend to press forward in your knowledge of Jesus?

☞ *iii. Cultivating and understanding a Vision and a Burden* **Ex. 3:7-9, 16-18.**

Whereas many men would like to speak so eloquently to other men for God and about God, He never calls His servants

that way. God first and foremost must chew His burden and pour it into the heart of His messenger. He shows him what is in His own agenda . . . and helps him to cultivate His own mind before He commissions him for a divine assignment.

Before every 'expression', there must be an 'impression'; before the birth, there must be a "conception" that leads to travail; and before a breaking forth, there must be a brooding over . . . And all these only take place on the mount. This is the crucial beginning of every enduring ministry in God's work.

'Burden' begets 'Birthing'! 'Bleeding' begets 'Blessing' and 'Vision' begets 'Mission'!

Look at God pouring His Burden and Vision into Moses' heart for what would become his occupation for the next forty years. Discuss what the burden here is and what the vision here is.

What burden has God laid on your heart and what vision has He given you for life? If any, discuss how it came. What would you say is the difference between this and your former ambition in life?

It is only on the mount with God that burdens are born in the heart of a man. And it is only as he receives an impartation of the burden of God's heart that he receives an inner strength, an inner push to carry on the work even in the face of opposition.

✍ iv. His Commissioning and "Enduement." Ex. 3:10-22; 4:1-17.

☞ *(a) Note the "come now therefore, and I will send thee . . ."*

Commissioning only comes after communing. Unless God has communed with a man and has incubated him, such that His burden has been imparted to his heart, He never commissions him into His work! This is very crucial if you must serve God aright!

Recall again all that God did to Moses before He came to this point of **"come now therefore and I will send thee."**

☞ *(b) Discuss the spirit behind Moses' response in* **vs. 11**, and **4:1, 10-13**.

God chooses the weak to break the strong and the **'nothings'** to discomfit those who are full of self. This same **'feeling'** of inadequacy is common to all the men that God uses... No one can be sufficient for God's task. It is grace that makes ordinary men to do extra-ordinary things for God.

☞ *(c) Highlight various 'assurances' that God gave Moses to counter every weakness of his life.*

Why did Moses ever so need these before facing the challenge of his call? What deep assurance can you claim God gave you at the onset of your stepping into what you are doing presently? Share as personally as you can, what scriptures or revelation of the word, or experiences of divine provision and impartation you had that made you step out for God.

☞ *(d) What is the significance of the various miracles God showed Moses on the mount, as far as his call was concerned?*

Discuss each one, applying them to your own situation. There is so much that God can do for and to a man when He encounters him on the mount. All the men purged and purified for God's greatest purposes on earth have all gone up to the mount both at the commencement of their dealings and then at every turn of the way into their ministries.

It was on the mount that Moses received the commissioning, the command to go; it was there he was told what to do; and it was there he received divine equipping with his rod in order to be able to carry out the assignment. All these can only take place as we climb up to be alone with the LORD on the mount, away from the crowd, above the voice of passion and the murmurs of self will.

Going up to the mount was a regular feature in the life of Moses. It was the same even in our Master's life. It became the regular practice of all who affected their generation.

Let us then proceed to study those who went on the mount alone with the LORD, as a means of receiving guidance for their life and for their labours for God.

3. MOSES ON THE MOUNT.

☞ (a) *As a way of guidance and Ministry.*

Ex. 19:3, 11-25 – Even after receiving a ministry, Moses kept going to meet with the Lord on the mount for guidance. It was his own way of doing ministry, to always be in God's presence. While others withdraw and melt into the crowd . . . engrossed in mundane activities, the man who will impact his generation must draw nigh to the mount, even if it is covered with a thick dark cloud of uncertainty and unfamiliarity.

✍ (b) 'COME UP TO ME IN THE MOUNT AND BE THERE..' Ex. 24:12-18

Men that God turns into His mouthpiece on earth are those He has sat upon for several years on the mount. It is there that detailed instructions for ministry are given them. Teachings and revelations that makes men significant in God's kingdom are not to be picked from the environment. They are found on the mount, when a man goes 'alone with God'.

You must learn this principle of going up to the mount to receive for your life and for all you must do for God in this life.

✍ (c) VOLUME OF IMPORTANT LESSONS . . . LOOK AT Ex. 25 to 32.

See the volume of important lessons and teachings that the man Moses (a man like you and me) received while on the mount. Our generation lacks timely instructions in the knowledge of God because His men are no longer **'men on the mount'** who bring heaven down to earth. Let this challenge your heart!

(d) The pattern shown thee on the Mount . . . Ex. 25:40; Ex. 26:30; Acts 7:44; Heb. 8:5

"The pattern, the fashion which was shown to thee on the mount." It is only on the 'mount' in the presence of God and at the feet of the Master that we see God's right pattern for our lives and ministries. **'Photocopies'** could be good, but is not to be compared with the **"original"**. It does not pay to be satisfied with the 'photocopy' when you can get the 'original' from the mount, alone with God!

(e) Moses went up to the Lord on the mount. Ex. 34:2-4, 29

When Moses came back, down from the mountain, the skin of his face shone. Compare this with the experience of our Lord Jesus Christ on the mount of transfiguration **Matt.17:1-7; 2 Pet.1:16-18; 1Jn 1:1-3; 2Cor.3:16-18.**

Transfiguration and transformation of our lives can only take place on the **"high mountain apart"** with the Lord. How is your inner life? Are you being transformed from one degree of glory to another? Come, you yourself apart!

4. JESUS: ON THE MOUNTAIN, APART AND ALONE, WITH GOD.

Matt. 14:22-23; Matt. 17:1-7; Lk. 6:12-16; Jn. 6:15

There are numerous references to Jesus going up to be with God. Look up each of these and point out what lessons we can learn from this. Identify what He went up to do at each of these times.

5. JESUS: ON THE MOUNT TO TRAIN, RAISE, AND ORDAIN MEN. MK. 3:7-15; MATT 5:1-2.

(a) Time To Ordain Men

When it was time for the Lord Jesus Christ to ordain men to be with Him for training into ministry, He did it, not on the plain or in the valley, but on the mountain. It was in His presence

that they were trained, not in the midst of the multitudes. All the instructions in **Matt. 5** to **Matt. 7** were given not to the crowd but to disciples. ***And these instructions were taught not on the plain but on the mountain.***

The Kingdom lifestyle (the blessed attitudes of the kingdom) is revealed to men only as they get to the mount to be alone with the Lord. And it is there they are ordained for Christian service.

How long has it been since you went to the Lord on the mount? And how often do you go there? Are you a disciple?

✍ (b) Look at the Master's attitude to the multitudes.

Why did He have to climb up the mount and sit down? The crowd normally has no initiative to climb up to the mount to see the Lord. Only disciples can endure such a discipline. Are you a disciple of the Lord?

The secrets of the kingdom are also not revealed to multitudes as it is written concerning disciples . . .

"To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest, it is given in parables." (**Lk. 8:10**).

Therefore Jesus had to leave the crowd to climb up the mount and sit down. It is not something to be done in a hurry. The Master was not in a hurry to teach them and come down. He sat down and took time to teach disciples. It was only when He finished that He came down.

✍ (c) "...His disciples came to Him."

Where? On the mount. Why? Because they were His disciples, committed to Him and separated to His cause.

Matt 24:28 *"And where the carcass is, there the eagles shall be gathered together"*

Matt.6:21 *"And where your treasure is, there will your heart be also".*

Will you also act wisely today? Where is your heart? What takes priority of your attention? What is your treasure? Are you a disciple?

(d) "Then He opened His mouth..."

When? Was it not when His disciples came to Him on the mount? Great mysteries will never flow out of His lips to any man until he has climbed up to sit at His feet on the mount apart and away from the multitudes. You can only hear parables when you remain in the valley, in the midst of the crowd. You can only hear what they hear, if you remain there.

(e) "... And Taught Them Saying..." Matt.5:2

(i) Discuss the necessity of His sayings for our lives. **Matt. 7:24-27**. What He said before as is written in the Scriptures must be given utmost attention; and yet, what He says to us on day-to-day basis from Scriptures, as we climb up the mount to be with Him must become a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

(ii) What must we do with these **'sayings'** on the mount? **Matt 7:24-27**. It is wisdom for us to do, obey, put to practice every one of these sayings of the Master. The Lord calls a man a wise man when he not only listens to the sayings of the Master but is careful enough to obey them. Yet He only takes time to speak to a man who cares to go up to the mount with Him.

Finally ...

It is on the mount (i.e. in His presence) that a personal knowledge of the Lord is obtained; it is only in the presence of God that a vision and a burden for Christian service are imparted and it is there that men are ordained into the ministry.

As we get along in this series of studies, we shall indeed sit down with Him on the Mount and at His feet to examine the sayings of the Master, until we become wise people in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Personal Assessment Questions

☞ 1. Have you ever experienced a deep, life-changing encounter with the Lord as you heard or studied the word of God? Share with us one such experience and the definite change that it brought to your life.

☞ 2. On his way to Mount Moriah, Abraham had to leave his young men and asses on the way in order to go yonder with the Lord . . .

(a) What are your 'young men' and your 'asses' you must leave behind?

(b) Which yonder must you go in order to get on the mount where the Lord has been waiting to bless you?

Can you discuss freely with us?

☞ 3. What challenges come to your heart as you studied Abraham on this mount? Outline them for discussion and personal prayer.

☞ 4. The Lord does not go far with a man who is busy with his own activities and ambition until he deliberately turns aside to God and His purpose as Moses did.

(a) Have you heard His call?

(b) In your walk with God, in what way can you definitely say you have turned aside towards God to hear Him and obey His purpose and call for your life?

☞ 5. No one can run errands for God correctly until he/she has taken time to know Him. Have you personally heard God introduce Himself to you? What you know of Him, is it by

revelation or by mere theory? Share with us your experience in this.

☞ 6 (a) What else challenged you as you studied Moses' encounter with the Lord on the mount? Write down your personal thoughts here.

(b) How do you intend to press forward in your knowledge of Jesus?

☞ 7. It is only on the mount with God that burdens are born in the heart of a man,

(a) What burden has God laid on your heart and what vision has He given you for life?

(b) Discuss with us how this burden came. What is the difference between this and your former ambition in life?

☞ 8. God gave Moses assurance in many ways to counter the weakness of his life.

☞ What deep assurance can you claim God gave you at the onset of your stepping into what you are doing presently? Share with us as much as you can, what Scriptures or revelation of the word, or experiences of divine provision and impartation you had that made you step out for God.

☞ 9. Since the time you stepped out into what you are now doing for God, have you been going up to the mount, into His presence, on a regular basis to receive instructions and guidance for your service in His vineyard? Share your specific experience in this with us.

☞ 10. Only disciples of Jesus Christ have the inner strength to climb up to the mount to meet the Lord. The crowds are ever staying in the valley with no initiative to go up. Are you a disciple? Share with us how you became one and your experience since then.

☞ 11. What else has God taught you as you went through this study?

☞ 12. Do you have any prayer requests?

WHO IS A DISCIPLE?

INTRODUCTION

Matt.5:1-2 *'And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain, and when he was set, his disciples came unto him ...'*

In our last study, we particularly noted that the Sermon on the Mount is meant for disciples, people who have made up their minds to go all the way with Jesus. It is meant for people who desire to grow up into Him in all things; those who desire to reach the fullness of His stature in every way.

Here, we shall focus on WHO A DISCIPLE IS. Every believer is called into discipleship if he/she must partake of the glory God wants to reveal in him/her. The Lord's desire is to see you become a disciple in every sense and then climb up to the mount where eternal principles are freely shared.

A. WHO IS A DISCIPLE?

(1) A disciple is first of all someone who is **BORN AGAIN. Jn. 3:1-7; 1Cor. 2:13-15; Matt. 11:28; Tit.3:5.** Except a man is born of water (the word of God – **Eph. 5:26**) and the Spirit, he has no potential to become like Jesus. No matter the feeding, training or exposure, a lizard cannot grow up to become a crocodile; neither can a goat grow to become a cow.

Even if all the principles of discipleship are applied, a sinner cannot develop by training to become a saint. He has to be born again.

Are you BORN AGAIN? (Jn. 1:12-13). If not, you have no ticket to get on board this DISCIPLE-SHIP.

(2) An Heir In Training

A disciple is an heir of God in-training, under tutors and governors until the time appointed by his Father when he will be matured enough to possess his possessions. (**Gal. 4:1-2**).

(3) One Who Voluntarily Yields His Neck!

Having had rest from sin and the devil, the disciple voluntarily ***yields his neck*** to pick up the yoke of his Master, so as to be taught and nurtured by Him until he (*the disciple*) becomes like Him (*the Master*). **Matt.11:29-30.**

There is a rest that Jesus gives a sinner as He delivers him from sin and Satan. But there is another rest in that Scripture that such a saved soul must find. This comes only through discipleship, by yielding your neck to the yoke of the Master to learn of Him.

What is a yoke?

A yoke is the binding bar between the necks of two oxen. It is the binding force, the binding relationship between the Disciple and the Master. Where the Master goes is where the disciple follows Him. He voluntarily and deliberately follows the Master, learning of Him, having understood that the Master's thoughts towards Him are thoughts of good, not of evil, to give him an expected end . . . as the Scriptures has said.

The Master's lifestyle, His will and His burden become that of the disciple. He or she is committed and separated to the Lord. Any child of God who has voluntarily and deliberately picked up this yoke of relationship, is a disciple.

✍ (4) With A Singular Focus

A disciple is a person with a *SINGULAR FOCUS*, under one master. **1Jn.3:5-10; Matt.6:21-24; Lk. 1:74-75.**

He possesses a single eye; he lives a singular (not a double) life; not an inter-mix of the natural and the spiritual. He is not someone with a mind for Christ and yet, a mind for the world as well. He has a clear testimony of deliverance from sin. Every personal and selfish ambition is laid at the Master's feet. His daily pursuit is Jesus and Him alone. He has burnt behind him the connecting bridge between him and the world. Are you such a disciple?

✍ (5) A Humble Learner

A disciple is a learner who has voluntarily conceded the pedagogical authority (a right for the Master to teach him because he accepts HIM as superior to himself in every way) to the Teacher. **Jn.6:67-69; Job. 13:15.** He is a person who has come to accept the wisdom of the teacher as the only one good for his own life. He is not afraid of anything, knowing that the Teacher knows what He is doing. He is willing to stay through the process.

He sees everything permitted to happen to his life as a divine apparatus to get him conformed to the image of his Master whom he loves and highly esteems. **Rom. 8:28-29.** When you suspect the Master and fearfully follow Him with that suspicion, it shows you are not yet a disciple.

✍ (6) A disciple is NOT choosy.

He does not mind whatever means the master uses to hammer him into the desired shape. The Lord could use his wife, her husband, housemaids, servants, friends, situations and circumstances and even the devil, etc. to sharpen a disciple's life. **Rom 8:28, 37-39; Job.19:25-27; 2Cor. 4:16-17;**

Eccl 3:11a.

He accepts joyfully the Master's decision as the best, in making him become all that the Lord designs him to be. He believes in the love of the Master. He knows and is persuaded that all things work together for good to those who love God.

(7) A disciple loves his Master.

He does not see the Master's authority and moulding hand over him as oppression. He is loyal, submissive and committed to Him. He is zealous for his Master's honour and interest at all cost.

Study David's men	**in 1Chron. 11:15-19.**
Peter and John	**in Acts 4:19-20; 5:32-42.**
Paul	**in Acts 20:22-24; 21:10-14.**
Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego	**in Dan 3:14-21.**

CONCLUSION

God's eternal purpose for saving any soul is to make that person to become CONFORMED to the image of His Son Jesus Christ. His will is that Christ will not be the only Son of God but the first born among many brethren. For that conformity to be achieved in any life, he must be discipled. He must be separated from sin, his old lifestyle and life plans; to the Lord and His purpose. It is only then that a Christian can become fully available to be taught and formed.

Each of the disciples of Jesus had to be separated to God this way, ever before He could open His mouth to teach them the mysteries of the kingdom.

The Lord does not reveal his secrets to the crowd or to the truant, He reveals His mysteries to the disciples. To the disciples, He explains the parables for their understanding

What is popularly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount, which we are about to study in **Matt. 5, 6, and 7** was spoken and taught to disciples. There is need for you also to have such an intimate relationship and deep commitment to the Lord, if His word would not always appear to you in parables. He seeks to make you the best that you can ever be.

☞ 1. From this study, would you consider yourself a disciple indeed?

☞ 2. If so, discuss why you feel so. When did you take up the yoke of discipleship on yourself?

☞ 3. In what ways have you experienced His dealings on your life as a disciple?

CHAPTER 3

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT...

INTRODUCTION

In the past studies on this series, we discovered that only disciples have access to the mysteries of the kingdom. People that have come up to Jesus on the **'mount'**, who have voluntarily taken upon themselves His yoke of discipleship are the ones who can gain insights into these sayings. As we look into the principles of the kingdom life, we trust that the Holy Spirit will instruct us and affect our lives such that we ourselves could be said to be wise men, who built their houses, their destinies on the Rock.

In this particular study, we shall look intently into what Jesus opened His mouth to say to His disciples; the things we must do to make ourselves **'Blessed'** and **'Inheritors of the kingdom.'** We must note here right away that unless we act on these sayings and bring them to bear on our lives and character, they will not benefit us. We will only show ourselves to be the **'fools'** who built their lives on sand, without any solid foundation for the days ahead (**Matt.7:24-27**)

MAIN TEXT: Matt. 5:1-3

1. Look at **Matt.5:3** in several Bible versions. What does it mean to be 'poor in spirit?'

KJV — 'Blessed are the poor in spirit...'

GNB — 'Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor . . . . .'

LIVING BIBLE — 'Humble men are very fortunate

AMPLIFIED — 'Blessed – happy, to be envied, and spiritually prosperous (that is, with life-joy and satisfaction in God's favor and salvation, regardless of their outward conditions) – are the poor in spirit (the humble, rating themselves insignificant) ...'

PHILIPS MODERN ENG — 'How happy are those who know their need for God...'

To be poor in spirit therefore means to know that you are spiritually poor . . . to be humble, to rate yourself insignificant, and to know your need for God.

✍ 2. What does it mean to 'know' that you are spiritually poor? Prov.16:18-19; Isa. 66:2; Rom.12:3; Phil 2:3.

There is a **'knowing'** of your spiritual poverty that you must have before the kingdom of heaven will be yours. It is those who **'know'** and not just those who **'show'** that they are spiritually poor, that are blessed. It is of the heart. It means being 'not proud; not of a haughty spirit; one who trembles at God's word; one who does not think of himself more highly than he ought to think; someone with a lowly mind.'

Are you one? It means having experienced the actual nothingness of your life. Have you really experienced such? If not, pray for one. It is that **'knowing'** of the poverty of your life that will fling the door of the kingdom of heaven open to you.

✍ 3. Discuss the essence of humility in walking with God Jas. 4:6, 1Pet. 5:5-6, Matt.23:12, Acts.12:20-23, Dan 4:29-37, Ps. 101:5, Ps.136:6.

Proud men are unfortunate. Instead of receiving assistance from God, God resists them. He **'...sets Himself against those who are proud;'** (**1Pet. 5:5LB**) to pull them down. You can see what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. Whenever God sees a

proud person, He sees him as an enemy whom He must fight. He does not walk with the proud or the scornful. If you desire God to walk with you, you must humble yourself. How are your heart and your looks? Are you humble? Is God always attracted to your life or He knows you '... **afar off**'?

✍ 4. 'God giveth grace to the humble.'

Discuss the implication of this in our day-to-day walk with God. **Heb. 4:16; 1Tim. 2:1; Tit. 2:11-12; 1Cor. 15:10; 2Cor. 6:1-2; 2Cor.12:7-10; 2Chr. 16:9.**

(a) What is **'grace'** that God gives to a man?

(b) What does Grace do for a man?

Grace is the divine enablement (assistance) given to a person by God, to enable him do what otherwise he could not do by himself. It is a help granted a man in his time of need. It TEACHES us and ENABLES us to say **'no'** to sin and **'yes'** to God and godliness.

But grace is only given to the humble. Those who are full of themselves and strong in themselves are turned away empty. Are you humble?

✍ 5. '...for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Matt.5:3.

(a) What does that mean? The kingdom of heaven is at the disposal of those who know they are spiritually poor. What a blessing!

(b) Discuss the privileges of the kingdom of heaven.

Matt.6:33; Matt.11:11; Lk.7:28; Lk.18:29-30; Ps.91:1-16; Lk.10:19; Lk.9:1-2; 2Cor. 5:18.

The privilege to handle and preach the gospel (the word of God), God's authority to back up the preaching of the gospel, and God's divine provision and protection, are all kingdom privileges. But all these supplies are only given to those who are poor in spirit. They are not ordinarily experienced by just

any kind of person. Are you poor in spirit? To what extent have you experienced these privileges? Why have you been so limited in experiencing such privileges?

✍ 6. Further Implications

It is significant that **Matt. 5:3** was the first kingdom principle that Jesus began to teach in this Sermon on the Mount. What could this imply on our lives as children of the kingdom? **Matt. 18:1-4.**

It is important for you to understand that knowing that you are spiritually poor and that you have need of God is the gateway into entering into the abundance of God's provision, protection, and manifestation of divine life in you. Whatever your situation is at any point in time, whether things seem good or otherwise, what will attract God and His kingdom to your life is this constant understanding. It is on this that all the other attitudes of the kingdom are hinged. It must be given priority until it becomes your personal lifestyle.

✍ 7. Examples of people who exhibited this kingdom principle as their lifestyle.

☞ *(a) JESUS* — **Jn 5:19; Phil 2:5-11; Heb 5:7-9; Matt. 28:18.**

Though He is God, He humbled Himself and became a man. And having left His glory to become a man, He lived with this understanding of His need of God: He was poor in spirit. He did nothing of His own accord. He depended on God all through. No wonder the whole kingdom of heaven was always available at His disposal to back Him up.

Are you wise in your own eyes? How do you approach situations in life?

☞ *(b) GIDEON* — **Judg. 6:14-16; Judg. 7:20-22**

Gideon knew his limit. He was spiritually poor. He was humble. He knew his need of God. Once God saw this quality,

He was attracted to Gideon's life to assist him. Heavens fought for him in the battle against the Midianites and he overcame.

☞ (c) JOSEPH — **Gen 41:15-16**

Joseph, like Jesus, knew that he could of his own self do nothing, acknowledged this before Pharaoh and God assisted him and gave him divine understanding.

☞ (d.) DANIEL — **Dan 2:14-23, 27-30, 46-49.**

☞ (e.) SOLOMON — **1Kg. 3:5-13**

Solomon knew his need of God. Though a king (a rich king born by a godly father David), yet he was humble. He knew he was spiritually poor and he made his request on that basis. God was pleased with him and came to his help and gave him wisdom together with all other things he did not ask for. That was grace.

Do you depend on your ability to face challenges? Are you tempted by your intellectual ability and physical strength, making you not to look up to God again? Proud men are unfortunate: God will resist them!

CONCLUSION

We have considered this premier condition of receiving and possessing anything from God: humility. Knowing and acknowledging poverty in our self ability, realizing our bankruptcy and our desperate need of God's help, is the necessary precondition for understanding and receiving the blessings of the kingdom.

Jesus said, "Whosoever hears this saying of mine and does it, is wise." This principle must become our lives' attitude, if we must walk with God and advance in the things of the Spirit.

"If thou wouldst have the dear Saviour from heaven, walk by thy side from the morn to the even, there is a rule that each day you must follow . . .

HUMBLE THYSELF TO WALK WITH GOD!"

Personal Assessment Questions

☞ 1. Being poor in spirit is a necessary precondition for inheriting the kingdom of heaven. Can you truly say you are poor in spirit? How do you know it?

☞ 2. In what areas and aspect or your life have you sensed the manifestation of pride? In which ways does it come in? What effect has this pride had on your progress in your personal walk with God? Share definite experiences you have in this with us.

☞ 3. The Lord gives 'grace' to the humble. Share with us:

(a) The sins that grace has enabled you to overcome.

(b) The difficult situations and tasks that the grace of God enabled you to achieve in your walk with the Lord.

☞ 4. (a) Is the kingdom of heaven really yours?

(b) What definite support have you personally received from the kingdom of heaven?

(c) What definite supply have you also received in the same way? To what extent have you experienced the privileges of the kingdom of heaven?

☞ 5. What personal steps have you resolved to take after going through this study to be and to remain poor and humble in spirit?

CHAPTER 4

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN...

INTRODUCTION

It is amazing that **'mourning'** is part of the blessed attitudes of the kingdom of God. It is an attitude which must be cultivated by every believer who desires to follow Jesus and learn of Him. Every disciple of today who desires to be useful in the hands of God tomorrow must develop this attitude of life. It forms part of the life bedrock of a man of God.

We shall therefore proceed to study this kingdom lifestyle taught by the Lord Jesus Christ.

MAIN TEXT: Matt.5:4; Lk. 6:21

1. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO MOURN?

It means 'to express sorrow over the loss of something or somebody'.

ECCL 7:2-6, 1THESS 4:13-14; JOEL 2:12-13, 15-17; PS.30:5; 2COR.7:10-11

From these Scriptures, what advantages are there in mourning? How should a believer mourn? Mourning touches the heart. It makes the heart better. It is the beginning of every genuine repentance. ***Confession of sin not preceded by mourning for sin will not bring genuine repentance.***

For a believer, mourning must achieve God's purpose. Mourning for selfish reasons causes death.

2. UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES ARE CHRISTIANS PARTICULARLY EXPECTED TO MOURN?

(A) For sin in penitence.

Joel 2:12-13; Ezra 10:6; Ps.38:1-8; 2Cor 7:9-10; 1Kg. 21:27

Sin makes one to come short of the glory of God. It brings disgrace (reproach) and a loss of God's glory. Mourning for sin comes from sorrow of heart, as a sign of regret for what you have done wrong. It is a necessary sign and an initial step of genuine repentance needed for the restoration of lost glory.

(b) Those who mourn in Zion because of the loss of God's glory among His people.

It involves intercession for the restoration of the lost glory.

Neh. 1:4; Dan. 9:2-8; Dan. 10:2; Lam.2:11-12; Ezek. 9:3-5; Ezek. 22:29-30; Isa. 62:1.

The Lord is looking for men and women among His people who are concerned and burdened about the situation of His people; someone who would take it upon himself or herself to intercede for the Body of Christ for the restoration of God's glory among His people. Will you be that someone? God shares His joy and comfort with those who bear the burden of His heart. Will you make yourself available?

(c) Mourning for souls to be saved.

Ps.126:5-6; 1Sam. 15:35; Sam. 16:1; Rom.9:1-3; Rom.10:1.

Look at the example of Jesus Christ in **Lk. 19:10.** Seeking the lost involves sorrowing (**Lk.2:48**). When the helpless and hopeless condition of the lost touches your heart, it results in mourning and intercession. It also results in an inner push to preach the gospel to the lost.

(d) Mourning because of persecution and worldly conflict

Jn. 16:20-21; Lk.6:21-22; 2Cor.1:4-5; Ps. 35:5

Instead of sorrowing, what does God command us to do when we are being persecuted?

Matt.5:11-12; 2Cor.4:16-17; Acts 5:40-41.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad when persecuted because there is a reward from God that accompanies every persecution. Though you mourn now, you are blessed because surely you will laugh.

3. SIGNS OF MOURNING

Mourning is an attitude that originates from the heart and shows outwardly.

✍ (A) **WEEPING – Neh. 1:4; 2:1-2; Joel.2:12**

✍ (b) **PRAYING WITH (OR WITHOUT) FASTING – Dan.9:3; Dan.10:2-3**

✍ (c) **NEGLECT OF APPEARANCE — 2 Sam.19:24; Dan. 10:3**

An outward show of mourning that does not originate from the heart is not acceptable to God, and it will not achieve God's purpose. Watch out! (**MATT. 6:5,16**).

4. THE BLESSEDNESS OF MOURNING.

"...they shall be comforted." (**MATT. 5:4**)

Discover the comfort in the following cases of mourning.

✍ (A) **MOURNING FOR SIN.**

2COR.7:7-10; 1KG.21:20-29; EZRA. 10:1-4; 10-12

There was genuine repentance leading to forgiveness.

✍ (b) **MOURNING FOR THE SAKE OF ZION.**

Isa. 61:3, Neh.1:2-4, Neh.6:15-16; Rev.21:3-4; Lk. 2:21-32, 36-38.

What a comfort of heart Nehemiah experienced after the wall of Jerusalem was re-built. Only those who mourned and bore the burden of the broken-down wall of Jerusalem experienced that consolation.

Simeon and the widow Anna mourned for Zion; they were praying and waiting for Jesus Christ, the consolation of Israel, and looking for redemption of Jerusalem. And they were comforted with the birth of Jesus. Comfort is only meant for those who mourn.

✍ (c) Mourning for souls to be saved.

Ps.126:5-6; Lk.15:4-6

The joy of seeing souls saved brings great comfort to the heart, especially souls whose burden you have borne and to whom you have preached. Such joy can also be yours as you bear burdens for the lost, praying for them to be saved and seeking to win them for Christ.

✍ (d) Mourning because of persecution

Matt. 5:11-12; 2Cor.1:4-5; 2Cor.4:16-17; Heb.12:2.

Discover the 'blessing', 'the great reward', the comfort, the 'eternal weight of glory' and 'the joy' that awaits every Christian who suffers and endures persecution for Christ's sake. It is a great privilege that must not be wasted.

✍ (e) The general blessedness in mourning

Eccl. 7:2-6; Ps. 30:5

Mourning is better than mirth; sorrow is better than laughter. It makes the heart better. It is painful at the time, yet there is comfort for those who mourn.

Have you ever mourned genuinely before God for the sins you commit: sins of commission and omission? Forgiveness is only sweet and is only meant for a person who has known the sorrow of repentance. Comfort is actually comforting when

you have gone through a mental and emotional stress because of your righteous concern for the glory of God.

Have you been as concerned for God's house as to mourn for a derailing soul, or a backsliding church?

"Blessed are those who mourn
. . . they shall be comforted."

Personal Assessment Questions

☞ *1. What sin have you ever mourned for in your life? Share clearly with us your personal experience in this. What brought the conviction and then the comfort? What nagging besetting habit do you still have that causes you ceaseless tears?*

☞ *2. What burdens you particularly on a regular basis that you would say you do mourn for? Is there any comfort as yet?*

☞ *3. How many members of your family (your personal family or in your father's house) are saved? How many remain yet to be saved? Discuss with us what you are doing about this.*

CHAPTER 5

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK . . .

INTRODUCTION

In continuation of our studies on our Lord's teaching on the principles of the Kingdom Lifestyle, we have been looking into the Sermon on the Mount. We understand that these instructions from our Lord's mouth are to become our lifestyle and daily attitude in life as we go through this present world. They are not for mere head knowledge.

In this particular study, we shall look up to the Lord again for further illumination on these principles. Our fervent prayer is that we will be the wise ones who hear these sayings of the Master and do them, building our house (our lives, destiny, ministry, family, etc.) on the rock.

Open your heart to the Holy Spirit and get ready for practical action on these sayings of the Master no matter what it may cost your life. You will be blessed by doing so.

MAIN TEXT: Matt 5:5

1. WHAT IS MEEKNESS?

What does it entail for us in practical life?

Matt.5:5; Phil. 2:2-3; Matt. 11:29; Lk. 6:29; 1Pet. 2:21-23.

Look at **Matt. 5:5** in different Bible versions:

KJV: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

NAV: "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit..."

NIV: "Blessed are the meek..."

Beck's: "Happy are those who are gentle, they will own the land."

William's: "Blessed are the lowly in mind, for they will possess the land."

NEB: "How blessed are those of a gentle spirit for they shall have the earth for their possession."

LB: "The meek and lowly are fortunate, for the whole wide world belongs to them."

GNB: "Happy are the meek, they will receive what God has promised."

Philips: "How happy are those who claim nothing, for the whole earth will belong to them."

Therefore, meekness is often defined as gentleness, lowliness of mind, not self-willed, easily entreated, claiming nothing, not defending self but trusting God to fight for him; no self assertion, no resistance or retaliation, no agitation and no fear of losing out even though going through oppression, criticism and blackmail. Meekness manifests in quietness of spirit and inner liberty from agitation.

Lk. 6:29 gives us a practical definition of meekness. Even if someone uses violence to rob you of your right, meekness will make you not to fight for yourself but trust God to fight on your behalf. A man who is not violent, one who does not fight for his right is the one that will inherit the earth. What a seeming contradiction. Yet that is the wisdom of God. That is the power of meekness.

2. EXAMPLES OF MEN WHO DEMONSTRATED MEEKNESS IN THE BIBLE.

(A) JESUS CHRIST, OUR MODEL:

Matt.11:29-30; Isa. 53:7; 1Pet.2:23; Matt.26:52-54.

Jesus Christ was maltreated . . . the just for the unjust. He was reviled, yet He did not revile back; not because He had no power to defend Himself but because He trusted God to fight for Him. That is meekness.

What is your attitude when you are insulted: insulted by your wife, husband, subordinate etc.? A meek man or woman takes insults patiently, trusting and allowing God to fight his or her battles.

✍ (b) MOSES. Num. 12: 1-13

Explore this situation in which Moses demonstrated meekness, quiet commitment, faithfulness, and selflessness despite being misunderstood and scandalised by his older siblings. Moses could have reacted against Miriam and Aaron in many ways, using his authority as a servant of God and a leader over the congregation. He could have prayed to God to strike them. But he did not utter a word. It was God that came down to defend him. And when God punished Miriam, Moses still prayed to God to heal her. That is meekness.

When you are persecuted, falsely accused or even scandalised by subordinates, how do you take it? Do you pray for fire to come down and consume those who persecute you or hinder your progress as James and John wanted to do in **Lk.9:51-56?** Do you delight in taking revenge, whether openly or by subtle covered means?

Read ***Rom. 12:19-21.*** Many times we have lost our battles because we fought for ourselves. God defends only those who refuse to defend themselves.

✍ (c) DAVID. 2Sam.16:5-13

Discover the insult and curses of Shimei, a subordinate, on David. David had power and men to fight and defend him and take vengeance. But look at his decision in this situation. He

trusted God to fight for him. And God did (2Sam.19:18-23). What lesson does that teach you?

✍ (d) JEREMIAH. Jer.26:8-15

✍ (E) STEPHEN. Acts 7:57-60.

Stephen did not keep quiet as he was being stoned but he did not curse those persecuting him. He rather prayed for them. Would you have done the same?

3. IN WHAT WAYS IS MEEKNESS ESSENTIAL IN OUR WALK WITH THE LORD?

✍ **(A) IN HEARING AND LEARNING FROM THE LORD AND HIS WORD. Jas.1:21; Ps.25:9; Prov.3:5-6**

A meek person is fortunate because God will guide him. Difficulty in knowing God's will is associated with a lack of meekness, strong will and argumentative attitudes. A meek man can easily take instructions without resistance or unnecessary argument. He can easily adapt. He is flexible. For the word of God to be effective and produce results in your life, beloved, you need meekness.

✍ **(b) IN TEACHING AND BRINGING OTHERS UP FOR THE LORD. 2Tim.2:23-26; Tit.3:2; Gal.6:1.**

Without meekness, you may win an argument but lose a soul in the process. Many people close doors of ministry against themselves and shut out the hearts of men against their service, due to arrogance, self defence and rigidity. Meekness is the key in restoring backsliders.

✍ **(c.) IN RELATING WITH OTHERS WHETHER BELIEVERS OR UNBELIEVERS. Matt.5:39; Jas.4:7; Rom.12:18-21; Phil.2:3-5.**

Realizing that we are whatever we are purely by the grace of God, we become meek in dealing with other men who could easily have received the same grace as we have. As the Christ,

Jesus was God in every sense; but once he became a man, he humbled himself even in relating with other men.

In dealing with the devil however, we can be violent and aggressive; but in relating with men, we must be meek.

4. HOW TO CULTIVATE AND GROW IN MEEKNESS

Zeph.2:3; Phil.2:2-5; Col.3:5-10; Gal.5:22-26; Prov.3:4-6; Matt.11:29.

Meekness is an attribute of Christ and is part of the fruit of the Spirit. It can be learnt; it can be cultivated as we daily yield our lives to Christ's teaching and leading. But except the flesh is crucified and crushed, there is no way for the carnal man (the self-independent, self-esteemed, self-seeking, self-promoting) to be meek.

5. 'BLESSED ARE THE MEEK...'

What are the blessings of the Meek? **Matt. 5:5**

(a) *'...for they shall inherit the earth.'* (KJV)

'... for they shall possess the land.' (William's)

'... for the whole wide world belongs to them.' (LB)

'... For they will receive what God has promised.' (GNB)

What does it mean to inherit the earth? Discuss practical ways in which the meek shall inherit the earth.

2Cor.6:10; Jn.12:32; Phil.2:5-11.

The Lord Jesus was reviled but He did not revile back. He was crucified but did nothing to defend Himself. He was meek. Therefore God exalted Him highly and He became Lord even over those that killed Him. The whole world became His.

Again, it was as He allowed Himself to be lifted up on the cross and crucified that His life began to attract all men into the

kingdom. His life is affecting the whole world to this day.

(b) The meek shall eat and be satisfied; he shall have abundance of peace. **Ps.22:26**(old KJV); **Ps. 37:11, 37**

(c) The Lord will lift up the meek and grant him salvation (deliverance). **Ps.147:6 (old KJV) Ps. 149:4 (old KJV); Ps.76:8-9.** The Lord fights his battles.

(d) The Lord shall guide the meek and teach him His ways. **Ps.25:9.**

6. EXAMPLES OF MEEK MEN WHO INHERITED WHAT GOD PROMISED; MEN WHO GOT THE EARTH FOR THEIR POSSESSION.

(A) Joseph. Gen 37; Gen.39; Gen.41:38-44; Gen.45:1-8

Joseph was severely persecuted by his brothers because of his dreams but he bore it patiently. He was framed by his Egyptian mistress and jailed; yet he did not rise up to defend himself and claim his right. He waited on God to fight for him. In all these, he sought no way to revenge. And in the end, he inherited the land; he inherited what God had promised.

Dare to trust God and stop struggling to fight your battles by yourself, trying to claim your right. You too will inherit what God has promised.

(b) Mordecai. Esth.3:2-6; Esth. 6:1-13; Esth.7:7-10

Through Mordecai, a coup plot against King Ahasuerus was aborted but no one immediately remembered to reward him. Yet he did not rise up to claim his right. Instead of a good reward, a plot was made by Haman to hang Mordecai for refusing to bow to him (Haman) in obedience to the law of his God. But when God arose to fight for him, his enemies became his footstool and he was honoured. He received what God has promised to those who obey Him.

CONCLUSION

If you leave all vengeance and your defence to the Lord; if you walk with Him in meekness, He will fight for you and cause even your enemies to be at peace with you.

Of a truth, 'Blessed are the meek...' Are you meek? Or have you remained strong in yourself, always pressing your opinion? Fighting and struggling to maintain your "own" name and inheritance will not help you. That is the surest way of losing the battle and going home empty handed. But those who are lowly, claiming nothing, shall possess the earth and inherit what God has promised.

Personal Assessment Questions

☞ *1. From the study on "Blessed are the meek..." Share with us what struck you most in your understanding of what meekness means. What aspect of your life does it directly affect? What steps have you taken (ever since) to pursue meekness as a lifestyle?*

☞ *2. From the various examples of men who the Scriptures describe as meek, what is your own vivid experience in "letting God fight for you?"*
On which occasion have you applied these principles as yet?

☞ *3. Meekness is defined also as a gentle, easily persuaded heart. It is not strong willed; God reveals His secrets much more to such a man. What would be a personal assessment of yourself when it comes to "insisting on one's way or opinion," defending one's self and proving a point to convince the other person?*

☞ *Could you substantiate your assessment with some concrete practical instances?*

CHAPTER 6

THEY WHO DO HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS . . .

INTRODUCTION

This study is part of the blessed attitudes of the kingdom preached in the sermon by Our Lord Jesus Christ to His followers on the mount.

We discover that the principles in this sermon are important bedrocks for a strong and lasting relationship with Jesus. They are the right attitudes we must maintain before God in this life if we must receive any blessing from His presence.

They are the blessed attitudes. Any other attitude apart from these may actually push us out of God's presence. Hence the need to cry to God until these things are engrafted upon our very hearts and they become our daily experience.

Please be reminded that as you hear these sayings of the Master, you have automatically started building your house (your life), whether you obey them or not. However, only those who hear and obey will be able to stand the trials, the winds, storms, and the rains that will inevitably come because of the word.

Therefore be sober and pray that God will grant you revelation of His word with the grace to obey.

MAIN TEXT: Matt.5: 6

1. "BLESSED ARE THEY WHO DO HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS ..." (Matt.5:6).

Let us read **Matt.5:6** from various versions.

NKJV: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall Be filled."

GNB: "Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires; God will satisfy them full."

LB: "Happy are those who long to be just and good, for they shall be completely satisfied."

NEB: "How blessed are those who hunger and thirst to see right prevail, how they shall be satisfied."

JB: "Happy are those who hunger and thirst for what is right. They shall be satisfied."

Beck: "Happy are those who hunger and thirst to be righteous, they will be satisfied."

AMP: "Blessed and fortunate and happy and spiritually prosperous (in that state in which the born-again child of God enjoys His favour and salvation) are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (uprightness and right stand- ing with God), for they shall be completely satisfied."

✍ (A) WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUNGRY AND THIRSTY?

Ps.42:1-2; Ps.63:1; Ps.107:5, 6, 9; Prov.27:7.

It means to have a strong desire, a deep yearning, and a keen appetite for something; it is a strong craving for something above all else.

To be hungry and thirsty at the same time is such a strong and dangerous condition of need that may lead to fainting if nothing is done to assuage them. Such a situation makes one to cry out for help for that need to be met.

✍ (b) What does it mean to hunger and thirst after righteousness?

See the different versions of **Matt.5:6.**

It means to have the greatest desire to do what God requires; longing and panting for righteousness out of a need or an emptiness within. It means to long to be just and good; to hunger and thirst to see right prevail.

Examine your heart. What is the greatest desire of your heart? **1Tim.6:9; Gal.6:12; Mk.9:35; 1Cor.14:1.** Do you long to be just and good? Is it your greatest desire to do what God requires, or is it just one of your desires?

✍ (c) How can one become hungry and thirsty for righteousness?

☞ *(i) Humble yourself.*

Matt.5:3; Matt.18:3; 1Pet.2:2; 2Kg.3:16, 17.

One important character trait of a child is the frequency of hunger more than that of an adult. Have you grown so much that you no longer need any more nourishment from the presence of God? The Lord's greatest desire for us is that we SHOULD be with Him, learning of Him **(Mk.3:14).** That is the one thing He said is needful **(Lk.10:42).** Humble yourself that the hunger of His presence may fill your heart.

☞ *(ii) Ask God for help to make you hungry by showing you your true spiritual condition, how you measure on the scale of His righteousness.*

Deut. 8:3; Isa. 6:1-6; Heb. 12:11.

God caused Israel to hunger in the wilderness. He can make you hungry. He showed Isaiah a vision of His glory and holiness. When Isaiah drew near God and saw His holiness compared with his own holiness, he saw his personal poverty. That created a deep desire to be holy in his heart and he cried out. That can be your experience too.

☞ *(iii) Understand God's goal for your life compared with your present achievement.*

When you see what God can accomplish through your life and you see what you are presently allowing Him to do; the difference will create a hunger for more. Pray for God to reveal this to you. Your heart will cry out to God for help in order to be able to satisfy His righteous demands. **Rom.8:29; 1Cor.2:9.**

✍ (d) Why must we pursue righteousness?

☞ *(i) Righteousness is an important part of the kingdom lifestyle. It is an attitude of the kingdom.*

Rom. 14:17; 1Jn. 3:6-10; 1 Pet.2:24.

Please note that this is the basic reason why Jesus suffered and died on the cross for us. Righteousness is the way by which we know who is a child of God and who is not. When this is not constantly manifesting in your life, you are a loss rather than a gain to the kingdom of God. Is your life consistently righteous, or is often interspersed with periods of unrighteousness?

☞ *(ii) Righteousness is needed for an effective personal communion and walk with God.*

Ps.34:17, 19; Ps 66:18; 1Jn 3:21-22; Ps.37:23-25; Ps.146:8; Prov.11:4; Prov.28:1; Heb. 5:7-8.

The Lord delights in answering the prayer of a righteous man. He guides him, delivers him, and provides for him. He is a helper to those who walk uprightly. Is your heart right with God? Sin in the heart of an unrighteous man blocks God from answering his prayer.

☞ *(iii) Righteousness exalts.*

Righteousness exalts a man. It brings him honour. Even if it does not exalt him immediately, it surely will eventually. And sin brings disgrace also: whether immediately or delayed. **Prov. 14:32-34.**

☞ *(iv) Righteousness causes fruitfulness, even in old age, without struggling.* **Ps.92:12-14; Ps.1:1-3.**

Divine life flows into and through a life that is righteous without any hindrance. It is the life flowing from the Tree trunk that produces fruit in the branch. When last did the Lord eat the fruit of righteousness out of your life?

☞ *(v) It leads to open heavens and open doors in ministry.*

Prov. 15:19; Matt.3:13-17.

When Jesus humbled Himself in obedience to God in order to fulfil all righteousness, the heavens were opened unto Him. His greatest desire was to do what God desired of Him at that point in time. He did it and God responded to Him.

☞ *(vi) Righteousness is essential in spiritual warfare.*

Eph.6:14; Acts 19:13-16; Prov. 28:1; 2Cor.6:7; 2Cor.10:4-6.

Even the devil knows who is righteous and who is not, and he knows how to handle them in warfare. It is righteousness in the heart that makes us bold to face the devil.

✍ (E.) WHAT KIND OF RIGHTEOUSNESS MUST WE PURSUE?

Matt.5:6, 20.

☞ *(i) Not that of the Pharisees.*

Discover and describe the righteousness of the Pharisees in these Scriptures as compared with that which God wants us to pursue. **Matt.6:1-6; Matt.23:1-8 14-28; Rom 10:1-4.** God abhors the righteousness that says but does not do.

☞ *(ii) It is the righteousness of God . . .*

Rom. 3: 21-26; Rom. 6: 12-16; Tit. 2:11-12; 1Jn. 3: 10; Jas 2:21-26.

The righteousness of God imputed to us by faith when we receive Christ at the new birth enables and leads us to practice righteousness. To stop at imputed righteousness will bring us calamity. We must, by grace, allow the imputed righteousness

to bear the fruit of righteousness in our lives (**Phil.1:11**). Not only that, we must hunger and thirst for it until our lives are filled... with righteousness.

2. WHAT IS THE BLESSEDNESS OF BEING HUNGRY AND THIRSTY FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS?

☞ *(a) The Lord Himself will hear you and satisfy your soul.* **Isa.41:17-18; Ps.107:9.**

☞ *(b) Your life will be filled with the fruit of righteousness.* **Phil.1:10-11; Heb.12:11.**

☞ *(c) You will experience the peace of God.* **Isa.32:17.**

☞ *(d) All other things that you need shall be added unto you.* **Matt.6:31-33.**

Knowing this, what must be our singular pursuit and greatest desire in life? **Matt.5:6(GNB).**

CONCLUSION

When your greatest desire is to do what God wants you to do; and to see righteousness prevail in your life, your family and environment, the Lord says He will fill and satisfy you with righteousness. But you must first of all strongly desire it above all else. You must pursue righteousness and develop a keen appetite for it. Only then, will your life be filled with righteousness and the fruit thereof.

The dryness and fruitlessness of our lives is usually due to the pseudo-satisfaction we have in our own righteousness.

Examine your heart now. What is your greatest desire in life even as of now? What are you running after? What is the pursuit of your life?

"Whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock..."

May you not be a fool at the end, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Personal Assessment Questions

☞ 1. What hindrances have you experienced in obeying God's will and God's word?

Discuss particular experiences you have had about these with us

☞ 2. Have you ever experienced periods of spiritual dryness in your life? If 'Yes':

☞ (a) When and for how long did each last? What caused each of the periods?

☞ (b) How did you handle each? What were the lessons you learnt from those experiences?

☞ 3. Satan sometimes tempts us in hard situations in order for us to compromise the righteous demands of God upon our lives whether at work, at home, in business, in school, or in our relationship with others.

☞ (a) Share with us one such experience you had, and state whether it was difficult for you to stand.

☞ (b) How did you handle it?

☞ 4.(a) Discuss with us a particular experience you had of obedience to God's instructions for your life.

☞ (b) What was the result of your obedience? What blessedness did you experience?

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL . . .

INTRODUCTION

In continuation of our study on the kingdom lifestyle, we shall study yet another blessed attitude of the kingdom of God: Blessed are the merciful . . . The Sermon on the Mount presents to us a bunch of coded secrets that become be-attitudes when imbibed, which can open the unlimited heavenly treasures of life to an obedient disciple.

Please pray that God will teach you to be merciful. Be reminded again, that unless you act on these sayings of the Master, you will only be building your life on sand. It is only in acting on them that you will truly be blessed.

1. WHAT DOES THE WORD 'MERCY' MEAN?

(A)i. The Lexicon Webster Dictionary defines it thus:

- *Benevolence, mildness or tenderness of heart.*
- *A disposition that tempers justice and leads either to pardon or to a lighter punishment than the law or justice warrants.*
- *An act or exercise of benevolence or favour.*

ii. Mercy is not earned by the recipient. (Rom 9:15-16).

If it is earned, then it is by merit; and not by mercy. Mercy is not worked for . . . so, Mercy cannot be claimed by right.

✍ **(b) Discover the association of mercy with God in the following Scriptures.**

Ps.103:8; Joel 2:13; 2 Cor.1:3; Dan. 9:9.

— God is merciful (full of mercy); there is no space in Him for wickedness.

— Mercy is God's own nature: It belongs to Him. It is part of Him. That is what He delights in doing. To be merciful is His hobby; it is His habit; it is His lifestyle.

— God is the Father of mercies; He is the Producer, the Origin and Originator of mercies.

2. '...BE MERCIFUL, JUST AS YOUR FATHER ALSO IS MERCIFUL.' LK.6:36.

How is our Father merciful? What are the characteristics and attributes of God's mercy? **Ps. 103:8-14; Lk 6:32-37.**

ATTRIBUTES OF A MERCIFUL LIFE

✍ **(a) A merciful person is GRACIOUS. Ps. 103:8**

(i) What does that mean? **Micah 7:18.**

(ii) Discuss the practical implications of being gracious.

Matt.5:43-45; Lk.6:35-37; Lam. 3:22; Ps.103:8.

The Lord is kind. He shows mercy even when people have not said **'sorry'** for their sins.

(iii) Can you regard yourself as merciful when your mercy is easily overstretched?

✍ **(b) He is slow to anger – Ps.103: 8; Jas 1:19-20**

(i) What is the implication of this on our lives?

(ii) **Ps.103:9** says '... Neither will He keep His anger for ever.' How then should we handle any occurrence of anger in our lives? **Ps. 37:8; Eph. 4:31.** Anger is dangerous to be left for some time. It does not necessarily cool off with time. Anger is best disposed off quickly. **Eph. 4:26.**

(c) He will not always chide. Ps.103:9; Prov.17:9

(i.) What does it mean to chide?

Dictionary meaning: "To scold."
NKJV: "He will not strive with us..."
LB: "He never bears a grudge..."
GNB: "He does not keep on rebuking..."
AMP: "He will not always chide or be contending..."

(ii) What then is the right way to administer discipline and correction? **Heb. 12:10-11; Job 5:17-18.** Discipline is not a punishment we administer just to please oneself. It is a punishment designed for the profit of the recipient, to bring about the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

(iii) How does harboured anger affect a reproof or rebuke? **Jas. 1:20.** Has your rebuke always brought out the best in people? Whenever you rebuke in anger, it will not work out God's righteousness in that person; no matter your zeal in bringing it about.

(d) Consider Ps. 103:10-11; Matt.5:44-45; Lk 6:35.

What merciful disposition can you see in these Scriptures? How does it practically influence the life of the merciful?

The merciful is tender in heart. He tempers judgment with mercy; refraining from inflicting an unnecessary or undue punishment on an offender. How do you measure on that scale of God's merciful character?

✍ **(E) NOTE Ps.103:12 and Lk. 6:37**

(i) Identify the attributes of the merciful revealed here. Can you see how God forgives and forgets?

(ii) Compare with **Matt.6:14-15** and **Matt.18:23-35.**

What is the quality and depth of forgiveness acceptable? Note **Matt.18:23-35.** The servant that was forgiven by the king did not forgive his fellow servant who owed him very little. He needed mercy; and he received mercy; but refused to show mercy. Therefore, the mercy shown him was withdrawn.

'So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses' (**Vs.35**).

Some will eventually go to hell not because they were not initially born again but because of refusing to show mercy.

(iii) Note the attributes of a merciless man in **Matt.18:23-35.**

- ☞ *He is forceful in getting his right.*
- ☞ *He seeks his own interest no matter who is hurt.*
- ☞ *He chokes men up; he brings up the wrongs done in the past each time he feels offended in order to reproach and punish the person, holding him by his throat.*
- ☞ *He casts his offender into prison, even if only in the prison of his heart, bearing grudge and keeping malice.*

Does that show a picture of the attitude of your heart?

(iv) Discover what we stand to lose by failing to forgive a fellow human being.

Matt.6:14-15; Mk 11:23-26; Matt 18:34-35; Jas. 2:13.

- ☞ *We will not be forgiven*
- ☞ *we will be forced to pay for our sins*
- ☞ *We will be handed over to tormentors, not just cast in prison.*

✍ (f) **In Ps. 103:13, what attitude can we identify?**

A merciful person is compassionate. He is full of pity for the offender. **Ps.103:14** says, 'for He knows our frame ...'

What does that teach us? The Lord understands our disposition. He knows that we are human and He understands the infirmities associated with human beings.

Therefore, understanding the disposition of those we relate with and those who offend us, is the key to showing mercy. Do you take time to understand people's disposition in order to overlook their behaviour and show mercy?

3. LOOK AT SOME AREAS OF NEED FOR MERCY IN OUR OWN LIVES.

Remember that it is the merciful that shall obtain mercy.

☞ *(a) For our salvation* **1Tim.1:12-16; Rom.2:4.**

☞ *(b) To receive help in our times of need, we must first obtain mercy in God's presence* – **Heb.4:16.**

☞ *(c) To be chosen of God for kingdom service* – **2Cor.4:1; Rom.9:15-16.**

☞ *(d.) To get a good wife, a good home* – **Prov. 18:22**

4. DISCOVER AND DISCUSS THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE MERCIFUL.

Matt.5:7; Jas.2:13; Ps.18:25; Prov. 3:3-4; Prov. 11:17

A merciful man predisposes himself to obtain mercy both from the Lord and from those he relates with. He does not trouble his own soul or set a trap for himself to fall in.

5. CULTIVATING THE ATTITUDE OF MERCIFULNESS

(a) Considering **Lk.6:36** which says,

"Be ye therefore merciful, as your father also is merciful."

What is the basis of genuine mercifulness in a life? Since it is a family character in God's family, the potential (nature) to be merciful is only acquired by the New birth. You can only be... as your Father (**Jn.1:12, 13; Jn.3:3-7**). Are you born again?

✍ (b) "PUT ON ...bowels of MERCIES..." Col. 3:12

What does this mean in practical terms? Look at 'Bowels of mercy' in different versions.

NAS: "a heart of compassion"
AMP: "Tender hearted pity and mercy"
Beck's: "Be tender hearted"

It means we must be tender hearted, have a heart full of flowing out endlessly in compassion towards others. And re to 'put on' such attitude as we have been given the y in Christ Jesus.

CONCLUSION

A merciful person is FULL of mercy. His compassions fail not. He is understanding and considerate and therefore compassionate. He is not easily provoked to anger. He does not strike at the instance of provocation. He is easily entreated, peaceable, and kind. He has grace to forgive any wrong from the heart, and to forget it. He is not quarrelsome. Though always at the giving end, he is ever nourished, refreshed and blessed, rather than running dry and empty.

Mercy is a divine genotype. Only those who are genuinely begotten by God in Christ Jesus can partake of His merciful nature. Therefore, a conscious effort needs to be made and sustained to put on, switch on, tune in this attitude in our daily living.

Are you merciful or hard, cold and cruel? Is your spirit sweet or bitter? Are you merciful as God is? Are you easily angered, difficult to pacify, recalcitrant, and unforgiving? Are you smart

in your ways, always scheming to gain directly from every transaction with men?

It pays far better to invest in God than in human scheming. Call on the Lord now, that this divine nature may become your lifestyle from now on. May He answer the cry of your heart, in Jesus' Name Amen.

☞ 1. When people offend you, what is the commonest way in which you react to the situation?

☞ 2.(a) How do you personally handle someone who keeps repeating the same offence towards you despite the fact that you have forgiven him of the same offence before?

(b) What do you normally think of such a person?

☞ 3. Discuss the effect of anger on your relationship with your wife/husband, children, and friends, sharing with us your practical experience in this. How did you resolve each situation?

☞ 4.(a) The merciful is tender hearted, tempers judgement with mercy, refraining from inflicting punishment on an offender. How do you measure on that scale of God's merciful character as you relate with people?

(b) Do you find it difficult to forgive and forget?

If so, what could be responsible for this?

BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART...

INTRODUCTION

As a continuation of this series of studies on kingdom attitudes preached by the Lord Jesus on the mount to His followers, we shall look at **'Blessed are the pure in heart...' (Matt.5:8).**

Purity of heart, as we shall soon discover, is an eternal prerequisite for maintaining an unbroken communion with God. Without holiness, it is emphatically declared in the Scriptures that no man shall see the Lord **(Heb. 12:14).**

Please pray and open your heart to the Lord for a personal touch and an encounter that brings a permanent experience of holiness of life. May the Lord answer you according to the yearning of your heart.

☝ **MAIN TEXTS: MATT5:8; Ps.24:3-5; Ps.15:1-5.**

1. THE HUMAN HEART.

(a) Spiritually speaking, describe the nature of the human heart.

Jer. 17:9-10; Matt.23:25-28; Matt.15:8; Prov.23:7; Ezek.14:1-5; Gen.6:5. What did you discover?

☞ *The heart is deceitful above all things. It is the most deceitful thing ever known. It is very slippery. Can you see this in* **Matt.23:25-28?**

☞ *It is desperate in terms of wickedness, desperate to do evil.*

☞ *The intents and contents of the human heart are continually evil without interruption* (**Gen.6:5**).

☞ *No man can know the things in a man's heart except probably himself* (**1Cor. 2:11**)

☞ *Even for the Almighty God to know what is inside a man's heart, it is by searching!* (**Jer. 17:10**).

(b) The heart of a man is actually the 'heart', the center, the origin of every matter. **Prov. 4:23; Matt. 15:18-20.**

(c) God's evaluation of a man is basically that of his heart and not his appearance. **1Sam.16:7; 1Kg. 11:4; 2Chro. 25:2; Ps.7:9; Ps. 51:6.**

Knowing how corrupt the heart of a man is and the fact that God cannot be impressed by outward appearance but by the inside, the heart, it becomes critical for you to look intently to God for help over the condition of your heart as you continue in this study.

2. WHAT DOES THE WORD 'PURE' MEAN?

(a) From the Dictionary, it means 'not mixed with any other substance; free from other substances.'

A pure thing is that which consists of only one substance, not mixed with any other substance even if that other substance is ordinarily good and useful. For instance, a sugar-in-water solution, though sweet and harmless, is no longer pure water . . . not to talk of sand mixed with water.

So, a pure heart means a heart reserved for God only, His purpose and His counsel. A heart not mixed with anything of self, of Satan, the world, or any other thing, good or bad.

(b) Discuss what it means to be "pure in heart"

Ps. 51:10; Ps. 42:1-2; Ps.73:25; Matt.6:19-24; Col.3:1-2; Jn. 4:34; Jn.14:30; Jas. 3:11; 1Jn 3:3, 5.

☞ *(i) It means to have a clean heart.*
Ps.51:10; Ps. 119:9, 11; Ezek. 36:25-26.

☞ *(ii) It means a heart devoid of evil thoughts and vanity.*
Ps.24:4, Prov.23:7a, Phil. 4:8, Jas 3:11, Mk.7:21.

☞ *(iii) He that speaks the truth in his heart.*
Ps. 15:2; Ps. 78:36-3; Matt. 15:8; Matt. 23:27-28; Lk. 8:15.
No hypocrisy. It is transparent.

☞ *(iv) Pure motive, good conscience.*
1Tim. 1:5; 1Tim. 4:12; 1Pet. 1:22; Heb. 4:12.

☞ *(v) A pure heart produces a holy life.*
Prov. 4:23; Jas. 3:12; Matt.12:33; Heb. 12:14; Matt.5:8.

☞ *(vi) Humble and lowly heart.* **Matt.11:29; 1Pet. 5:5.**

☞ *(vii) Single focus. Heart focused only on God.*
Ps. 73:25; Matt 6:19-24; Jn.14:30; Jn. 4:34; Col. 3:1-2.

Compare this with **Lk. 8:14**. Can you see the difference? Is your heart clean? Or is it choked with the tares and cares of this world? Have those "other things" entered in to pollute and corrupt your heart with sin?

Examine your heart now. Is there really no more condemnation for sin? Are your thoughts pure? Is your knowledge of God pure or is it mixed up with some other knowledge? Do you speak the truth even when it hurts?

Do you have a pure motive behind your deeds? Is your service to God and to man with a pure motive and a good conscience? Is there nothing of **'self'** inside? Are you holy? Is your heart focused only on God?

These and many other questions like these reveal, whether or not, a man has a pure heart. May God help you to discover your heart so as to raise an honest and earnest cry to God for help today in Jesus' Name, Amen.

3. 'BLESSED . . . FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD' Matt 5:8.

What is the need of a pure heart and what is the blessedness of having and maintaining a pure heart?

(A) It is God's requirement for relating with a man.

Ps.15:15; Ps. 24:3-5; Heb.12:14; 2Cor. 6:17-18; 7:1

The pure in heart are the ones who can boldly and confidently approach God and be acceptable in His sight. They have an unlimited access into God's presence.

Consider Isaiah's case in **Isa.6:1-8.** He could not be commissioned into God's service until he met this condition.

(b) It releases God's help and support for a man's life.

Ps.73:1; 2Cor. 6:17-18; Isa. 26:3; 2Chr. 16:9.

God's eyes are everywhere. He sees the need in men's lives but he cannot lavish his mighty power on people because they do not meet this condition.

(c) Out of the heart are the issues of life.

Prov.4:23; Jn. 7:38.

Purity of heart is the basis for abundant living. Life, ministry, and anointing become contaminated once the heart is impure.

(d) It is the basis for seeing God.

Matt.5:8; Heb. 12:14; 1Jn.3:1-3.

Purity of heart and holiness of life is the prerequisite for **'seeing'** God reveal Himself to you as you study God's word; seeing Him in action in your life and over your situation; seeing God manifest Himself in your service to Him. It opens heavenly vision to a man.

It brings him into a very close intimacy with God. Oh, how we ought to pursue purity of heart until it is made clearly manifest in our lives.

4. SECURING AND MAINTAINING PURITY OF HEART

The old heart, the natural human heart cannot be repaired, disciplined and trained to become pure. **Job 14:4; Job15:14.** The old heart must be removed and a new heart received. **Ezek.36:25-26; Ps.51:10; Jn. 3:3-7; 1Pet.1:22-23.**

How do we then maintain the purity of the new heart?

(a) By constant study and revelation of the word of truth.

Ps.119:9, 11; Jn.17:17,19; Eph.5:26-27; Col.3:16; 2Cor.3:18.

(b) By obeying the truth. 1Pet. 1:22

(c) By keeping guard over your heart.

Prov.4:23; Ps.139:23-24; Prov. 25:28; 1Pet.1:13-16.

(d) Right seeing, right hearing and right thinking.

They are the gateways into the heart.

Job31:1-2; Prov. 4:25-27; Mk.4:24; Lk.8:18; Phil.4:8; Col. 3:1-2; Rom.12:2.

CONCLUSION

In all cases, the heart of man determines his every action. God also does not measure a man by his outward appearance. Whatever the outward appears to be, it originates from the heart. But beyond this, the heart is capable of putting up a show for the on-looker, while the story inside is different.

When a man prays, God does not analyze the words, but the heart and its motives.

Is your heart pure? Is your heart right with God?

IS THY HEART RIGHT WITH GOD?

1. Have thy affections been nailed to the cross?
   Is thy heart right with God?
   Countest thou all things for Jesus but loss?
   Is thy heart right with God?

2. Hast thou dominion o'er self and o'er sin?
   Is thy heart right with God?
   Over all evil without and within?
   Is thy heart right with God?

3. Is there no more condemnation for sin?
   Is thy heart right with God?
   Does Jesus rule in the temple within?
   Is thy heart right with God?

4. Art thou now walking in heaven's pure light?
   Is thy heart right with God?
   Is thy soul wearing the garment of white?
   Is thy heart right with God?

Chorus:

Is thy heart right with God?
Washed in the crimson flood,
Cleansed and made holy,
Humble and lowly,
Right in the sight of God?

Personal Assessment Questions

☞ 1. What kind of thoughts do you discover your heart often thinking about? Share with us in detail.

How do you handle impure thoughts coming to your heart?

☞ 2. Since God always looks into the heart, each time He looks at a man ... Purity of heart is crucial, be it in prayer, in serving God or others ... What motives did God convict you about as a hindrance to your "seeing His glory", as you went through this study.

Explain this in details.

☞ 3. (a) Share with us any experience you had in which you actually 'saw God' manifest Himself to you. How did they happen?

(b) Is that a normal frequent occurrence in your life or it happens once in a while?

☞ 4. Have you sensed the call of God on your life? What do you understand it to be?

(a) How did you come about that call?

(b) What are you presently doing to pursue the call?

☞ 5. Do you have any prayer request?

BLESSED ARE THE PEACE MAKERS . . .

INTRODUCTION

In continuation of the series of Bible studies on the Kingdom Lifestyle as seen in the Sermon on the Mount, we shall look at **Matt. 5:9** which says,

'Blessed are the peace makers,
for they shall be called sons of God.'

As we study, please let your heart be consistently in God's presence and open up to the Lord to particularly touch you and impart this blessed attitude in your life so that it will become your lifestyle. As you hear these sayings of the Master and you go ahead to do what He says, you are automatically building your life upon the rock.

May that be your portion in Jesus' Name. Amen.

MAIN TEXT: Matt. 5:8-12

1. LOOK AT Matt. 5:9 FROM VARIOUS VERSIONS:

NKJV: "Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called sons of God."

GNB: "Happy are those who work for peace among men, God will call them His sons."

LB: "Happy are those who strive for peace, they shall be called the sons of God."

PHILIPS: "Happy are those who make peace, for they shall be known as sons of God."

2. THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF PEACE.

✍ (A) WHAT DOES THE WORD 'PEACE' MEAN?

2Pet.1:2 (AMP) Peace means a state of . . .

. . . perfect well-being, all necessary good, all spiritual prosperity and freedom from fears, agitating passions and moral conflict.'

A person is said to be at peace when his life is rested, his life is spiritually prosperous and he is free from fears, free from agitating passions and moral conflict.

For you to be a peace maker, you must be at peace yourself. You cannot lead someone into an experience you have never had.

✍ (b) NO PEACE FOR THE WICKED (I.E. FOR A SINNER).

Isa. 48:22; Jas.4:1-2; Jn.8:34.

Every sinner is a slave of sin. He has been enslaved by sin. He has no peace. There is always a war within, caused by the lust for pleasure inside the heart of every sinner. His heart is never rested from agitating passions or moral conflicts.

Even if you have decided to sear your conscience with hot iron **(1Tim.4:2)** so that it becomes insensitive to the things of God, that only gives you an uneasy quiet. You will still have no peace within or without. Your life will only be opened up to more troubles. For you to have peace, you must receive the Prince of Peace and be saved from your sins.

✍ (c) God is THE AUTHOR OF PEACE.

And Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

1Cor.14:33; Isa.9:6; Jn. 14:27; Gal.5:22.

The world gives a kind of peace that can be best described as an uneasy calm; it does not know God, the Author of peace. The Lord God is the source of peace. You cannot get it from

anywhere else unless you become one with Jesus the Prince of Peace. In the world there is tribulation and lack of ease. But in Christ, all things hold together **(Jn.16:33; Col. 1:17 NIV).**

It is only as you surrender your life to Christ that you not only receive peace but become a channel of peace also.

3. THE PEACE MAKER

✍ (A) WHO IS A PEACE MAKER?

Matt. 5:9 (GNB, LB)

A peace maker is one who strives for peace, who makes peace between two quarrelling parties or people. He is therefore someone who is acceptable by each of the two opposing parties in order to be able to reconcile them to each other. Are you a peace maker? Have you made that your attitude in life or is it just an occasional incidence?

✍ (b) WHAT IS THE NEED FOR PEACE MAKERS?

Isa.59:1-2, 8; Isa.48:22.

There is a quarrel between God and man, and the quarrel is the problem of sin. Therefore God has withdrawn His peace from everyone who has not been reconciled to Him. Peace makers are needed basically first, to reconcile men to God.

✍ 4. THE ACT OF PEACE-MAKING

(a) Jesus is the Master Peace maker.

How did He do it? **Eph. 2:14-18.**

☞ *(i) He broke down . . . the middle wall of partition between sinners and God.* **Eph.2:14; Lk.23:32; Heb.7:25.**

Every peace maker must do the same. A peace maker is an intercessor. **2Cor.10:4-5; Jer.51:20-23.** To make peace between God and man, you must be able to prevail with God in the place of prayer and against Satan in spiritual warfare, on behalf of

sinners. Have we had anybody come to God by your own intercession? How many??

☞ *(ii) "He abolished in His flesh the enmity..."* **Eph. 2:15.**

He gave up SELF (the flesh) and went to the cross so that the righteous demands of the law might be fulfilled. What people are afraid of giving up, in coming to God, are their sins and their lust of the flesh. Jesus gave up sin in His own flesh. He became an example to us, showing that it is possible.

As a peace maker, God wants you to abolish in your own life what people are afraid of in coming to God. The hostility he has against God, thinking if he obeys God, He will cheat him, you must abolish it in your own life for him to know that God does not cheat anyone. To be a peace maker, you must be an example of believers by your life; your life must be a testimony. Examine yourself now. Does your Christianity challenge others? Does your life draw people to Christ?

☞ *(iii) "He slew the enmity..."* **Eph.2:16; Isa.59:1-2**

The enmity between God and man is the problem of sin. It was sin that brought the barrier, the separation between God and man. God does not tolerate sin in sinners; likewise, sinners do not like the holiness of God. They cannot stand it. No sinner quarrels with the God of provision, the God of miracles. They like God's goodness, protection, and miracles, but not His holiness.

To be a peace maker therefore, the enmity must be done away with. The matter of sin must be dealt with resolutely. You must not only present God as a God of miracles but also the holy God whose eyes cannot behold iniquity.

✍ **(b) Study Carefully and discover the lifestyle of a peace maker in Lk.6:27-35.**

☞ *(i) "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you..."* **(Vs. 27-28).**

Remember how many people you are keeping at an arm's length, those against whom you bear grudges because you have considered and concluded that they hate you since the day they offended you. That is natural. But if you will be a child of God, a peace-maker, Jesus says **'Love..., do good ...'** to those persons.

These are active words, not passive. Such are rare opportunities to show the love of God, not just when people do good to you but when also they offend you. Bless them and pray for them **(vs.28)** rather than maintain an uneasy calm. Then shall you be called a peace maker. That is the attitude, the lifestyle in the Kingdom of God.

☞ *(ii) "To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also."* **(vs.29)**

That may or may not be direct smiting. People may smite your cheek by cheating you and denying you your right. Naturally, such actions cause quarrels, as you try to defend yourself. But you will make and maintain peace and make a difference by offering the other cheek also, not fighting for your right. It is then you will be marked out as a true child of God, a peace maker.

☞ *(iii) "And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic also."* **(vs.29)**

Give in to any one even as he tries to cheat you. Thus you shall be a peace maker and people will identify you as a child of God.

5. AT WHAT LEVELS DOES GOD WANT US TO MAKE PEACE?

(A) Make peace with God

Isa.48:22; Isa. 59:8; Job. 22:21-22; 2Cor.5:20-21; Rom.5:1; 1Jn.1:6-9; Matt.1:21

You cannot be a peace maker when you are not personally at peace with God or reconciled to Him, by repenting from your sins. This you must do now if you have not already done so, because there is no peace for the wicked, says the Lord.

(b) Make peace with men.

Heb.12:14; Rom.12:17-18; Matt.6:14-15; Rom.14:17; Mk.9:50.

We lose our integrity and our message to people when we are not at peace with them. Such a situation makes the hearts of men to become resistant to the message we preach. Being at peace with men not only shows us to be children of God but also maintains for us open doors in the hearts of the people.

(c) Make peace with brethren.

Matt.5:23-24; Eph. 4:3; 2Tim 2:22; 1Jn 2:9-11.

You cannot be a good child to God while you are a bad brother or sister to God's children. That would be a costly assumption to think you are in the light while actually you are in darkness.

(d) Reconcile men to God. 2Cor5:18-20; Isa.52:7; Eph. 6:15

(E) Seek peace in the land where you are.

1Tim 2:3; Jer. 29:7; Ezek. 22:29-30.

The gospel thrives in an atmosphere of peace. National peace is crucial to peaceful and godly living.

6. THE BLESSEDNESS OF BEING A PEACEMAKER.

"...they shall be called sons of God." (NKJV)

"...God will call them his children." (GNB)

✍ **(a) What is the implication of being called "a child of God' by men?**

1Tim3:1, 7; Matt.5:13; Jer. 29:7.

✍ **(b) Discuss the privileges of being called a child of God by God Himself.**

1Jn.5:9; Rom.8:15-17; 1Jn.3:1; Zac. 2:8b; Rev 5:10.

CONCLUSION

Peace making is a part of the lifestyle in God's Kingdom. It is an important mark of being a child of God. It is our calling. It is our way of life. Peace with God is the key into a life of peace and peace making. A man that has no peace with God has no peace to offer any man. And peace with men together with peace with God is the key to receiving open doors of ministry among men, reconciling them to God. A bad neighbour will certainly be an ineffective minister of reconciliation, just as a sinning 'believer' too.

Are you truly a child of God? How is your relationship with God? How is your relationship with people in your neighborhood? Even Jesus Christ our Lord had to grow in favour with men, having a peaceful relationship with them ever before He could enter into His ministry effectively (**Lk.2:40, 52**).

Are you at peace with God and with men? How is your relationship with your husband, wife, children, colleagues, neighbours, etc.?

The gospel of peace thrives mainly in an atmosphere of peace. Are you actively involved in reconciling men to God? The Lord is coming at an hour you do not expect Him. Will He meet you in PEACE?

Personal Assessment Questions

1. (a) Have you experienced the real peace that God gives?

Explain how it happened.

(b) Discuss how you got convinced that you are at peace with God now. What is the difference between your life now and that before?

2. (a) What situation or decision ever brought you a troubled heart before now, forming a barrier between you and God? Explain how it happened.

(b) How did you handle it?

3. (a) Do you have problems relating with other Christians? What is the cause? Have you got victory over this problem?

(b) What do you do in order to maintain peace with them?

4. (a) How many people would you say were reconciled through you to God in the act of conversion in the last one year?

(b) How did it happen? Share some of the testimonies with us

5. (a) Is there anything that usually causes a misunderstanding between you and your neighbors? Explain the situation

(b) Have you been able to handle it? How?

6. Any prayer requests?

CHAPTER 10

BLESSED ARE THEY WHICH ARE PERSECUTED

INTRODUCTION

In continuation of our series of studies on the kingdom lifestyle taught in the Sermon on the Mount by our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall study what our attitude should be in the face of persecution.

God's word clearly declares, **'yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution.' (2Tim.3:12).** Our heritage in Christ Jesus includes this experience. All elders and patriarchs of our faith went through it. Can we fare less?

As we study, we request you to open your heart for divine illumination on this blessed attitude of the kingdom of God. Hearing, studying, and knowing this truth is not enough; you will be counted a fool until you rise up to obey it in a definite way.

☝ **BLESSED ARE THEY WHICH ARE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE..." Matt 5:10.**

1. (A) WHAT IS PERSECUTION?

It means to treat somebody in a cruel way especially because of his race, political or religious beliefs, and in our own case, for the sake of righteousness.

If you are treated cruelly because of your wrong behaviour, it is not the same as persecution **(1Pet.4:15)**.

✍ (b) By what means can a person be persecuted?
Matt.5:11; Lk.6:22; Lk.10:17-22; Heb.11:33-37; Jn. 16:1-2.

People persecute us sometimes in the following ways:

☞ i. *By saying all kinds of evil against us falsely because we believe in Jesus.* **Acts.6:8-13.**

☞ ii. *By hating us.* **Jn.15:18; Ps.38:19-20.**

☞ iii. *By excluding us to keep us out of their company or even out of their congregations.* **Lk.4:28-29; Jn.9:6-7, 15, 19-22.**

☞ iv. *By reviling (insulting) us.* **2Sam.16:5-12; 1Pet.2:23.**

☞ v. *By taking us to court, scourging in the synagogue.* **Acts.5:27-28, 40-41.**

☞ vi. *By being brought before governors and kings because of our faith in Christ.* **Dan 3:14-21; Acts.23:33-35.**

☞ vii. *By being delivered up to death even by close relatives.* **Gen.4:1-8; Acts9:1-2.**

✍ C. Have you ever been persecuted because of your faith in Christ and because of your righteous behaviour?

Share your experience with us.

2. (A). IS PERSECUTION COMPULSORY FOR EVERY DISCIPLE OF CHRIST? DISCUSS.

2Tim. 3:12; Phil. 1:29-30; 1Pet.2:21-23; Jn.15:18-20; Mk.10:28-30.

Persecution is part of our calling as believers. If truly you belong to Christ, the world must persecute you. If the world loves you and speaks well of you, watch out! For the world only loves its own **(Lk. 6:26; Jn. 15:19)**.

✍ (b). What is the reason behind our persecution as Christians?

Why does the world persecute us? **Jn.15:18-25; Jn. 16:1-4.**

The hostility of the world against Christians is a transferred hostility. The world hates us because it hated Jesus. Satan, the god of this world, is the arch-enemy of our Master Jesus and of anyone who follows Jesus and His lifestyle.

(c). Examples of people persecuted for the sake of righteousness:

Discover THE PERSECUTION each of them passed through, who persecuted them, and for what reason they were persecuted.

(i) David, the Young Anointed

1Sam.18:6-9; 1Sam.19:1-5; 1Sam.24:11; Ps.119:161.

David was persecuted by Saul who attempted to kill him. The reason for his persecution was because David, a young man, killed Goliath the Philistine giant whom Saul the king, was afraid to confront. Saul became jealous of David and sought to kill him. Your righteousness (or success) in life, in business, in your place of work or even in ministry may cause your leaders to persecute you.

(ii) Jeremiah The Prophet **Jer. 37:4-16**

Jeremiah was beaten and cast into prison by a captain of the guard and the princes of Israel in Jerusalem. He was persecuted because he prophesied the truth and spoke the word that the Lord put in his mouth even though it was not in favour of his people, the Israelites. They felt he was supporting their enemies, the Chaldeans. For preaching the truth, we can be persecuted.

(iii) Daniel The Administrator **Dan 6:1-17**

Daniel was made one of the three governors in Babylon, to whom the one hundred and twenty satraps appointed over the kingdom would give account. Because Daniel distinguished himself among the governors and performed excellently, the king thought of setting him over the whole realm. It was this

that made the governors and satraps to devise a means of finding some charge against him.

However, they could not find any fault in him except concerning the law of his God. They cast him into the den of lions and laid a stone on its mouth. He was persecuted for being righteous, not willing to compromise his prayer life and his commitment to the true God.

☞ *(iv) Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego:* **Dan. 3:14:21**

They were persecuted by being cast into the burning fiery furnace because of their faith and commitment to the true God. They refused to bow to the gods of the Babylonians. They were accused and reported by the Chaldeans to king Nebuchadnezzar who proceeded to persecute them.

☞ *(v) Our Lord Jesus Christ:* **Lk.4:18-30**

He was persecuted by the people in the synagogue because of His preaching and claiming that the prophecy in Isaiah was fulfilled in Him (Is.61:1-3). When they heard Him, they rose up and thrust him out of the city and led Him to the brow of the hill to cast Him down over the cliff. But God delivered Him and He went to another city and continued preaching.

3. (A) WHAT MUST OUR ATTITUDE BE IN TIMES OF PERSECUTION?

Mat.5:12; Acts 5:40-41; Jas. 1:2-5; 1Pet.5:6-10; 1Cor.10:13; Rom 8:18, 28; 2Cor.4:16 - 5:1; Ps.34:19; Matt. 10:23.

Our attitude must be that of joy as the Lord commanded us. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad because great is your reward in heaven. Those who dodge persecution will not receive such a reward. Endure patiently and pray, asking for wisdom to know what to do at such a time. God may want you to stay there where you are being persecuted **(Acts 18:4-18)**, or to leave that place for another place **(Matt.10:23)**. There is need

to receive wisdom and instruction at such moments.

In times of persecution, resist the devil but endure with men. Bless, do not curse. Pray for those persecuting you as Jesus and Stephen did. Cast all your cares upon the Lord in prayer. He knows how to handle every situation. The Lord knows the measure of His grace in your life. He will not allow you to be tempted beyond your ability to bear it. He will make all things to work together for your good and for the fulfilment of His purpose in your life.

There is a glory yet to be revealed in you. You must not miss that because of whatever persecution. Jesus Christ our Lord endured hardship as He looked forward to the joy that was set before Him. May you be found following in His steps.

(b) Should a believer deliberately cause his own persecution?

Rom.12:18; Matt.6:13; Matt.5:10-11.

The word of God does not teach us to look for persecution by ourselves. The kind of persecution that will bring blessedness is that which comes for the sake of righteousness and as a result of our faith in Christ, not the one that comes because of our personal desire to be persecuted for whatever reason. Live in peace with all men as much as is within your abilities.

4. 'BLESSED, ARE YE WHEN THEY REVILE AND PERSECUTE YOU...' MATT.5:11.

What blessedness is there for us in enduring persecution for righteousness sake?

(a) '...for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Matt.5:10

When the world persecutes you and throws you a challenge to battle, it is the Lord Jesus they are persecuting (**Acts 9:4-5**). The kingdom of God will stand to back you up. God will uphold

you and His glory and power will envelop you.

✍ **(b) '...for great is your reward in heaven.' Matt.5:12.**

Such rewards are only reserved for those who are privileged to be persecuted because of Jesus, those who endure persecution for His name's sake.

✍ **(c) '...the trying of your faith worketh patience.' Jas.1:3.**

✍ **(d) '...the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.' 1Pet.4:12-14; Rom.8:17-19.**

When you are persecuted for the sake of Christ, the Spirit of glory rests on you. The glory of God rests on you. There is a glory that comes upon a life that endures persecution. Such glory was what people saw in Stephen in **Acts.6:15** as they saw that his face looked as that of an angel. The manifestation of the sons of God occurs when His glory is revealed through lives that have suffered persecution.

✍ **(e) "...that the genuineness of your faith... might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ." 1Pet.1:7**

People persecute us because Christ has not been revealed to them. When Christ is revealed to them, it is then they will appreciate how genuine your faith is, and honour you. Such an experience brings a man to honour, praise, and glory even in the sight of men. The contrary happens to people who dodge persecution.

✍ **(f) "...he shall receive a crown of life." Jas.1:12.**

✍ **(g) "...then shall the offering...be pleasant unto the Lord..." Mal.3:3-4.**

Not all offerings are pleasing to the Lord. But when a man endures persecution and has been approved, his life, service

and whatever he offers to the Lord will be pleasing in His sight.

Persecution is an instrument used of God to bless, mature us, and approve our lives for His noble use. It attracts God's presence and His glory to any life who endures it.

How do you react to persecution when it comes your way? Do you patiently go through it with endurance or you dodge it? Let it be known to you that it is only those who suffer with Christ (in persecution etc.) that shall also be glorified with Him **(Rom.8:17)**.

5. HOW DO WE QUALIFY FOR THIS BLESSEDNESS OF PERSECUTION?

✍ **(a) By ensuring in our lives that we make a clean and permanent break with the world and by clinging to Jesus. Jn. 15:18-19; Jas. 4:4; Lk.6:26**

As long as you are a friend of the world, the world would love you and not persecute you. That will rob you of the blessings and glory that are associated with persecution.

But when you break your relationship of friendliness with the world and cleave to Jesus and testify of Him, the world will normally turn against you and persecute you.

✍ **(b) By simply living a life of righteousness practically and standing boldly for Jesus in every endeavour. Matt.5:10-11; 2Tim.3:12.**

If you live an unrighteous life and suffer for it, that is not persecution. It attracts no blessing.

✍ **(c) By keeping yourself unspotted from the world. Jas.1:27.**

6. LOOK AT OTHER EXAMPLES OF PERSECUTED SAINTS IN THE SCRIPTURES.

What did you learn in each case?

☞ (a) JESUS: **Jn.7:7; 15:18**

☞ (b) JOSEPH: **Gen.37:3-4, 8-12, 19-20; Gen.39:20**

☞ (c) PAUL: **Acts.16:16-26**

☞ (d) MORDECAI, ESTHER: **Esth.3:2-6; 5:14: 6:11-14; 7:5-10.**

CONCLUSION

Would you love to be marked out by God for noble use? Do you desire to be a vessel of honour, a vessel of gold, fit for the Master's use? *Pro.°3:#* says, **'The refining pot is for silver, and the furnace is for gold; but the Lord trieth the hearts.'**

Do not live in compromise or in hypocrisy any longer; stand up for Jesus. When persecution comes, face it in the fullness of the Spirit of God. Face it with joy, in patience, with love, and by faith. Be humble. Keep sober and prayerful, counting solely on His wisdom for every step you take. Then He will surely bring you through it all victoriously.

When you are tried, may you come forth pure as gold for the Lord, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Personal Assessment Questions

☞ 1. (a) Have you ever been persecuted because of your faith in Christ and because of your righteous behaviour? Share your experience with us, stating who persecuted you, for what reason you were persecuted and what the persecution was.

☞ (b) How did you take it? Have your persecutors come to realise their wrong in persecuting you?

Explain.

☞ 2. The fear of persecution sometimes makes Christians to quietly, secretly, or openly deny Christ and compromise their faith.

(a) Discuss with us an experience you had in this regard.

(b) What are your fears about being persecuted?

(c) Have you been able to overcome such fears? How?

☞ 3. Share with us an experience of the blessedness of persecution you have had.

☞ 4. Is there any matter you want us pray for you about?

CHAPTER 11

YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH

INTRODUCTION

To be the salt of the earth and the light of the world is an important calling that we have in Christ Jesus in order to be relevant in the world in which we are living. This is part of the teaching that the Lord gave to the disciples on the mount, and He is still giving to us today.

Please be prayerful as you study along. It is our calling. It must become our lifestyle. Be careful enough to apply this word of God to your life and press on to obey. It is only in doing this that you shall be called a wise man, building your life and your future upon a rock. May God grant you insight into His word in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Salt of the earth. Matt.5:13.

Salt is a substance used to flavour (season) and preserve (purify) food.

1. SIGNIFICANCE OF SALT IN THE SCRIPTURES

(A). EVERY OFFERING (SACRIFICE) MUST BE SEASONED (FLAVOURED AND PURIFIED) WITH SALT.

Lev.2:13 (KJV, GNB); Ezek. 43:24 (KJV, GNB); Mk. 9:49 (KJV, GNB); Col. 4:6.

i. Salt represents the covenant between us and God.

It is a covenant of purity **(2Cor 6:16-18),** a covenant of salt.

Therefore, God commanded that we must put salt on all our offerings.

☞ *ii. What does salt mean in our lives as Christians?*

Mk.9:50(GNB); Eph. 5:2; 2Cor2:14-17(GNB).

By the purity of our lives and character, we become the salt that gives the gospel of Christ a sweet aroma wherever we go. Preaching God's word without a pure life is like presenting a sacrifice to God without salt. In the same way, whatever gifts or offerings we give to God must be accompanied with purity of life in order to make it an offering with a sweet-smelling flavour acceptable to God.

✍ **(b). Discuss the implications of the importance of salt in our lives as New Testament believers, considering the sacrifices we offer to God.**

Mk.9:49-50; Rom.12:1-2; Heb.13:15, 16; Phil 2:17; Phil. 4:18

'For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt.' . **Mk.9:49**

There is a seasoning, a purification that the fire of God's word brings to our lives. This is what gives us salt in ourselves **(Mk.9:50).**

When a man does not allow the word of God to change and purify him, he has no salt in himself. He has no salt with which to flavour his sacrifices. It is our pure lives and character that act as salt in our sacrifices.

We are instructed in **Rom.12:1-2** to present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice, holy, the kind that is acceptable to God. Presenting our bodies to God for His service without holiness of life is like giving God a sacrifice without salt. It is like breaking the covenant between us and God. It is not acceptable.

It will profit us nothing. Even if we give all our goods to feed the poor and our bodies to be burned (for the sake of Christ)

and have not love, it profits us nothing. Every sacrifice we present to God must be seasoned with salt. Do you have salt in yourself? Are you pure within?

✍ (c) Discuss as practically as possible, our commission as the salt of the earth.

In what practical ways can we fulfill this calling?

Matt. 5:13(KJV, LB); Col.4:5-6; Mk.9:50.

Matt.5:13 (LB) says;

'You are the world's seasoning, to make it tolerable. If you lose your flavour, what will happen to the world? And you yourselves will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.'

'Salt is good...' Mk.9:50. This is God's declaration and from practical experience with physical salt, it is clear that salt is good. But it is only useful when it is dissolved inside food. It bites the tongue when it is eaten as a lump. It is not palatable when taken that way. And as long as it remains as a lump, it is useful for nothing.

So **Matt.5:13** says, **'Ye are the salt OF THE EARTH.'** In other words, **'ye are the salt for sweetening the earth.'** We are the salt that God intends to sprinkle all over the earth to sweeten, purify, and preserve it. Our usefulness lies in our sweetness and our being 'sprinkled' and 'dissolved' in the community. Any attempt we make to remain as a lump renders us useless. God intends that we will spread ourselves and live in the midst of unbelievers and act as salt among them to make this world tolerable for them and draw them to God.

Therefore the Lord Jesus prayed for us not to be taken out of the world but that God should keep us from the evil one **(Jn.17:15, 1Cor.5:9-11).** Even though we must necessarily gather together with other Christians and share fellowship with them, we must scatter thereafter to different parts of the community and country in order to fulfill our calling as the salt

of the earth.

A situation in which many believers live together in a town or city while the surrounding villages and towns lack the presence of God is not scriptural. What God did in **Acts 7** and **8** to break and scatter that Jerusalem lump of salt can still happen again. But that is unnecessary if we would willingly scatter according to the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives and according to Scriptures.

The whole world is corrupt and is being corrupted more and more daily, making it more and more intolerable and unbearable to live in. God deliberately planted us here in the world so as to season it and preserve it by our pure lives. God has ordained that without Christians, the world would become very unbearable and collapse due to decay. Men would have completely destroyed themselves and destroyed the world long ago if not for our presence in the world.

Wherever you find a Christian with the right character and pure life, sweetness is introduced to that society. Such a life normally lifts a standard against decay in the community and God is glorified. That is why we cannot afford to live impure lives. We cannot afford to lose our saltiness. Even our speech must be seasoned with salt, backed up by a pure life. It is our high calling in Christ Jesus.

2. (A) HOW CAN A CHRISTIAN LOSE HIS SAVOUR AS SALT?

Gen.34:24-30; Prov. 15:8, 9, 26; 1Pet 4:15; Acts 5:1-5; 2Cor.2:17(GNB); Eccl.10:1; Matt.15:18-19

The insincerity and cruelty of Jacob's sons (Simeon and Levi) towards Shechem and his father's house made Jacob and his household to stink before the people. Though Jacob and his family were carriers of divine covenant, their wicked behaviour made their salt to lose its saltiness and they had to run before their enemies.

In the same way, vengeance, lying, hawking (peddling) the word of God to make a living out of it, foolish behaviour, gossips (little foxes that spoil the vine), and indeed any sin found in the life of a Christian is capable of making him lose his savour as the salt of the earth. He then becomes tasteless and good for nothing and men begin to handle him as such.

(b) Discuss the implications of losing your savour as the salt of the earth with reference to the following
(i) - (iv) Matt.5:13; Lk.14:34-35.

i. '...wherewith shall it be salted?'

Even the heavens are asking: **'how shall it be salted?'** It is a costly loss, for it is a difficult (if not an impossible) task if salt loses its savour. It is an impossible task for it to regain its saltiness except there is a divine intervention in mercy. We must therefore watch our character; we must pray that God helps us to preserve our saltiness.

ii. "It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill."

Saltless salt is a problem for the land by virtue of its chemical composition. It will make the land unproductive. And it is also a problem for the dunghill, because it will also not allow the normal process of decay to take place.

Whenever a Christian misbehaves and spoils his character by behaving in a way unbecoming of a Christian, he becomes a problem to the Christian fold as well as to the world. He is not accepted among believers, and is suspected and rejected among unbelievers.

He becomes unsettled and a misfit in life unless he repents and God intervenes not only to change him, but also to change the thoughts of men towards him. It is a costly loss for salt to

lose its savour for whatever reason.

☞ *iii. "...but to be cast out..." Jn.15:16; Gen.12:14-20.*

Losing our saltiness makes us to become good for nothing; it makes a Christian to become undesirable among men. When a man has become identified in a community as a Christian, a man reputed for wisdom, a little folly, and a little misbehaviour makes him to stink. What is done to a stinking object is to cast it out and throw it away. So it is with a Christian that has lost his saltiness among men.

Abraham became a stinking object in Egypt as he deceived Pharaoh by calling his wife his sister. The king was so surprised by Abraham's behaviour that a man could deny his wife! That was because even unbelievers could hardly do such a thing. Abraham was immediately sent out of that country by Pharaoh and his men. God may forgive you but men will not forgive so easily. Even if they do, they will keep making reference to it. They may immediately lock the door of their hearts against you and your message once misbehaviour is found with you.

Have you begun to stink before the people around you? What is the cause and what is your gain compared with what you stand to lose? Such behaviour shall profit you nothing. There is need to cry to God immediately for divine intervention.

☞ *iv. '...and to be trodden under foot of men.'*

Any Christian who loses his saltiness automatically becomes a byword, a matter to gossip about, among men. He becomes an object of ridicule, someone to be trampled underfoot by men. It is definitely not an experience to be desired. Therefore, watch your lives and be careful the way you behave.

3. HOW CAN WE MAINTAIN OUR SWEETNESS?

Rom.12:1-2; Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16; Jude 23; Jn.15:4; Col.3:16; Matt. 26:41.

It is the flesh, the human nature (our nature as human beings) that normally contaminates the pure character of Christ in us, if allowed to grow side by side with our spiritual life. Walking in the Spirit and yielding our bodies to God for His use on a daily basis preserves us and prevents us from losing our saltiness. Also, the life of Christ will flow through us without hindrance if we as the branches maintain our point of contact with Christ, the Vine.

He is the Source of our sweetness. Breaking our contact with Him also means losing our sweetness. Therefore, watch your contact point. Abide in Christ. Stay within His boundaries for your life. Let His word also abide in you. Watch and pray. The Lord will surely preserve you.

CONCLUSION:

We are the salt of the earth. It is a calling given to us by reason of our covenant relationship with God. It is a covenant of purity and we can only fulfill that calling as we live in holiness and righteousness before Him here on earth. As the salt of the earth, God has ordained that it is by our lives and presence that this world will be habitable and tolerable.

After the rapture when we are taken away and caught up to meet the Lord in the air, rapid decay will set in here on earth and the end of the world shall come. But right now while we are in the world, we are the salt of the earth, drawing people to God by our sweet, holy, and godly lives.

How sweet and godly has the world found your life? Do you make the community around you tolerable by your holy and pure life or you make it worse to live in?

What do people around you say about you? Do you have a good report of men outside the church? Or have you lost your savour already?

To lose your savour is to become good for nothing among the brethren and even among unbelievers; it will make you become an abomination to God and a byword among men. It is too costly for salt to lose its savour.

If you have already lost your savour, you must cry to God until He responds to you and changes your **'Marah'** (bitterness) to sweetness.

If you have not lost it, then rely on the Lord's strength alone to sustain you. May you be dependable to fulfill this holy calling in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Personal Assessment Questions

☞ *1. Presently, how would you rate yourself as "the salt of the earth" in the particular place or position you occupy? Honestly discuss this with us, with examples and illustration of why you feel so.*

☞ *2. Have you ever experienced "men trampling over you and casting you out" because of a mistake you made or a sin you committed as a leader?*
Share with us details of such experience and how did you cope with it? Have you overcome it already? Do you need any personal counselling on this issue?

☞ *3. What ways are you employing to maintain your 'saltiness' in the "soup" you have found yourself?*

CHAPTER 12

YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

INTRODUCTION

The Lord Jesus did not say 'you are LIKE the light of the world' but that you are actually the light of the world. This is also our calling in Christ Jesus. This world, without the children of God, will be in darkness.

MAIN TEXT: Matt.5:14

1. YOU ARE THE LIGHT

(A) WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF LIGHT? Jn.1:5; Jn. 5:35; Eph.5:13; 2Pet.1:19; Isa.60:3.

Light is quiet but it shines wherever it is and it attracts people. No matter how thick the darkness is, light overpowers and drives away darkness. Wherever you see darkness prevailing, whether in a home or in a community, it is either because there is no light there or the light is not shining.

Apart from shining, light also burns. Touch a lamp that is lit and you will experience the burning property of light. Anyone who comes where there is light will not only see clearly but may also receive a mark if he comes into physical contact with the light.

Moreover, light reveals (exposes) things that are hidden.

Something is hidden only if it is in the dark; and no matter how much you look for it, you may not find it. But bring in light and every hidden thing becomes exposed. People only succeed in hiding their sins as long as there is no **'light'** to expose such sins. As soon as **'light'** comes in, their sins are revealed because . . .

" . . . the light shines in upon their sin and shows it up, and when they see how wrong they really are, some of them may even become children of light." **(Eph. 5:13 LB)**

(b) Discuss practically what God is asking us to do as the light of the world.

Matt.26:69-73; Lk.24:32; Acts 8:17-24.

Having seen the characteristics of light, it is clear that as the light of the world, we are to shine. As light, we are like a city set on a hill. We cannot be hid. By divine arrangement, God ensures that we are situated in a place where all eyes can see us, just as everyone who lights a lamp normally puts it on a table so that all may see by it. God expects that by our lives, people around us should not walk in darkness. It is a heavenly calling. You must shine.

Please note that whether you shine or not, you are a city set on a hill. You cannot be hid. Even if you decide to dim your light so that it does not shine, you cannot be hid. Everyone will know you as a Christian whose light is not shining bright and that will not be to your advantage **(Lk.9:26)**. Peter dimmed his light and backslid. It was only by the mercy of God that he was restored. You must shine your light.

We must not only shine but burn. Our lives must leave a burning mark in the hearts of people who come in contact with us. As Jesus spoke to those two brothers on the road to Emmaus about how right and scriptural it was for Christ to be crucified and to rise up the third day, their hearts burned within them. There was an impact that His speech made on their lives

to burn off the dross of unbelief and fear from their hearts. And when He broke the bread and gave them, their eyes were opened and they knew that it was the Lord Himself that spoke to them. So also must our lives and character do to everyone around us until Jesus is made real to them.

Also, Peter's life brought the hidden sinful character of Simon the sorcerer to light. The bitterness in his heart was exposed and he begged to be prayed for. Sometimes men may deliberately hide their sins, but some actually may not know their true sinful situation. However, by our lives and our walk with Jesus, we should reveal it. We would be a disappointment to Jesus if we connived with sinners to hide their sins. We automatically become partakers with them of their sins.

"But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light" **(Eph.5:13).** *Whatever hides is darkness.*

Are you truly the light in your environment? What about the things you are hiding in your life? Has your light shined enough to bring people to Christ? What are the things that make you dim your light? Pray now and get rid of them before they get rid of you and your candle is removed from its candlestick. **(Rev.2:4-5).**

2 ... LIGHT OF THE WORLD

✍ (A) Why does the world need light?

Isa.60:2; Prov.4:19; 1Jn.5:19; Eph.6:12; Phil.2:15.

The whole world is in darkness. Thick darkness covers the people because sin brought men into darkness under the power of the evil one. People grope in darkness so much that they stumble, yet they do not know what makes them to stumble. Were there no Christians in the world, it would have been terrible for people to live in.

Men would have helped to destroy each other and destroy the world because they cannot see the way and they do not see what makes them to stumble, thinking another person is the cause of their problems, not knowing that the mother of their problems is the sin inside of their lives.

The light that the world needs in order to live right and not stumble is in us. The light that your husband, wife, children, parents, friends etc. need in order to be saved is in you. May you not die with your light without lighting any man in the world in Jesus' Name, Amen.

(b) What is the effect of darkness on a man's life and the world system? 1Jn.2:11; Prov. 4:19; Jn.12:35; Isa.5:20.

Darkness makes a man blind: blind to his environment, blind to the feelings of others, blind to God's purpose for his life, blind to even things that make him stumble. When a man walks in darkness, he makes mistakes and yet he does not know what makes him to do so. Therefore he falls into the same problem over and over again. Though he has eyes, he cannot see because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Hatred and other sins bring a man into darkness. When a man is in darkness, he does not know where he is going. He loses his sense of direction, only playing a game of chance with his life. He calls evil good, and calls good evil; he calls darkness light, and light darkness. He calls bitter things sweet, and what is sweet bitter.

Sin makes a man to lose his senses and thus walk out of sense just as it happened to the prodigal son in **Lk 15.** It was only when he came back to his senses that he decided to return to his father.

Is that your present situation? Then you have an urgent need of light and you must cry out to the Lord to take you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

3. HOW CAN WE FULFILL OUR CALLING AS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD?

Isa.60:1; Matt.5:15-16; Lk.12:35; Eph.5:8, 11-13, 18; 2Cor.6:14; 2Tim.4:2.

We are the LIGHT OF THE WORLD. Light is useful only in an environment of darkness. In such a place, its influence is powerful and indispensable. Bring a bright fluorescent lamp out under sunlight and its light will not be effective. It has no effect at all. But put the same lamp in a dark hall and its influence is quite dramatic as it gives light to everyone in the room causing them to see clearly.

The grace of God on your life will continue to remain useless, making little or no impact if you continue staying under bright light; for God did not ordain it to be so. The whole world is in darkness. Our light is meant for the world, not for the church.

Though we must have times to gather together as a church in a locality, we must thereafter go into the world to give them light. Again, a situation in which believers gather together day and night, every day of the week, is not scriptural. It is contrary to our calling as the light of the world.

Your gift will manifest better and your light will be more useful as you boldly step out by faith to stay among unbelievers. And as you allow your light to shine, THEY will glorify your Father in heaven.

Arise and shine. God has lit you already and has put you in a place where you cannot be hid: in the midst of darkness so that people can see your light and come to Jesus. Let your light shine. Do not dim it. Do not compromise your stand where God has placed you. Shine! Light does not run from darkness. Physically it is impossible, how much more spiritually.

Living above sin makes our light shine brighter by keeping the glass protecting the flame clean. Yet that alone gives us

only the lowest and dimmest light. Even moralists try to do that. We must go further to live the life of Christ, the resurrection life, and preach the gospel of Christ. Your character, lifestyle, and good works must show that you are for Jesus. It will make your light shine brightest and focus better so that the source of your light is not debatable.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." **(Matt.5:16)**

May the Lord not be disappointed in you in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Personal Assessment Questions

☞ *1. Discuss what struck you most in this study. What are the challenges on your heart?*

☞ *2. What steps have you resolved to take (and have already taken) to shine brighter for the LORD in your area of abode?*

☞ *3. What dimmed your light in times past?*

☞ *What did you do, and are currently doing to brush up in order to shine among men?*

☞ *4. What are 'bushels' that must be taken out of your life, and what are the lamp stands you must climb upon for your light to shine for a wider coverage?*

Jesus Keep
Me the Cros

CHAPTER 13

THE BELIEVERS' RIGHTEOUSNESS

INTRODUCTION

One critical mark that differentiates the children of God from the children of the devil is righteousness. This is so important that it forms a large part of the sermon preached by Jesus on the mount, and He is still preaching to us today.

As we proceed in this study, we pray that the Lord may grant you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of the Almighty and in His will. We pray that the word may come to you with grace to enable you to obey in Jesus' Name. So shall you be called a wise man who built his house upon the rock.

MAIN TEXT: MATT. 5:20-48

1. WHAT DOES 'RIGHTEOUSNESS' MEAN?

Jn. 3:7-10

Righteousness means uprightness, godliness. To be righteous means to have a right standing with God; to always do what is right, good, just, and honourable in God's sight. It means to practice righteousness. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.

2. DISCUSS THE WAYS FOUND IN SCRIPTURES THROUGH WHICH RIGHTEOUSNESS COULD COME.

(A) Righteousness of the Law

Rom.3:19-20, 23; Rom.10:2-5; Rom.8:1-4; Rom. 9:30-32; Mk.10:17-22.

The righteousness of the Law comes to those who are under the Law, who obey the Law of Moses. In this case, people struggle to obey the Law without paying attention to the true condition of their hearts and the motive behind their actions.

The Law brought the knowledge of sin and the entire world became guilty before God. Though people may claim to be righteous because of their obedience to the Law, they are not justified before God and so, they cannot be saved that way. Therefore the Law of Moses is also called the Law of sin and death **(Rom. 8:2)**. People are still short of the glory of God despite their obedience to the Law because the Law handles the external but not the internal in-born condition of a man.

(b) Righteousness of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Rom.3:21-26; Rom.4:11; Rom. 8:3-4; Rom.7:7-12; Rom.9:30-32; Rom.10:10; 1Cor.1:30-31; Phil.3:8-9; Lk.23:39-43.

Since the Law failed to fulfill God's righteous demands because it was weak through the flesh, God had to look for another way to bring man to righteousness. This He did by sending Jesus His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh **(Rom.8:3)**. He therefore condemned sin in the flesh by Christ Jesus. Jesus Christ bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness **(1Pet.2:24)**.

He became the propitiation (appeasement) for our sins by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate God's righteousness **(Rom 3:25)**. In this way, anyone who believes in Christ Jesus

and what He did for us on the cross becomes justified before God.

He becomes justified by faith apart from the deeds of the Law **(Rom 3:28).** Such a person has the righteousness of God imputed to him through faith in Christ Jesus **(Rom.3:22, Rom.4:11)** because in His forbearance God had passed over the *SINS THAT WERE PREVIOUSLY COMMITTED* **(Rom 3:25).** This is an internal work in the life of every believer.

3. WHAT IS GOD'S EXPECTATION CONCERNING THOSE TO WHOM GOD HAS IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS?

we have died to life

(A) WE, HAVING DIED TO SINS MUST LIVE FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

1Pet.2:24; 2Cor.5:14-15; Rom 6:1-6.

If a man dies immediately after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, he has God's righteousness imputed on him and is justified by his faith. He has eternal life and is qualified to enter heaven. But as long as a believer is still alive, God expects him to live righteously henceforth, in order to maintain his imputed righteousness. God ensures this, by equipping him with the power of the cross and of the Holy Spirit to overcome the flesh.

It was the flesh that rendered the law weak in achieving God's righteousness. But by the cross, the flesh has been crushed and its power over the believer broken. The imputed righteousness within our hearts must then be transferred outside to become our lifestyle **(1 Jn.2:29; 1Jn.3:7-10).**

He who has been justified by God without his personal righteousness must now justify God's decision by personally living righteously.

(b) FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD.

Jas.2:14-26; 1Jn.3:10; 16-22.

As long as we are alive, our faith must be put to work. Abraham believed God concerning His promise to give him children from his own loins that would be as numerous as the stars, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. **(Gen.15:4-6).**

In **Gen. 21**, Isaac was born according to promise. But in **Gen.22**, Abraham's faith in what God said had to be tested. He had to put his faith to action to prove that he was actually a believer. He lifted up the knife to slaughter his only son as a sacrifice to God, believing and concluding that God was able to raise him up from the dead (**Heb.11:17-19**). And so by this action, his faith was made perfect by his works.

In the same way, we also must make a foolproof of our faith in Christ by our works, even works of righteousness.

(c) Bring forth fruits of righteousness.

Rom.6:22; Matt.3:8-10 (KJV, LB); Phil. 1:11; Heb.12:11; Tit.3:5-8; Heb. 11:33.

There is a reason why God saved us and did not take us to heaven immediately but still kept us alive in this world. It is that we should produce fruits of righteousness while still here in the body. The work of righteousness within must produce fruit of righteousness without. By doing this, we prove that God's standard of righteousness is attainable for human beings if they allow God take control of their lives.

As soon as a man turns to Christ in faith for salvation, the power of his human nature (the human seed) is terminated and removed and the nature of Christ (God's seed) is planted in him **(Ezek. 36:26-27;1Jn.3:9)**.

That seed (God's own nature) is capable of growing into a fruit-producing tree of righteousness. Therefore God expects such a person to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance to prove that he has turned from sin. Saying that you are born

again and that you are now a child of God is not enough. There must be proof. You must stop sinning. There must of necessity be a character change and a change of lifestyle as you graciously allow the new seed to bring forth a new shoot.

Thereafter, from one stage of growth to another, your life will be filled with the fruits of righteousness, fruits that will bring glory and praise to God by Jesus Christ. Such good works coming out from our lives by Christ Jesus, show the species of life within us, whether Adamic or Christ's own species. 'For every tree is known by its own fruit' (**Lk.6:44**).

4. ". . . UNLESS YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS EXCEEDS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES . . ." (Matt.5:20).

A) Discuss what is meant by 'the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.' Matt.5:20-43; Lk.11:39-46.

The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees is that of the Law. They go to any extent to obey the Law to the letter outwardly, irrespective of the condition of their hearts internally. Yet God does not judge only actions but also the thoughts and intents of the heart **(Jer.17:9-10).**

For example the Pharisees ensure that they obey the law that says 'you shall not murder' yet they may be going about with anger in their hearts against a brother without a cause. As far as God is concerned, that is equal to murder and it carries the same sentence.

Another law says, **'You shall not commit adultery."** While the Pharisees obey this in action, they do not necessarily obey it in their thoughts. Men may burn lustfully in their hearts towards women but as long as they do not commit the act of adultery physically, they are excused by the law according to the Pharisees. But in God's sight, the two: lustful looks and (thoughts) and the act of adultery itself, are the same and they

both carry the same weight of judgment.

The scribes and Pharisees are known to be clean outside but filthy inside their hearts. They are very zealous to obey the law to minute details without paying attention to the justice and love of God. They are known to do their acts to be seen by men. They are therefore tagged **'hypocrites'** in the Bible.

Though the Law is good, God had to discard it because the hearts of men are so bad that the law could not bring them to God's righteousness. Christ is therefore the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. The righteous requirement of the law is being fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.

Beloved, examine your heart. Is your righteousness that of the scribes and the Pharisees? If you cling to external personal or church rules and regulations with no regard for the internal condition of the heart, then you cannot be interested in the righteousness of God. If you are, then you need to care about having a right standing with God and not just be concerned with what men say about you.

(b) How can our righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees?

Rom.8:1-4; Rom.6:6, 14; Jn.17:17; Rom.12:1-2; Matt.5:20-43; Matt.7:1-5; Gal.5:16-18, 22-23; Matt.23:23; Matt.12:1-8; Jn.8:2-11; Tit.2:11-12.

This cannot be achieved by struggling. All struggles must stop. There is a work of regeneration that must be done first of all by being born anew. It is this that gives rest from sin and personal struggles. Trusting in the work of Christ on the cross will deliver you from the yoke of sin and from the law of sin and death. The righteousness of Christ is imputed at that point.

Thereafter, your mind has to be renewed by a prayerful and regular study of the word of God followed carefully with

obedience. As you walk in the Spirit and by the word of God, the fruit of the Spirit which is also the fruit of righteousness will begin to manifest in abundance in you by the grace of God.

All who live in such a way live beyond the standard stipulated by the law. Therefore against such, there is no law. Sensitivity to the Holy Spirit and against sin develops inside such a life, such that he stops sinning not only in deed but in thoughts and in word.

He/she does not only stop committing the act of adultery or fornication but also stops looking lustfully at a woman (or man). He does not only stop committing murder but stops being angry. Such a person becomes harmless, watching against inflicting injury to people; but more than that, when injured, he refuses to revenge. He goes beyond loving his neighbour and hating his enemy. He loves even his enemies.

Such is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. It goes beyond the law of sin and death, beyond the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

5. "...YOU WILL, BY NO MEANS ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN." (MATT. 5:20).

✍ (A) **WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?**

Rom.3:20; Matt.23:23; Matt. 7:21-23.

✍ (b) **A GENUINE NEW BIRTH EXPERIENCE NOT FOLLOWED BY WORKS AND FRUITS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS MAY STILL CAUSE ONE TO MISS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.**

Lk.9:62; Jn.8:31-32; Matt.10:22; Rom.8:5-8; Rom.9:24-27.

To be righteous inside out is an important and necessary prerequisite for entering the kingdom of God. It is possible to be saved today and still miss it tomorrow. May God give you understanding on this matter.

CONCLUSION

We are saved by grace, not by works.

"By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God not of works lest anyone should boast." (Eph. 2:8-9).

Yes, just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead. It is by works that faith is made perfect.

Christ is our righteousness. His righteousness is imputed to us when we believe such that even if we die at that point, we go to heaven. But as long as we live, God expects our lives to bring forth and be full of fruits of righteousness. The internal work of righteousness done in us by Christ must bring forth external fruits of righteousness in our character and lifestyle. We must not keep on sinning and expect that grace should abound. Beyond that, our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees in life and conduct.

How is your life? Is there any difference between your character and that of an unbeliever, or between you and the scribes and Pharisees? God's standard remains sure. Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the Kingdom of heaven.

Personal Assessment Questions

☞ 1. What have been your struggles at meeting up with the righteous demand of holy living?

☞ 2. Have you truly experienced rest from sin and sinful habits and thoughts? Share your experience with us in some details.

☞ 3. Is there any area, where even as a born-again Christian, you are doing less than the righteousness of the Pharisees?

Point them out honestly and share with us your conviction and what steps you have taken to handle the situation.

☞ 4. How would you henceforth build upon the righteousness that comes to you by faith?

THE BELIEVERS' ACTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

INTRODUCTION

As an important part of the instructions given to the disciples by the Lord Jesus Christ on the Mount, we shall look closely at the believers' acts of righteousness.

In our last study, we saw that the matter of righteousness within and without is an important bedrock in the life of every believer. The righteousness imputed to us by the Lord Jesus must result in external fruits of righteousness in our lives.

Looking at a few examples of believers' acts of righteousness in this study and the Lord's instructions for us to make these acts acceptable to God, we plead with you to open your heart with meekness to receive the engrafted word. May the Lord enable you to act as well on these instructions in Jesus' Name, Amen.

1. 'BE CAREFUL NOT TO DO YOUR ACTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS BEFORE MEN . . .' Matt.6:1(NIV).

✍ (A) **IDENTIFY THE ACTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS STATED IN Matt.6:1-34.**

Are they optional for us as Christians? Explain.

Matt.6:1-2, 5, 16, 19; Heb. 13:16; 1Jn. 3:7.

It is clear from **Matt.6:1-34** that our acts of righteousness include giving, praying, forgiving, fasting, being of one focus, being loyal to one Master, and ensuring you do not worry

about your needs.

Matt.6:1 begins by saying **"Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men...."** This presupposes that it is certain that we shall do acts of righteousness. Secondly, note the word **'when'** in **Matt. 6:2, 5, 16.** That also means that each of these acts will certainly become our regular lifestyle.

Therefore the Lord gave us instructions on how to do it *WHEN* we do it. Otherwise the Scripture would have said **'If you give...'** or **'If you pray ...'** or **'If you fast ...'** if it is an uncertain act that depends on our personal choice. But it says **'when you give...;' 'when you pray...;' 'when you fast...'** Therefore none of these acts of righteousness is optional for any believer. It must become our lifestyle if it is not so already.

You must personally see to it that you cultivate these habits of giving, praying, fasting, forgiving, being always focused on the Lord and His will for your life, and refusing to worry about your needs.

(b) What attitude of heart does God want us to maintain as we do these 'acts of righteousness' in order that they might be acceptable in His sight?

Matt.5:16; Phil.2:13; Col.3:17,23-24; Matt.6:1; Phil.2:3; Jn.12:43; 1Cor.4:5, Lk.18:9,14.

Knowing that it is God that works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure, all the glory resulting from these acts must be given to the Lord. Learn not to ascribe God's glory to yourself. Let your light shine in such a way that men may glorify God, not you.

There is a way your light will shine and men will praise you and there is a way it will shine and men will praise God. Moreover, we must learn to do these acts as unto the Lord not to men. Even though men are mostly the receivers of our good deeds whenever we do them, we must always remember that it is to the Lord that we do them. He is the one

that will adequately reward us. Doing our good deeds as if to a man will shift our expectation to men for our reward. That is why if such people behave otherwise, we get disappointed and feel unappreciated. And what can a mortal man give you in exchange or as a reward for the eternal fruit of righteousness produced by your life?

Again loving the praise of men and so doing our acts of righteousness in order to be seen by men, robs us of our reward from God. Imagine giving a huge amount of money to someone for his needs or for the work of God with a secret craving for the praise of men. Such a desire sometimes makes the giver not to want to give secretly. He gives it in such a way that he might be seen and praised for doing so. And once human beings praise you for your good deed, that is the only reward you will get.

Does that describe the tendency of your heart when you give? What you lose by that is more precious than the praise of men you get. We must abide by Christ's principles in order for our works to be acceptable to and approved by God.

(c) Discuss the danger of doing these acts before men, to be seen by them.

Matt.6:1, 2, 5, 16; Heb.4:12; Jer.17:10.

Every act of righteousness done in God's own way is a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God and it attracts a good reward **(Phil.4:15-19; 1Cor.4:5).** God judges the act not by the act itself but by the motive of the heart behind the act. He searches the heart to know its intent and content.

If He discovers that the motive behind the act is to be seen by men, then you are disqualified from being rewarded by God no matter the magnitude of the act of righteousness and sacrifice. Whether men eventually see you doing the act or not, whether they praise you and clap for you for doing the act

or not, you have already received your reward. This applies to every act of righteousness including giving, praying, fasting, etc. Instead of receiving answer to prayer from God as a reward, once the motive is to be seen of men, He counts that as your reward.

What a great loss! Despite volumes of prayers and fasting, very few receive answer from heaven. Very few acts of giving are rewarded from above. May the Lord deliver us from evil tendencies and wasted efforts in Jesus' Name, Amen.

2. GIVING.

Discuss the requirements for God to accept our sacrifice and reward us when we give.

(A) RECONCILE WITH THOSE WHO HAVE A GRUDGE AGAINST YOU. Matt.5:23-24; Prov.15:8

When you are about to give an offering to the Lord (even if it is by giving it to someone else but as to the Lord), and at that moment you remember that you have offended someone, the Lord's instruction is clear on the matter. If you desire that your gift should be acceptable to God, first leave it at that point, go and reconcile with the person and then come and offer your gift. God cannot be blinded by offerings to overlook sin.

(b) '...DO NOT SOUND A TRUMPET BEFORE THEE...' Matt.6:2 (GNB, NIV).

i. In what ways do we sound a trumpet when we give?

What effect does a trumpet create on people around when it is sounded?

Sounding a trumpet while giving may be by announcing the amount to people or to another person, or by doing anything that could attract other people's attention to you while giving. These are little details of tendencies and motives we must watch in our acts lest our works be burnt on the last Day.

Normally when you sound a trumpet, people's attention is directed towards you and so it is possible for them to notice whatever you do and hear whatever you say. Once that is the desire behind your act, you already have your reward.

☞ *ii. What shall be your reward if you sound a trumpet before you when you give?* **(Matt.6:2)**

The attention of the people you get, with or without the praise of men is your reward no matter the magnitude of your giving. God has no other reward for you.

✍ **(c) What then should our attitude be when giving to the needy? Matt.6:3-4 (GNB); 2Cor.9:7.**

'So when you give something to a needy person, do not make a big show of it, as the hypocrites do in the houses of worship and on the streets. They do it so that people will praise them. I assure you, they have already been paid in full.

But when you help a needy person, do it in such a way that even your closest friend will not know about it. Then it will be a private matter. And your father who sees what you do in private, will reward you.' **(Matt.6:2-4. GNB)**

Give secretly, give privately, and give cheerfully. Then you will have your reward from God.

✍ **(d) How shall we be rewarded if we follow the Lord's instructions in giving? Prov.19:17; Matt.6:20.**

The reward is both here on earth and there in heaven. God does not forget such a labor of love.

3. PRAYER

Discuss the attitude of heart we must avoid or maintain in the place of prayer if our prayer must be rewarded as seen in the following Scriptures: **Matt.6:5-8, Jn.12:43**

✍ (a) "...They love to pray standing in the synagogues and in corners of streets that they may be seen of men." (Matt 6:5)

What does that mean? Discuss practically how it applies to us as Christians. Should we never pray in public?

Avoid yielding to the desire for the praise of men. Once that desire is there, it will motivate you to pray in such a way and in such a place that men may see you. It hinders prayers from being answered.

✍ (b) "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet ..." **Matt 6:6.**

How do we ensure this each time we pray?

This could be a physical closet (room) into which we need to enter and lock up so as to avoid distractions and being seen by men. Here the Lord encourages personal prayers to be made in secret.

Moreover, entering into our closet when we want to pray also means closing the door of our hearts (the internal closet) against all wandering thoughts; and then focusing our attention only on the Lord. This makes our prayers secret and personal. When we ensure secrecy in prayer, God will reward us openly. The answer to such prayers is not in secret. Men will see it and glorify God on our behalf (**Matt.6:1**).

✍ (c) "...Use not vain repetition." **Matt.6:7-8**

☞ *i. What does that mean? Give examples of such that you know.*

Compare this with **Lk.18:1-7.**

What is the difference? Avoid saying the same words repeatedly to God in making the same request during the same prayer session as if to ensure that God hears it properly. God's ear is not dull that he cannot hear (**Isa. 59:1**). Your Father knows that you need these things even before you ask him.

Secondly, Prayer is not a magical chant; so we do not need

to keep repeating some phrases in the place of prayer as if that is what forces the answer to come; like the heathen do.

The prayer in **Lk.18:1-7** is importunate (persistent, constant) prayer. The widow kept going to the judge until she got the justice she was looking for. She went the first time but got no answer; she went again another time and then another time, and persisted until the answer came. It teaches us not to stop going to God in prayer over our request until the answer comes. That is different from using vain repetitions over a matter in the same moment of prayer. Such vain repetitions only indicates unbelief. Avoid them.

☞ *ii. How do we avoid 'vain repetitions' in the place of prayer?*

Eccl.5:1-2; Lk.22:44; Jas.5:17; Heb.11:6.

God is. He is ever present wherever you are and whenever you pray. He that made the ears can surely hear. Even before you speak, He already knows what you want to make request for. He only gives us the privilege of being responsible to ask for what we need by ourselves. So fear God. Have faith in God and in His goodness towards the children of men.

When you come before God, you do not need to speak rashly. Speak thoughtfully, seriously, and sincerely (earnestly) to God in prayers and believe that He has heard you. The Lord is faithful. He answers prayers.

✍ d) Forgive so that God will also forgive you your sins and answer your prayers.

Matt.6:12; 14-15; Matt.18:22-35; Isa.59:1-2.

Sin hinders prayers. But God is gracious. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness whenever we confess our sins to him and turn away from it. No matter the magnitude of our sins, He forgives. Once forgiven, our prayers get ready answers. But having been forgiven, if you refuse to forgive those who

offend you, God will call back your sins against you and instead of you receiving answers to your prayers, He will hand you over to **'tormentors'. (Matt.18:34)**.

An unforgiving heart is a hard heart **(Matt.19:8)** and a dangerous heart. It is sin and it hinders prayers. No matter what offence another person commits against you, forgive him/her. If you are willing to forgive but think that you lack the ability to do so, pray for grace. The Lord will grant you the grace to forgive.

4. FASTING

✍ Discuss the acceptable attitude we must maintain in fasting. Matt.6:16-18.

In what ways can we possibly appear to men to show that we are fasting? **Isa.58:5; Matt.6:16.**

Fasting is a godly spiritual exercise that helps us to humble ourselves before God and concentrate on Him in the place of prayer. Therefore, God demands secrecy whenever we fast if it will be acceptable before Him and attract a reward. It must not show on our face and even in our dressing.

Our appearance must not be so different from our normal appearance that men will easily suspect by our appearance that we are fasting. That is the instruction from the Lord Jesus Christ. As you maintain secrecy in fasting, God will reward you openly.

5. HANDLING OUR TREASURES

✍ Study Matt.6:19 from different Bible versions:

NKJV: *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal."*

NIV: *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,*

where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal."

GNB: "Do not store up riches for yourselves here on earth, where moths and rust destroy, and robbers break in and steal."

AMP: "Do not gather and heap up and store for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust and worm consume and destroy, and where thieves break through and steal."

✍ (A) WHAT TREASURES CAN WE POSSIBLY STORE ON EARTH FOR OURSELVES AND HOW? Matt.6:2, 5, 16; Lk.12:15-21

Such treasures could be money, educational certificates and career, position, power, fame, children, houses, clothes, jewelries, food, etc. Anything we value more than another, anything we would not easily want to part ways with, is a treasure.

There is a natural human tendency to keep such treasures for ourselves. For instance, keeping money for ourselves, attaining a position of authority for our own gain and in order to achieve our own purpose, keeping and training our children for our own gain and purpose and to fulfil our own ambition etc. Can you identify the treasures you have been keeping for yourself at this point?

✍ (b) "LAY NOT UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES UPON EARTH..." (Matt.6:19).

Explain the implication of the **"for yourselves"** phrase in our lives as Christians. **1Cor 4:7; Lk.12:21, 32-36; Deut.8:18.**

It is the Lord that gives us ability to get wealth. Whatever wealth comes our way, whether money, power, children etc., we must remember the Lord who is the Source of them all. Release those treasures back to the Lord and let Him lead you in the way He wants them used. Don't store them FOR YOURSELVES as we previously explained.

Fear God. He can require your soul from you without notice, earlier than you expect. He can command moth and rust, and thieves and devourers to come upon that wealth you are storing for yourself. Learn to give. First give yourself over to God and then hand over your treasures to Him. Remove your heart from them. Give to the needy. By so doing, you will be storing these treasures in heaven and God will ensure their safekeeping in the stores of heaven for you.

✍ (c) Discuss the danger of storing up treasures for yourself on earth. Share your experience with us on this. Matt.6:16-21; Prov.11:4.

There is the danger of moth, rust, thieves, devourers etc. destroying and taking your treasures away from you without your consent. And in case of your children, wife, husband etc. being the treasures you are storing here on earth for yourself, sickness and death can take them away without your permission.

There is also the danger of death taking you away from these treasures when you are not prepared for it. God is in full control of His earth and He has power to decide and do what He wants to do with us when we are not living to please Him and when we are not willing to let go.

Moreover, there is the danger of these treasures diverting, stealing, and capturing our hearts from the Lord to them. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. And in that case, we cannot possibly do what pleases the Lord with our lives.

✍ (d) Discuss practical ways we can store up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

1Cor.4:2; 1Tim.6:17-19; Lk.12:32-34.

We are stewards of those treasures we have and without a doubt, we shall give an account of all these things to God. Let

us learn to remove our trust from these treasures. It is because we somehow trust in them to produce some gain (benefit) for us, that they become treasures to us. It is because we trust in our money to rescue us in times of financial need, trust in our children to do us proud and become a future security for us especially in our old age that makes them to be treasures that we keep for ourselves.

Only God must be our treasure. Nothing in this world is good enough and stable enough to be a treasure. Hand over these treasures to God and remove your heart from them. Give freely. Be rich in good works.

Even if you keep money in the bank, free your mind from it and let God lead you in the way He wants it spent. Hand it over to God. Out of it He may supply your needs or He may choose to supply through other means. All that matters is that your needs are supplied.

By so doing, you will free your heart from the hold of these treasures. You will be able to focus on the Lord and serve Him without distraction.

Examine your heart. What are your treasures? Identify them one by one. Humbly hand them over to the Lord this moment and free your heart from their grip. Let the Lord sit on the throne of your heart. You will then discover treasures that you have never experienced in the Lord before.

6. DO NOT WORRY (OR BE TROUBLED) ABOUT ANYTHING

(a) What are the things we normally worry about? Matt.6:25.

What to eat, drink, wear, where to lay our heads etc. are the major objects of human worry. Share your experience in regard to these sources of worry.

Even when we worry about our children, husband, wife, etc., at the bottom of our worry are these things either for now or for the future.

(b) What is God's purpose for our existence as Christians if we must not run after these things as others do? Lk.12:7, 23; Matt.5:13-16; Ps.115:16.

We are of a great value to the Lord. As He is so are we in this world. We are His representatives here on earth. Our bodies are the temple of the Lord. We are individually and corporately His house where He dwells. He has no other physical hands or legs here on earth but our hands and legs. We are of more value to him than anything else in all of creation. Our bodies are more important to him than for us to be employing them solely to look for food or clothes.

He needs our bodies to achieve His purpose; will He therefore not care for our bodies? Whatever makes us think that God is not very interested in taking care of our bodies must be the devil. He therefore deceives and makes us to run around to fend for ourselves as if God only cares for our spirits without an interest or arrangement to sustain our bodies.

You must allow God to change your way of thinking and stop diverting God's tool (your life and body) for the purpose it was not meant for.

"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" **(Matt. 6:33 KJV).**

(c) What can we achieve by worrying? Lk.12:25-26; Jn.15:5.

What is your experience in this?

There is nothing good that we can accomplish by worrying. Rather, worry causes us to make mistakes and take wrong and costly decisions. It causes tension and when tension multiplies,

it leads to hypertension. When you realize that we can achieve nothing without the Lord, then you shall learn to relax and leave all matters in His able hands.

(d) How then should we handle our needs?

Lk.12:22-30; Phil.4:6-7(KJV, LB).

'Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God your needs and don't forget to thank Him for his answers. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than human mind can understand. His peace will keep your thoughts and your hearts quiet and rest as you trust in Christ Jesus.' **(Phil.4:6 LB)**

Let nothing divert your focus from God, not even your spiritual needs. It is only then you can serve God acceptably and without distraction.

CONCLUSION

Righteous acts are not optional for any Christian.

"Little children, let no man deceive you: he who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous." **(Jn.3:7)**

None of these acts of righteousness has power on its own to save any man; for we are saved by grace through faith, not of works lest any man should boast. Yet the internal work of grace done at salvation must become external acts of righteousness in order for our faith to be made perfect.

Furthermore, every act of righteousness that we do attracts a reward from God if done the right way as the Lord commands us in the Bible. They constitute treasures stored up for us in heaven.

Have you got any treasure stored up in heaven yet? How

have you been carrying out your good works? What is your motive for doing these things? You know the inner tendencies of your heart.

Examine your heart and allow the word of God to correct you this very hour. Watch your life and your ways lest at the end you watch in dismay all your works burn to ashes and your race be in vain. Take heed! Watch! Our Rewarder is coming.

Personal Assessment Questions

☞ 1. *Share intimately with us which of these various acts of righteousness you do regularly and which ones you do omit. And how have you practiced them?*

☞ 2. *In which way has this study challenged and instructed you regarding these acts?*

☞ 2. *How do you normally conduct your prayer time (or quiet time)?*

☞ *What difficulties have you been experiencing?*

☞ 3. *What further questions would you want to ask about giving and keeping treasures?*

CHAPTER 15

NECESSARY INSTRUCTIONS FOR KINGDOM LIVING

INTRODUCTION

As part of the way of life in the Kingdom of God, our Lord Jesus Christ gave clear definite instructions to His disciples and to those of us afar off who believe in Him and follow Him. Anyone who desires to please God and stand the storms of life must pay close attention to these sayings. Disregarding them will only make a man to become a fool at the end.

As you go through this study therefore, we plead with you to be sober and receive with meekness the engrafted word of God. May the Lord grant you understanding in Jesus' Name, Amen.

YOU MUST NOT SERVE MONEY (MAMMON)

MAIN TEXT: MATT 6:19-21, 24

1.Discuss what you understand by money. Matt.6:19, 21, 24; Prov.10:2, 22; Mk 4:19; Eccl.7:12; Eccl.10:19; Prov.27:24; Isa.55:1; 1Tim.6:10.

Money is a man-made acceptable way of storing treasures and wealth here on earth. Therefore it is regarded as a treasure. It naturally gives an impression of being able to do all things and can thus easily enslave a man and capture his

loyalty. Yet it is clear that there are many things money cannot do.

Read **Eccl.10:19** from different versions:

KJV: "A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes merry; but money answers everything."

NIV: "A feast is made for laughter and wine makes life merry, but money is the answer for everything."

GNB: "Feasting makes you happy and wine cheers you up, but you can't have either without money."

That Scripture *DOES NOT* say **'money is the answer for everything in life.'** Money is the answer only for making a feast and buying wine, it has no answer for many things we need in life. Yet when money comes, it normally comes with a kind of pseudo - relief and false confidence as if you can now get everything you need with it. This is a deceit which the Bible rightly, calls **"the deceitfulness of riches." (Matt.13:22).** If others are deceived by it, you must not.

Money cannot buy peace of mind; it cannot buy sleep. It cannot buy you life. It only deceives. It has a limit to which it can help and that, only by the grace of God. More than that, there are many things you can buy even without money.

For example, the salvation of your soul, righteousness in life, divine revelation of God's word, the power of the Holy Spirit, etc. cannot be bought with money **(Isa. 55:1-3, Rev. 3: 17 -18).** You must enlarge your understanding and refuse to be deceived by the fake power that money carries and offers.

There is a god, the power behind money. He is the prince of this world who is no other than Satan, the devil. Silver and gold belong to God. Money is one of those things that God normally gives His people to enjoy. God made it for man; He did not make man for it. But when it is given an undue power and regard, the devil works through it to deceive.

Money is a kind of master and it enslaves. It entices men to long for it and deceitfully steals their hearts and affections from God. Thus, men may be religious and even **'born again'** while the love of money has captured their hearts. They pursue money and give God a second place in their lives. By longing to have money, many have wandered away from God in their faith and devotion to God, their choice of where to serve God, what kind of ministry to embark upon, etc.

To allow money and material possession priority of attention and devotion in your life is to be an idolater. Money must not be your master. The love of money is the root of every evil. It does not make any man rich. As money increases, so also the mouths that will consume it increase. It will grow wings and fly away and leave you poor and empty on the day of reckoning.

With all its pseudo power and flamboyance, money is temporary, not eternal. It is only the blessing of the Lord that makes a man rich without any sorrow added to it. That is the right thing to pursue. All other things that you need (including money) shall be added to you.

2. IN WHAT WAYS DO WE ALLOW MONEY TO REPLACE GOD IN OUR LIVES?

Matt 6:19, 21, 24, 25, 31; Eccl.5:10-12.

When you attach importance to money and it becomes a treasure to you, it conveniently competes with God in your life. When you store money here on earth as a treasure and you are not rich towards God, money is gradually becoming your master.

Trying to satisfy the desires of the flesh by allowing the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life take root in your life is a sure way of allowing money to creep into the position God occupies in your life. Thinking and worrying

about what you do not have, depending less on God and more on money, giving money and the search for money the priority of your attention and time etc. are all signs that money and material things are beginning to replace God in your life. It normally creeps in craftily and stealthily with passion.

Watch out! Is your search for money not beginning to creep into the space for your **'Quiet Time'** with God? Is the desire to have and buy whatever appeals to you not pushing you to pursue money at the expense of His will for your life? Does your crave for money and material possession not wake you up early and keep you late at night?

Sometimes money may come with the deception that if you pursue it a little more, you can have something with which to serve God, as if it is your money that God is looking for! Watch out!

This matter demands prayerfulness so as not to enter into its grip. The love of money is the root of every evil, and the life of a man does not depend on the abundance of the things he possesses.

3. GIVE EXAMPLES OF WHAT MONEY CANNOT DO FOR US.

Matt.6:27; Eph. 2:8-9; Mk 10:23; Acts 8:18-20; Prov.11:4; Eccl.5:10-12 (GNB); Heb. 10:8.

You will discover from these Scriptures that there are many things money cannot do for us in this life and these are things we often need very much. Money cannot increase our height or physical stature in life. Riches do no good on the Day of Judgment. It cannot buy us the kingdom of God or our salvation. There is no gift of God that money can buy. It cannot buy you sleep but can actually remove sleep from your eyes.

Money has no ability to give peace and lasting satisfaction in life. Therefore, if only in this world we have hope, we are of all men most miserable.

4. HOW CAN WE OVERCOME MONEY IN ORDER TO SERVE GOD WITH ALL OUR HEART, MIND, AND STRENGTH?

1Jn.5:4; Matt.6:24; Ps.23:6; Prov.23:4; Heb. 11:26; Matt.6:25-33; 1Jn.2:15-17; 1Tim.6:6-8; 1Cor.15:33.

Money is a strong god that does not readily release its captives. In order to overcome it and be free from its grip, the first thing is not to be unbelieving. Be a believer in the kindness and faithfulness of God. The Lord is not wicked. He knows all our needs and is willing to lavish His possessions on all those who focus their lives and love on Him.

Look deeply into your heart. What do you give high value to? What do you treasure most? Whatever you are willing to lose other things for, is your treasure. If you discover that you push your communion and walk with God away in order to pursue a career or business, then God is not your treasure yet. You need to cry to God for help because money will soon disappoint you.

God's plan is that if we focus our lives on knowing the Lord and following Him as our Shepherd, then surely, goodness and mercy shall follow us not for one year nor five, but all the days of our lives. If we pursue God, money and the good things of life will pursue us. But if we reverse the order and pursue riches, then money will turn and run from us.

Even if those who do not know the Lord do this, we must not. When Solomon asked for wisdom, God did not only give him wisdom but riches and honour in addition, because he asked for the right thing.

Let the Lord be your pursuit. Even if things look difficult at first, God will prove Himself faithful.

Monthly Prestudy
26/06/21

DO NOT JUDGE

1. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO JUDGE ANOTHER PERSON?

Dictionary meaning: - To judge means to assess somebody or something in order to estimate its value; to assess somebody's good and bad qualities in order criticize and form an opinion about him. Look at Matt 7:1-2 from different versions:

KJV: "Judge not, that you be not judged, for with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will measured back to you."

GNB: "Do not judge others, so that God will not judge you, for God will judge you in the same way as you judge others, and he will apply to you the same rules you apply to others."

LB: "Don't criticize, and then you won't be criticized, For others will treat you as you treat them."

The way you judge others depends on the accuracy of your own estimate of their character. It therefore involves looking down on another person. Whatever is found or seen in the life of the person in question forms the basis of that judgment. Judging others may or may not be verbalized but your attitude will normally show it.

2. (A) IN WHAT WAYS DO WE JUDGE OTHERS?

Discuss practically.

Rom.14:1-3; Matt.7:3; Lk.18:9-13; Rom.11:1-3; Jn.12:3-8.

Some judge people because of their weakness in exercising their faith, or because of one sin or the other in their lives. It may also be because in our own estimate, we believe that we

are spiritually better than the other person, we judge and criticize him.

Sometimes we judge people's prayer life by the tone of their prayers, their appearance, fasting, and activities or even by the kind of fellowship they attend. Even when we pray for a particular person, we may find ourselves criticizing and judging him. We often forget that God is the only one who knows the right worth of each person because He sees into the heart and discerns the intent of every man's heart. He does not use the outward appearance or behaviour alone to assess us. While you are criticizing or complaining against a brother, God may be commending him.

Look at the case in **Jn.12:3-8**. Judas Iscariot judged Mary's action as a waste and a wrong way to serve God whereas Jesus commended her. We are likely to be wrong in our estimate of others and so sin against God. Also, the measure we use in judging others will be the same measure used to mete out judgment back unto us. So the Lord instructs **'Judge not.'**

Do you find yourself often criticizing others? Do you sometimes see yourself better than others? It is a fearful thing to note that the same measure of judgment awaits you. There is need to repent straightaway.

(b) Does it mean we should not judge others at all? Explain. 1Cor. 5:12-13; 1Cor.4:3-5; 1Cor.6:1-6.

Looking at the Scriptures, we are allowed to judge others especially in indisputable matters that have definite biblical positions and scriptural instructions on how to handle them.

For example, proven cases of immorality among the brethren or settling issues of disputes among the brethren. When we do this, we are only being scriptural, rather than condemning them.

While looking at any such case, we must fear God and do it

Moreover, when a tiny mote is found in the eye of a leader, it appears in the spirit as a beam. The size of the beam increases as your leadership responsibility increases. Leadership multiplies the mote. If a little sin is allowed in the life of the leader, the privileges of leadership covers it until it grows out of hand.

In practical terms, when a particular sin is found in the life of an ordinary church member, it is regarded as a mote. But if the same sin is found in a leader's life, it becomes a beam even in the estimate of others and it hinders effectiveness in ministry. It hinders us in God's presence and hinders the sharpness of our insight into God's word and into other people's lives.

What to do in order to CLEARLY see and effectively remove the mote in our brother's eye is to FIRST remove the beam in our own eye. This is a kingdom life principle that we must individually cultivate and make our lifestyle if we will last in the kingdom.

DO NOT GIVE UNTO DOGS WHAT IS SACRED (HOLY)

1. GIVE EXAMPLES OF 'SACRED THINGS' AND 'SPIRITUAL PEARLS.'

Lev.23:2; 1Cor.3:17; Rom.7:12; 2Tim.1:9; Matt.13:45-46; Mk.8:35-37; Prov.4:7; 2Pet.1:4; 1Cor.6:15, 20; Prov.3:13-15; 1Pet.1:7; Phil.3:7-9; Ps.19:7-11; Ps.119:103-105,130.

God's holy feasts, the gathering of His people, your body, your calling, your soul, the revelation of the word of God, the wisdom of God given to us, the kingdom of God, the promises of God, your faith in Christ, the knowledge of Christ revealed to you, are all examples of sacred things and our pearls that we must not give unto dogs and swine.

They are precious and holy, meant only for the children of the kingdom. Several of these sacred things were procured for us by the death and shedding of the blood of the Son of God.

2. DISCUSS PRACTICAL WAYS IN WHICH A CHRISTIAN GIVES SACRED THINGS TO DOGS AND THROWS HIS PEARLS TO PIGS.

1Cor.6:16; 2Cor.6:14-16; Ezra 4:1-3; 2Cor.2:17; 1Tim.6:5,9-10; Rom.2:24-25; Heb. 10:26-29,35.

When you offer your body for immorality, or you disobey God by yoking yourself with an unbeliever whether in marriage, business or in any other way, you are toying with a pearl. You are offering your sacred things to dogs.

When you allow unbelievers to participate in cash or kind or in person in funding or laboring with you in the work of God, it is regarded as casting precious pearls before swine.

Walking and working spiritual works with people even Christians who suppose that godliness is a means of gain, God counts it as throwing your sacred things to dogs.

It is because we do not heed this holy injunction that unbelievers poke fun at "speaking in tongues" and create comedy with Church principles. We took our pearls out to them by singing our choruses at the football stadium and speaking in tongues into our recorded music albums.

Sometimes these steps are taken, either ignorantly or deliberately, due to one pressure or the other. Yet that will not excuse you or deliver you from the trouble that follows such actions: the dogs and the swine will trample your holy things and your pearls, then turn and attack you.

They will first make them worthless and undesirable to your heart. What you have been regarding highly as a treasure will be devalued and rendered useless before your very eyes even by what they say about it. Not only that, they will turn and tear

you into pieces. You will not be able to escape their paws.

Look into your life. How do you use your God given body? How do you handle your pearls? How do you handle the revelation of God's word graciously given to you by the Holy Spirit? What about the way you handle the funding of the work of God in your hands? Do you involve unbelievers?

God will not only hold you responsible for your stewardship in all these things but you stand the danger of losing your pearls and being torn into pieces by **'dogs'** and **'swine..'**

There is need to watch our lives and be careful not to carelessly destroy what we have spiritually been building for years just **"for a 'spoon of pottage' or 'for the pleasure of sin for a season.""' (Heb.12:16; Heb.11:25)**

3. WHAT DO DOGS SIGNIFY IN SCRIPTURES?

Deut. 23:18; Mk.7:27; Phil 3:2; Rev.22:14-15; Lev.11:7-8; 2Pet.2:20-22; Isa.56:10-11.

Dogs and pigs were regarded as unclean animals in the Old Testament. They were an abomination to the Lord. In a figurative sense, the Lord Jesus used **'dogs'** to describe unbelievers and people outside the kingdom of God. They are regarded as evil doers, full of sin and wickedness. And **'swine'** *(Pigs)* are regarded as the disobedient, backslidden Christians who were washed and cleansed but have returned to wallow again in sin. Though they may look gentle and religious outwardly, they are enemies inside.

Your must watch your relationship with such people and guard your holy things and your pearls from them jealously.

4. IN WHAT WAYS CAN WE THEN KEEP SACRED THINGS FROM DOGS AND OUR PEARLS FROM SWINE?

Discuss practically. Ezra 4:1-3, 23-24; Mk.7:27; 1Kg.21:1-15; Gen. 14:21-24.

Heavenly things are precious. Spiritual things are treasures that money cannot buy. They are eternal. They are pearls of a great price and the enemy knows this. It cost Jesus Christ the shedding of His blood on the cross to give us access to these things.

You must deliberately refuse to sell your birthright for a spoon of pottage no matter the pressure of your need: need for friendship and associates, need for a marriage partner, financial support, or material things must push you to exchange your pearl or give out your holy things to dogs.

Naboth resisted this to the point of shedding his blood. Zerubbabel refused it to the point that the enemy fought the work of God in his hands until it could no longer be continued. Yet these men did not compromise God's requirement. Whatever it will cost, we must resist all such temptations and the Lord will fight for us as He did for these men of old.

CONCLUSION

"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;

Moreover by them is Thy servant is warned; and in keeping them there is great reward." (Ps. 19:7, 11)

Have you received any instruction or correction from God's word in this study? What have you received? Any warning?

This is the right time to correct your life while you are still looking into the mirror of God's word. Do it urgently, do it sincerely, do it without procrastination. When the flood, the rain, and the storms of life come in future, then you will be regarded as a wise man who built his house upon a rock.

May that be your testimony in Jesus' name, Amen.

Personal Assessment Questions

☞ 1. "You cannot serve God and mammon" is a clear unmistakable word from our LORD... What are you doing to free your heart from the grip of money?

☞ How have you sincerely handled the monies that passed through your hands in times past?

☞ 2. What other treasure do you treasure apart from money?

☞ How have you overcome the desire to acquire things and keep a full store?

☞ (Think of things that you love to acquire and keep, even if they are not immediately useful and share with us your experience in this).

☞ 3. In what areas has the judgmental spirit manifested in your life?

☞ What were your reasons?

☞ What steps have you taken (after this study) to see men as God sees them?

☞ 4. What struck you personally, as you looked at the issue of "not giving your holy things to dogs"? Discuss with us when it happened personally to you.

☞ How would you labour to preserve the sacred things God has committed to your care henceforth?

CHAPTER 16

FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS FOR KINGDOM LIVING

INTRODUCTION

This is a continuation of the series of instructions for holy and godly living in the kingdom of God as taught by the Lord on the mount. It cannot be over emphasized that every child of the kingdom must pay close attention to these instructions and cultivate this attitude and lifestyle of the kingdom. If we must please God and possess our kingdom possessions, now is the time to cry to God in prayer and work on our lives and character until we become conformed to Christ's lifestyle.

May the Lord grant you an understanding heart as you study on.

ASK, SEEK, KNOCK.

MAIN TEXT: MATT.7:7-11.

1. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO 'ASK', 'SEEK', AND 'KNOCK'? Matt.21:22; Phil.4:6; Ps.27:4; Matt.13:44-46; Lk.15:8; Rev.3:20.

In order to get our needs met as children of the kingdom, the instruction is **'ask'**, **'seek'**, and **'knock'**. Nothing happens except in answer to your asking, seeking, and knocking in

prayer. To neglect this instruction is to suffer unnecessary lack and eventually fail to accomplish God's call on our lives.

Even though God knows our needs, He has given us the privilege to ask, seek, and knock for them to be granted us. We have a part to play and God has a part to play too in this.

When we play our part by 'asking', God plays His part by granting our request so that we can receive it. When we 'seek', God plays His part by showing us what we are looking for so that we can find it. And when we 'knock', God plays His part by opening the door so that we can enter in.

Asking involves making a definite request while seeking involves a strong desire for something, leading us to a definite search for it. It is clear that we only search for things that are precious, things that WE REGARD as treasures. When something is not a treasure, you do not bother to get it. Even if you have it and it eventually gets lost, you will not have an inner urge to search for it.

Therefore, before we can truly 'seek' for something, it must become a treasure to us. We may even be willing to sell all that we have to get it. Seeking is also involved when we lose a treasure, in order to find it. Furthermore, we only knock when we have a desire to have something which has been kept behind locked doors.

Precious things are normally kept behind locked doors. They are not found outside or on the surface. Knocking alerts the one inside to open the door so that we may enter in and get what we need.

2. DISCUSS THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS INSTRUCTION ON OUR LIVES AND OUR OPERATIONS IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

Jn.15:4-5; Isa.45:15; Col.2:3; Prov.25:2; Ps. 24:7; Ps.62:8; Ps.78:23-24; Rev.3:7-8; Lk.11:5-8.

We are made to depend on God, not to be independent. You are a co-laborer with God over your life and your operations in the kingdom. It is therefore necessary to understand this and abide by His instructions.

The Lord delights in hiding Himself; and His treasures are hidden in Him. That is one of the things He does in order for Him to be glorified as God. If you do not know how to 'seek' for the Lord and search for Him with all your heart, you may not find Him or know Him. His knowledge comes to us only by **'seeking'**.

The treasures of the Lord are kept under lock and key and He is the only one that holds the key. There is no duplicate kept elsewhere. There is need for us to knock in order for the door to be opened, and to seek for what we need in order to find it. All this is done in the place of prayer. Our needs whether spiritual or physical, personal needs or needs that confront us in fulfilling our call, will only be met as we learn to ask, seek, or knock.

3. DISCUSS THE VARIOUS EXAMPLES OF:

✍ (A) WHAT TO ASK FOR. WHY?

Jn. 15:7; Matt.7:9-11; Ps.2:8; Lk.11:13; Jas 1:5; Jas.4:2; Jn.3:27; Jer.6:16.

Whatsoever we need for life and for kingdom service falls under this instruction. The food we need for our physical sustenance, the souls in the nations to win for Jesus, the Holy Spirit, wisdom, the way and the path to walk in, etc. are all what to ask for. Without asking, there shall be no receiving.

A man can receive nothing unless it is given to him from heaven. Wishful thinking, strong desire to have, and fighting to have, are not the same as 'asking.' Until you ask, you have not asked. Ask, and it shall be given you.

What have you identified as your needs? Whether spiritual or physical, ask. Stop wishing; stop envying. The Lord is thinking about you and is zealously driving away 'dogs' from the 'bread' He has been keeping for you **(Mk.7:27)**. He is only waiting for you to ask. He that made your body, will He not provide the food needed to sustain it? He that gave you a call, will He not provide what you need to fulfill it? Be not unbelieving, says the Lord. Ask.

(b) Treasures to seek after. Why?

Isa.55:6; Prov.8:17; Ps.34:14; Prov.2:1-7; Jer.5:1; Jn.5:39; Matt.6:33; Col.3:1; Heb.4:16; 1Cor.2:7-9

The Lord is the first and only object of our search. All other things are secondary and are only necessary because they will help us in finding the Lord. Peace is not found on the surface. It is not easy to get. It must be deliberately sought after, whether peace with God or with men.

Revelation from God's word, the wisdom of God, the kingdom of God, things that are above (heavenly things), the grace of God, etc. are all normally hidden. God deliberately hides them away probably so that careless people and 'dogs' will not easily come by them. It is an honour for us to seek the Lord and His treasures diligently with all our hearts. He that seeks finds.

c. Doors to knock. Why?

Jn.10:1-2,9; Rev.3:7; Hos.2:15; 2Cor.2:12; Col.4:3; Ps.78:23-28; Ps.24:7; Ps.118:19-20; Ps.119:18; 2Cor.3:15-16.

The Lord owns the sheep. Christians are the sheep of His pasture and He keeps us secured in His pavilion under lock and

key. If you desire to serve the Lord among His people, you must knock in prayer before the door of ministry will be opened to you.

Even all nations are under His authority. He is the One who has the keys of David, who opens and no one shuts, who shuts and no one opens. If you knock, He can open doors of ministry to you among nations to bring them into the kingdom. Such was the experience of Paul with the Lord. The door of utterance and the door of faith are all doors to be knocked upon in order for them to be opened.

There are other doors that must be entered through knocking in order to receive what God has kept in store for our personal lives. These include door of righteousness and the door of our spiritual eyes in order to gain insight into the word of God.

The man who knocks is the one that will make definite progress both in life and in ministry. Knock and the door will be opened to you, says the Lord.

God has reasons for instructing us to ask, seek, and knock. To get things done here on earth and to live a normal, progressive, fulfilling Christian life, these **'spiritual buttons'** must be pressed as often as necessary. This is an important part of kingdom lifestyle.

May you not be presumptuous in Jesus' Name, Amen.

'THE GATE'...AND 'THE WAY'

MAIN TEXT: MATT.7:13-14.

1 (A) DISCUSS WHAT YOU UNDERSTAND BY 'THE GATE' IN THESE SCRIPTURES.

Matt.7:13-14; Ps.9:13-14; Ps.118:19; Gen.28:17; Isa.45:1.

What is the implication of this 'gate' in the life of a Christian?

A gate is a barrier that can be opened or shut, which forms an entry point into somewhere and an outlet out of it. It is like a check-point to control movement in and out of a place. There is the gate of righteousness, the gate of heaven, the gate of Zion, the gate into the call of God on your life, and the gate of death.

From **Matt.7:13-14,** there are two gates that can be identified; the gate that forms an entry point into destruction and the gate which leads into life. No one can enter into any of these unless he passes through a gate, in which case entry into any of the gates is by choice and not by chance.

Each gate leads to a completely different destination. Each person must therefore be careful to note the description of each of the two gates so as to make the right choice. Even if unbelievers make a wrong choice due to the blindness of their hearts and ignorance, a Christian should not.

(b) DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN THE TWO 'GATES' MENTIONED IN Matt.7:13-14

(Read from different Bible versions).

What did you discover to be God's expectation for us if we will enter into any aspect of Christian experience?

NKJV: "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.' **(Matt.7:13-14)**

GNB: "Go in through the narrow gate, because the gate to hell is wide and the road that leads to it is easy, and there are many who travel it. But the gate to life is narrow and the way that leads to it is hard, and there are few people who find it."

LB: "Heaven can be entered only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide enough for all the multitudes who choose its easy way. But the Gateway to life is small and the road is narrow, and only a few ever find it."

The gate that leads to life is described as narrow and small. Only a few find it. It is so small to the eyes and human desire that it is difficult to find. If you do not look for it deliberately, you will not easily find it.

However, the gate that leads to destruction is described as wide or broad. It is so broad that it is said to be wide enough for all the multitudes that choose its easy way. And many there are who go in by that way. It is not difficult at all to enter in there. It is the commonest and easiest choice of majority of people.

God expects each one of His children to choose the narrow gate if we desire to enter into life. It is the entry point into anything pertaining to life and godliness. It is the right gate to a life that pleases God; it is the gate to the proper fulfillment of God's call on our lives if we would not be counted to have run in vain at the end.

The narrow gate is the one that leads to a lasting breakthrough in life, and it is the one that leads to eternal life.

Each time we are confronted with a decision to make whether big or small, it is as if the two gates stand before us and we must make a choice. If you decide to go *'the way people do it'* or the way that appeals to the senses, the *'easy to find'* way, that is the wide gate you are entering and it will surely lead you to destruction sooner or later.

But if you decide not to be hasty but you consult the Lord and His word, making your decision according to the will of God, you are entering through the narrow gate. Though it looks difficult to find and seems to make you sluggish in making decisions, it will surely lead you to life and lasting peace. Because of its nature and the difficulty in finding it, only very few choose to pass through it.

How do you make your decisions? Are you hasty in your thought processes, thereby rushing to make decisions? Do you follow popular opinion and the easy way out of your situation? Do you find yourself often following the natural inclination of your heart? That way is dangerous. You may be disappointed either now or in eternity. God decided to clearly describe these two gates in the Scriptures so that we will not make the wrong choice. Be careful!

✍ (c) What are the requirements for being able to enter through the narrow gate?

Jn.3:5; Rev.21:27; Matt.19:21,23-24,Lk.9:23; Matt.7:14; Mk.9:43-48; Lk.13:24; Gal.5:17; 1Cor.1:26-29; Heb.12:1.

Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. These gates are not physical but spiritual. The natural cannot discern the right choice. The new birth is therefore the first condition to meet, if someone would enter through the narrow gate. Not only does that experience make you to enter the kingdom of God, it sets your heart right and makes you able to make the right choice in

decision making.

Life in the flesh is the enemy of godliness. You must maintain a lifestyle of constantly saying **'no'** to sin and the flesh and repeatedly saying **'yes'** to the Lord.

Sometimes riches deceive. The deceitfulness of riches may cause a person to make decisions based on his riches, (any kind of riches, e.g. financial, intellectual, human contacts and relations, riches of power, popularity, etc.). It makes him to think that his riches will always see him through life's challenges.

For example, instead of choosing to depend on the Lord and pray in order for his needs to be met, a rich man sees no need to pass through that narrow gate. The easier thing to do is to simply spend from his rich store of money to meet his needs with little or no reference to God.

The man who has human contacts and **'big'** people in government sees no need to pray and wait on the Lord to get a job or a contract. All these can block one's ability to discern and pass through the narrow gate. In order to be able to find the narrow gate, you must refuse to put your trust in riches.

From **Matt.7:14**, you will discover that the narrow gate must be found. *'. . . . and there are few who find it.'*

It means if we must find that gate, we must look for it. The entry point into right decisions and into the will of God does not come easy. You must desire it, hunger for it and seek it before you can find it.

Again, to enter through the narrow gate, you must strive for it. There is always the human nature (self) that will always struggle in your mind against the Spirit. You must violently disagree with your self inclinations in order to find the narrow gate. It takes grace and endurance to find it.

But once you make it your lifestyle and your choice in life to

always go through the narrow gate into any situation, it will not always be as difficult as the initial attempts.

2. (A) DISCUSS WHAT YOU UNDERSTAND BY 'THE WAY' IN . . .

Matt.7:13-14; Ps.18:30; Ps. 139:24; Jer.21:8; Isa.55:8; Prov.22:6; Jn.14:6.

'The way' means the road, the route taken by somebody in order to reach a destination. It could also mean a lifestyle; a procedure taken to achieve something.

From the above Scriptures, there is the way of God, the wicked way, the everlasting way, the way of life, the way of death, the way of man etc.

There is also the way of life that is personified in Christ Jesus. Once you make your choice about the gate you want to pass through, a way is definitely opened to you, whether the way to life or the way to destruction depending on your choice of gate. Does that not touch your heart?

✍ (b) Differentiate between the two ways mentioned in that Scripture

Read **Matt.7:13-14** from different Bible versions.

Apply it to our daily Christian experience. What did you discover?

Prov.14:12; Prov.4:19; Prov.2:12-15; Prov.4:11-12, 18; Isa.35:8(LB); Jn.14:6.

The way, the road, the lifestyle that leads to destruction is broad and easy. It is the common choice of many, including believers. People go in there naturally. It is an easy road to go through. It does not require any effort to go that way. Some go through that way as their normal lifestyle; some go through that easy road in business, in pursuing their educational career or even in pursuing God's service.

That may explain the reason why many who have cast out devils and worked wonders in the name of Jesus will be disappointed and condemned on that day **(Matt.7:21)**.

As we do the work of God, it must be done in God's own way, not in the broad, easy, natural way.

The way that leads to life is described as narrow, difficult, hard. There are only very few going through that way. It takes patient searching, it takes God's grace, it takes real endurance to find it and go through it. But if you succeed in choosing to go that way, it leads to life both now and in eternity.

When a way seems right in your sight, know that that way is wrong. It is the broad way, the way of darkness, the way that will cause you to stumble. You must refuse it and seek God's face to show you His own way of doing what you want to do or getting to where you are going. Whatever the word of God says about anything you want to do is the right way, the narrow way.

For example as a spinster or a bachelor, suppose there is a man or a lady whom you desire to marry. You so much love him/her that you are willing to pay any price to marry him/her. But he/she is an unbeliever. The way of God into marriage (the narrow way) says . . .

"Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers **2Cor. 6:14**.

If you want to follow the narrow way that leads to life, you will stop that relationship and wait patiently for God's choice for your life. Going on with such a relationship or trying to explain things away to suit your choice will only lead you to destruction sooner or later. Many have traveled on that road and are crying and regretting today.

Jesus Christ Himself is the embodiment of the narrow way. His lifestyle is the narrow way. Following in His footsteps, doing things the way He did, means going through the narrow

way. There is a way He saw people, related with people, handled money, went about God's work etc. His life is the pattern that God commanded us to follow. He is the Way.

Have you ever taken time to study His way of life? If not, how then will you be able to identify the narrow way and walk in it? The easy (broad) way leads to destruction. Yet the narrow way and the broad way are parallel lines (i.e. lying so very close and seemingly going in the same direction). A little step aside from the narrow path will surely land you on the broad way. There is only a step between life and death **(1Sam.20:3).** Be watchful, be prayerful!

✍ c. Discuss how we can find the narrow way and walk in it always.

Ezra.8:21; Ps.86:11; Ps.25:9; Ps.32:8-9; Prov.23:19; Jer.6:16; Acts.18:26; Lk.9:62.

There is need to humbly seek God's face by prayer and sometimes with fasting. God's way is not easily accessible. It is not naturally desired. It is God that teaches us His way. It takes a man whose heart pants after God and His way, to find the narrow way.

We must be meek, we must be submissive, not clinging to anything; we must be ready to adapt to God's will. Whatever you do not see Jesus do, do not do it. It is not the way. Jesus is our model. He is the way approved of God for us to follow at all times in living our lives.

Whenever you are confused about any matter, do not make a move. Stand at that junction and ask for the old path. Check the life of Jesus and that of the men of old, how they acted in such situation in their own time. Pray again and again for direction. God will use the old path to shine light on your way.

CONCLUSION

God's word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto out path. God expects that each one of us should make His word both the first and the upholding principle in our lives **(Col.1:17)**. He upholds all things in this life and that to come, by the word of His power.

Unless we live and walk by His word, we shall be building our lives and destinies on shaky, sinking ground. Take heed. A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed without remedy.

Take heed to these instructions for a vibrant kingdom living and you will prove from your own experience how sweet it is to take God by His word. May the Lord bless you.

Personal Assessment Questions

☞ *1. What challenges came to your heart in the course of this study on "Ask, seek, knock"? What does this reveal about your prayer life and how have you responded to it?*

☞ *2. What are the paramount issues that you normally ask, seek, or knock for? How many have you benefited with your "access" to the throne of grace?*

☞ *3. Have you chosen the straight gate and the narrow way? Discuss with us, when and how it happened. In practical terms, why do you consider the way you have taken to be narrow? Illustrate this with your own experience.*

☞ *4. Share with us your personal testimony how you broke off from the popular way of sinners.*

CHAPTER 17

THE GREAT WARNINGS OF THE MASTER

INTRODUCTION

Our Lord, in preparing His disciples for life in the Kingdom, foresaw a dangerous trap that would swallow up many and derail several well-meaning Christians both then and now. Other apostles also warned of these dangers of the end-time: false prophets, false teachers, and fake apostles; messengers of Satan but in the disguise of angels, wolves but in sheep skin.

Miracles, signs and wonders are good but are not adequate tests for identifying these false teachers that have arisen even in our own time. Several of "the very elect" have been deceived and lured away after other gods than the God of Heaven, the Maker of heaven and earth.

It is in the light of this that we cannot brush aside the great warnings from the mouth of our Lord, the Author and Finisher of our Faith. All wayfaring Christians must take heed to this and study carefully what has already been provided as our guideposts in Scriptures.

As we study, please be prayerful. Look before you leap. Wonderful preachers are on the wayside today due to this same issue. Beware! Watch and pray.

'BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS...'

MAIN TEXT: MATT.7:15

1. TO BEWARE MEANS TO BE AWARE . . . TO WATCH OUT, AND TO BE VERY CAREFUL.

Do not be unsuspecting. Look well and examine carefully. Why? Because many false prophets and teachers have gone out into the world **(1Jn.4:1-2)**.

2. WHO ARE FALSE PROPHETS?

What are their traits by which we can identify them? How do they operate? Where are they?

(A) False prophets could work off signs and wonders but introduce and emphasize some other means or other gods. Deut. 13:1-3; 2Cor.11:13-15.

Please note that the false prophets that are in the world, are not very far from us. They are all around us. We are trusting God that you are not already one of them.

They perform miracles, they prophesy and it comes to pass but they do all these to turn people's hearts after other gods. They are capable of transforming themselves, disguising and masquerading as ministers of Christ but their lives do not resemble that of Christ.

What are the other **'gods'** of our time that false prophets point men to today? Some use candles, blessed hankies, **'anointing oil'**, holy water, blessed stone, etc. in ministering and praying for people.

These divert people's hearts from trusting God. These little **'gods'** become the objects of their trust and they are not able to trust God except these material things are used. They

therefore do not differ in any way from the gods of animists and idol worshipers.

Examine your life. Are you involved in such practices? Do you prescribe these 'gods' for others? Watch out! You are beginning to fit into the Bible's description of False Prophets.

✍ (b) False prophets . . . .
— release 'profaneness' into the body of Christ,
— speak 'visions' of their own hearts (personal ambition, etc.),
— assure sinners and compromisers of peace and prosperity.
Jer. 23:15-17, 25-28, 31-32.

False prophets pronounce blessing on disobedient people; they tell dreams and visions of their own hearts and ambitions. They fill people with false hopes. Imagine someone asking you to give so that they will pray for you and that in three months, you will become a millionaire! He does not bother to check whether you are dubious, whether you are hardworking or not, or even not working at all. Such is a false prophet who promises peace to those who despise the Lord in their lives.

They hardly ever preach repentance from sin. False prophets place an undue emphasis on dreams and revelations rather than God's word. They deceive people by their light-heartedness. They exhibit lightness (no weight or gravity, no seriousness) in the way they handle God's word.

This is a scriptural description of false prophets. You may please check yourself. Are you already like that? Maybe you ignorantly followed a senior false prophet and he "trained" you into becoming one yourself. There is a space for you to repent. This study is actually God's love to reclaim you from perdition, if you respond to Him.

On the other hand, are you one of those that have already been deceived by false prophets? Why not deliver yourself like a deer from the hand of these wolves hunting for your soul?

(c) False prophets can be very zealous and active, often sounding loud and bogus.
Jer.23:21-22; 1Kg.22:6, 10-12, 21-24.

You will discover from these Scriptures that false prophets are so zealous that they often run with their own message even though they have not received any message from God. They are like soothsayers almost always with a positive message for people. Their messages hardly ever confront men with the truth and so never change people's lives.

False prophets seem to be in the majority and often, they do not contradict one another. The help to sustain each other's deceitful acts. They corroborate lies, so that the other can corroborate them too. They esteem men above God's word.

When you see a preacher fighting the truth and threatening people, he is a false prophet. When you see a preacher who cannot bear people asking for scriptural basis from the Word of God before they obey, he is a false prophet.

Again, would you please check yourself. Do you preach what you do not receive from God? Do you preach to soothe people and promise them peace when God is saying something contrary? Maybe you are becoming a false prophet. There is only a step between life and death. You need to watch out!

False prophets tell people what they want to hear instead of what God wants to say to them. They are often loud and bogus, wanting to be quickly noticed. They are often found in loitering the corridors of power, around **'big men.'** Beware!

d. False prophets do not stand in the counsel of God (i.e. the whole counsel of the Scriptures). They pick few words here and there mainly from second-hand sources.
Jer.23:18, 22, 28-30; Acts.20:27-30; Lk.7:30.

Note that he is a false prophet who carves out an empire

for himself (even in the Body of Christ) and draws disciples after himself rather than after Christ. They do not spare the flock as long as they can get their selfish gain. They often arise from among the believers. They sometimes collect information from **'around,'** not from above, but they come and speak it to the brethren as if it is from the Lord.

Examine your heart again and again. ***Are you a false prophet and you do not know it?*** If you are, then be honest with God and with yourself; acknowledge it and repent! A little more delay may be dangerous. Watch out!

(E) False prophets cause divisions and offenses contrary to Scriptures. Rom.16:17-18; Acts 20:30

False prophets are often good speakers; they excel in speaking flatteries. They speak to deceive the simple hearted Christians who cannot see through their flatteries. They are not serving Christ but their own ambitions. Watch out for such men and women. Avoid them like you would avoid plague.

(F) False prophets are false teachers bringing in heresies into the church. 2Pet.2:1-3(LB)

Discuss their common methods. Have you encountered any in your walk with the Lord? **2 Pet. 2:1-3 (LB).**

"But there were false prophets, too, in those days, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will cleverly tell lies about God, turning against even their Master who bought them; but theirs will be a swift and terrible end.

Many will follow their evil teaching that there is nothing wrong with sexual sin. And because of them, Christ and his way will be scoffed at.

These teachers in their greed will tell you anything to get hold of your money. But God condemned them long ago and their destruction is on the way."

This Scripture is very clear. Are you sure you have not become a false prophet, or fallen prey into the hands of one? Watch out!

Many false prophets do not begin as false prophets. They start as any normal Christian but only *BECOME* false prophets, either ignorantly or by willfully *TURNING* against the Lord their Master who brought them up. Except you watch your life and stay on track with Jesus and His lifestyle, you may inadvertently become a false prophet. Take heed to your life.

(G) False prophets are greedy, feeding on the flock.

Mic.3:5 (NAV, LB); Isa.56:10-12; Matt.7:15b.

A false prophet is one who is greedy for gain, always wanting more, never having enough. He feeds **'on'** the flock instead of feeding the flock. You must not be ignorant. Watch!

Are you a preacher who is greedy for gain? Do you labor over the souls of men to shepherd them properly for the Lord, giving them their portion of meat in due season? Or do you feed **'on'** them instead of feeding them?

Beware! The chief Shepherd, our Rewarder is coming. He will reward every one according to his deeds.

2. WHAT MUST A CHILD OF GOD LOOK FOR IN MEN AND WOMEN WHO CLAIM LEADERSHIP IN THE BODY OF CHRIST?

Matt.7:16-20; Rom 14:17

(A) Look for 'fruits' in their lives rather than 'gifts'.

Discuss **'fruits'** as the MARK of a man's inner life and identity rather than gifts and works. **Gal 15:22-23; 1Cor.13:1-3**

Fruit is an excellent pointer to the nature, the species, and the kind of a tree. Gifts do not portray a man's true life. A gift can be imparted even when a man does not merit it. It is actually a gift. Fruits take time to grow. They do not grow

overnight. No tree bears fruit in a day.

The fruit is the identity of the tree itself. The fruit (character) of a man shows the kind of life he has inside.

The Corinthian church was known to be carnal and unspiritual so much that someone among them was sleeping with his father's wife. There in their midst, a Christian brother took another brother to court. Yet they were very rich in manifesting spiritual gifts. Gifts are gifts irrespective of the real situation of the person manifesting them. But you can not bear a different kind of fruit other than the kind of person you are inside.

Every tree is identified by its fruits. So also is the false prophet; for though he may be performing wonders, the fruits he brings forth will be carnal fruits. His character (his behaviour) will show who he is, not his charisma.

(b) Leaders ought to be placed over God's flock based on the fruit of their lives rather than their charismatic gifts and works.

Ex.18:21; Acts 6:3; 1Tim; 3:1-8; Tit. 1:6-9.

To select leaders, we must make a search from among the people even if it is just to select a leader over tens. Fruit is emphasized in Scriptures as a necessary pre-condition for leadership. Such people must be full of the Holy Spirit, capable for such service (inner strength) and must fear God.

A recent convert must not be made a leader. He may have great gifts operating through him but this does not speak of his spiritual maturity. The fruit of the Spirit is a good sign of maturity because it is born of long continuance in the discipline of God's word. Novices are not to be made leaders no matter their gifts, paper qualification, and social status. Otherwise they may fall into the snare of the devil as their character will soon show their immaturity and carnality; and it may lead them

to end up as false prophets.

Therefore as a person, you must grow, not only to be able to recognize false prophets and avoid them **(Eph. 4:14)** but also in order not to become one.

✍ (c) Active obedience to God's word; deliberate following of God's will rather than mere loud and "bogus" profession of His Lordship, is God's priority for us.

Matt.7:21; 1Sam.15:22-23; Mk.7:6-8.

Do you discover your behaviour running contrary to what you say about God and to God? Watch your life. When your life contradicts what you preach, it is a sign that you are not far from becoming a false prophet.

God's expectation is that our lives will become epistles that confirm the reality and power of God's word, epistles that men can read and become persuaded to follow Jesus. And when the life and character of a leader contradict the gospel of Christ, watch out. He may be a false prophet.

✍ (d) Fruit is God's basis of evaluation and judgment of our lives. Matt.7:19; Jn.15:2-8,16; Lk.13:6-9.

Ordinary lip proclamation of the Lordship of Jesus Christ does not move God. He delights in the fruit of Christ-life that we bear, for that is what determines our length of stay here on earth and our eventual placement in eternity.

God prefers that every tree that does not bear fruit be cut down rather than to allow it to continue living and wasting divine resources. And it will not only be cut down but also cast into fire.

The same end awaits trees that bear fruit but not good fruit **(Matt.7:19)**. This calls for us to be sober at this point and examine our hearts.

Are you bearing fruit for Jesus? If so, what kind? By

their 'fruits' you shall know them, says the Lord.

CONCLUSION

Several men have shifted their emphasis from the Lord Jesus to mere things. Others have been lured away into error. The Lord is more concerned about the fruit of righteousness in all our lives and labours.

What is the fruit of your life? Even if you do mighty works and speak loud of your service in the kingdom, what counts before God is the kind of fruit you bear with your life. While you must watch out for false prophets, false teachers, and false leaders who creep in unnoticed all around us, the best way is to take heed to yourself: your heart condition, your character, and your activity.

Keep a keen eye on your life... keep your focus on Jesus and His counsel for your life. Be careful that, "you are not that **'false prophet!'**, as prophet Nathan told king David bluntly after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, killed her husband, Uriah, and took her to be his wife.

Personal Assessment Questions

☞ *1· "Beware of false prophets..." Examine your heart·*

Please share with us your personal encounters with false prophets and false prophecies·

☞ *How did you escape the snare or are you still deeply involved with them and entangled in their snares?*

☞ *2·What are the attractions false prophets play upon to lure men? Share with us your own personal experience in this· What burden do you now bear for God's people as a result?*

CHAPTER 18

FURTHER WARNINGS FROM THE MASTER

INTRODUCTION

From the teaching contained in the Sermon on the Mount preached by the Lord Jesus Christ to His disciples, we discover several warnings and danger signals that can make us miss out in the Kingdom of God.

In this study, we shall look at His warning to us about the great Day of Judgment. Be prayerful; be sober as you go through the study. May it bring us an impartation of the Spirit in Jesus' Name.

. '...IN THAT DAY...' (Matt.7:22).

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

It is certain; a day of judgment is coming. It will be a costly assumption to think and live as if there will be no day of judgment. On that day, it will be too late to repent and do the will of God. Now is the time to prepare for that day.

(A) 'MANY will SAY TO ME...'

Matt.7:22; Rev.6:16-17; Matt 25:8-12,24-25,37-39,44.

When He said **'many'** what does that imply in your heart? People that will have one thing or the other to say to the Lord on the Day of Judgment will not be few at all. They will be many. The chances of being part of that 'many', are therefore high.

Many will say, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name."

Many will say "to the mountains and rocks, 'fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb."

"Many will say . . ." **What will you say on that day?**

(b) There shall be great surprises in that day.

Matt.7:22-23; 1Tim.5:24-25; Mk.10:31

Looking at what these **'Many'** will say, it means they will not expect what will happen. They will be unprepared for such surprises. The people who will be affected with such a surprise are those who do not pay close attention to the sins in their lives to repent and turn away from them.

They are so familiar with the Lord, His Name, and His gifts that they do not pay attention to the true condition of their lives. They are people who do the work of God but not according to the pattern set by our Lord Jesus even though they have been granted the manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and access to do wonderful works in His Name.

They have a lack in their lives but because it is not apparent now, they cover it up and work on. But things that are not apparent now will become apparent on that day and it will be too late to do anything about them.

(c) Why not now?

1Cor.3:11-15; 1Cor.4:3-5(LB); 2Cor.5:10-11; 2Pet.3:9.
Consider the parable of the tares in Matt.13:24-30.

God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. That is why judgment is not now. But it is certain that the judgment day is coming and the criteria for judgment are already laid down clearly for us in Scriptures. We

have no excuse. If anyone is condemned, it will be his fault. God has already set a day to judge the whole world. He is only giving every body a chance to set his destiny.

✍ (d) What will be the real implication of 'that day'? Heb.9:27; Eccl.9:10.

There is no repentance in the grave. We have an opportunity to repent and change right now, to do the will of God while we live. It is given to man once to die; after that, comes judgment.

Some assume that since the 'day' has delayed in coming; it is not likely to come again. Suppose it comes, how will you face God on that day? You lose nothing by living right in God's sight. Rather you stand to gain all things both now and in eternity. Moreover, it is certain that the day is coming. God is not a man that He should lie.

Pray. Watch your life. Pray that you will not face eternal damnation on that day. Now is the time to prepare for that day.

2. THE CONTRADICTION OF MINISTRY WITHOUT THE CORRESPONDING LIFE MATT 7:22-23.

'Prophesy in His Name; Devils cast out in His Name; many wonderful works done in His Name...' (Mk 16:15-20).

✍ (a) Discuss the power in His Name; and the use of the Name.

Why will His Name ever work?

Lk.10:17-22; Heb. 1:2-4,6-9; Col.16-19; Phil.2:9-11.

Jesus obtained His powerful Name by inheritance. He was before all things and He is the heir of all things. Secondly, He obtained that Name by His obedience in laying down His life and dying on the cross. Therefore His name has potency to

work anywhere.

✍ (b) Does the fact that the authority in His Name works for a man show that man's (or the user's) personal strength or holiness?

Acts.3:10-13, 16; Acts 4:10-12.

Peter confessed that it was not by their own power or holiness that the lame man got healed, but through faith in the Name of Jesus. Holiness or no holiness, faith in the Name of Jesus works wonders. The Name of Jesus is potent in itself to work miracles.

That clearly shows that performing or receiving miracles in the Name of Jesus is not a sign of someone's holiness or spirituality or a qualification to go to heaven. Let no one be deceived. If you do not work on your life even as a man or woman of God and allow the word of God to consistently change your character and shape your lifestyle, you will be surprised on that day.

✍ (c) What is the common deception around men that God grants the mighty use of His Name?

Acts 3:11-12; Acts 10:25-26; Acts 14:11-15, 18; Acts 12:21-23; 1Sam.18:6-9; Num.20:7-12.

When miracles and great works are done by a man in the Name of Jesus, men do not normally recognize the Person behind the miracles. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. Men are not always able to see that it is God working through His men to perform such miracles. Rather, they see the vessel as if he is the origin, the source of the miracle.

And every miracle is a clear demonstration of a power that is beyond man; so it causes men to bow down and worship. Incidentally, they only bow down to the man through whom the great work is done because he is the only one they can see. They do this in many ways, including giving men titles, praise

singing etc. They can not see the God behind it all.

But a man or woman of God must not be deceived as to collect the glory. Doing so means he is making himself equal with God. Moses did it and he perished in the wilderness. We must learn like Peter and Paul to speak out and direct the glory to God.

Are men beginning to give you titles and sing your praise because of great works you do in Christ's Name? Are you beginning to share His glory? Beware! Destruction is near. He will not share His glory with any man.

(d) What other great mistakes could a man of God himself make nowadays as a result of ministry in the Name and authority of Jesus?

i. To rejoice in works done in His Name rather than pay attention to a growing personal relationship with Jesus.

Lk.10:20; Ex.33:1-3,12-18.

You will discover that the disciples were very excited because of the miracles they did in the Name of Jesus when they were sent out to preach. But Jesus told them not to rejoice because of that. The miracles they performed were not a sign of their personal spirituality. Rather, if they would rejoice at all it must be because their names were written in the book of life.

Moses valued God's presence and relationship more than miracles. In **Ex 33:1-3,** God promised them miracles; yet Moses requested for God's presence to go with them.

It will be a great mistake to dance around and rejoice in miracles at the expense of a vibrant relationship with Jesus, no matter who you are. God is no respecter of persons. It is not miracles but our relationship with God that will make people know that God is with us.

☞ *ii. To accept human praise, coronation, and awards for works of grace done in His Name, rather than ascribe the glory to God.*

Dan.4:2, 25, 29-31; Dan.5:17, 22-23; Acts 12:23; Isa.42:8; Jn.1:19-27; Jn.3:26-30; Jn.6:14-15; Acts.3:12; 10:26; Acts 14:14-15, 18.

How and with what did the men who escaped this snare prevail? What lessons can we learn for our lives today?

Nebuchadnezzar ascribed the glory of his kingdom to himself and he was driven to the bush by God to eat grass like oxen. Belshazzar made himself equal with God by drinking wine from vessels taken from God's temple, and that very night, his kingdom was taken from him and he was slain. Praise singers sang Herod's praise and called him a god, but he did not open his mouth to give the glory to God; so he was struck immediately by an angel and was eaten to death by worms.

John the Baptist, Peter and John, Paul and Barnabas however all refused to receive glory ascribed to them by men when great works were done by their hands. Even Jesus Christ our Lord ran away from being crowned king by men when they saw the sign He performed by feeding five thousand men with five loaves of bread and two pieces of fish.

Somehow, every one that would be used of God in any generation will be faced with this same temptation to accept human praise, awards, and coronation. What will you do when confronted with such a temptation? What will be your own reaction? Or have you already fallen victim to this temptation? You can still retrace your steps and cry to God for mercy. He will abundantly pardon.

☞ *iii. To eat and enrich one's self with the offering of men due to works done in His Name.*

Num.22:7; 2Pet.2:15-16; Jude 11; 2Kg.5:15-27; 2Cor.2:17; 2Cor.4:2; 1Tim.6:5-11; Acts.20:33-35.

Analyze Christ's instruction in **Lk.17:7-10.** What lessons must we learn from that in our pilgrimage?

The offerings that men give to God are for God, even though you as the vessel He is using to labour over their lives, receive them. Surely he that serves at the altar must eat from the altar. But such a servant must wait on God and not on man, to give him his own portion. You must learn to pray as every other disciple **'. . . give us this day our daily bread.'**

What happened to Balaam, Gehazi, and the sons of Eli also , for our example so that we may not fall into the same error. odliness is not a means of making gain; but godliness with ontentment is already the great gain for the servant of God.

Despite our labours in the field, we must continue to gird urselves and still serve God whenever we return from there. Ve must allow the Lord to eat and drink first and be satisfied both from our labours and from the lives of His people. It is then that we can eat and drink.

☞ *iv. To assume that we have a place in heaven because of works done in His Name and by His authority, is another great mistake that a man of God may make.*

Matt.7:21-23; Eph.2:8-10; 1Cor.4:7; Tit.2:11-12.

Salvation is by grace through faith; it is not by works. The grace that saved us goes further to teach us to say **'no'** to sin and to lawlessness; and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present age. Doing the will of God must be our pursuit in life as we labour in His service.

We must no longer practice lawlessness and pursue selfish ambition. No matter the volume and the greatness of works we do in His Name, that must never be our pursuit or our confidence. It is only those that do the will of God that will enter the kingdom of heaven **(Matt.7:21).** They are the ones that will abide for ever.

What is your confidence for eternal life based upon? Do you suppose that because of the great works you have done in Jesus' Name, and the fact that whenever you call that Name, things happen, that will be your entry ticket to heaven? Do not be deceived; neither can God be deceived. May you not be found wanting on that day when measured according to divine standards in Jesus' Name.

CONCLUSION

The Lord's warning on the great Day of Judgment is evident throughout the scriptures. He speaks with all the finality and gravity it deserves. What will you say to Him on that day?

Sometimes we see the day as if it is so far away and not so near; yet death terminates the opportunities for whatever improvement any man can make on his life. It makes men to only wait helplessly and fearfully for that great day . . . . And death is as close to each of us as a step away. What is your preparation to meet with your Lord?

Again, spiritual gifts are given to men as a divine favor from God. The Holy Spirit gives them to every Christian severally as He wills. They are given by mercy, not by merit. It is therefore quite possible for a man to manifest spiritual gifts when his life is not yet correct.

Great works done in the Name of Jesus are never true indications of a man's personal strength or holiness. To accept man's praise, coronation, awards, and rewards for works of grace done in His Name rather than ascribe the glory to God, is erroneous. Divine abilities, gifts of the Spirit and ministries extended to us by mercy, are never to become our personal credentials before God.

Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord even if that

man be the greatest of preachers or miracle workers that ever lived. To grow inwardly in conformity to the image of Christ as we grow in outward ministry is God's delight.

Therefore, take heed to your life, O man or woman of God, lest on that day, the Master say to you, **'Honestly I know you not, depart from me, you workers of iniquity.'** May the Lord give you deep understanding in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Personal Assessment Questions

☞ *1· What are the quiet deceptions that have come on your own heart as well because of your access to His Name and authority?*

☞ *2·What are your personal preparations for that 'day of judgement'?*

☞ *3· How would you handle an outburst of anointing and power in your life and ministry (if it does come)?*

CHAPTER 19

STANDING AGAINST THE STORMS OF LIFE

INTRODUCTION

This is the last of the instructions given by the Lord Jesus Christ to His disciples in His teaching popularly called the Sermon on the Mount. It is an instruction emphasizing the importance of paying close attention to hearing and obeying all He has said before and what He would still say to them and to us by and by. It is certain that every one of us will face storms in life. What determines whether our lives and whatever we are building will stand life trials or not, is the subject of this study.

May the Lord who directed you to go through this study speak directly to you and encounter you particularly in Jesus' Name.

MAIN TEXT: MATT.7:24-27; LK 6:47-49.

1. AN OPEN INVITATION...

'Whosoever comes to me and hears my sayings...' **Lk. 6:47**

(A) WHAT DOES THAT TEACH US ABOUT THE RIGHT WAY TO BEGIN BUILDING ANYTHING IN LIFE?

Ps.127:1; Prov.3:5-7; 1Jn.5:4; Jn.6:37.

Building is a project and it involves a process. It involves the time and the life of the builder. Incidentally, our lives and our times are not in our hands but in the hands of the Lord. And

except the Lord builds a house, they labour in vain that build it. Wisdom demands that we acknowledge the Lord in all our ways and decisions; and allow Him who knows all things and can do all things to direct us.

The only wise thing to do before doing anything is to COME to the Lord and HEAR Him over the matter. When you do whatever He says to you, it means your decision is born of God **(1Jn.5:4)** and it will surely overcome whatever storms may face you as a result.

What is your experience in this? Do you acknowledge the Lord before you take any decision; or is it only in 'big' matters that you care enough to involve Him? Do not take things for granted. You may be building your life on sand without knowing.

✍ (b) What is the significance of *HEARING* Jesus in building our lives and our decisions?

Matt.13:15-17; Rom.10:14-17; Matt.11:15; Mk4:24.

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Hearing the Lord in building our lives produces faith in us to receive further from God the wisdom, grace, and all other physical and spiritual resources needed to successfully complete the building. It also brings healing to our lives when needed.

As we pray or study and hear God's word, He speaks to us. We should however not only take time to hear the Lord over every issue, but pay attention to the measure (of times, attention etc.) we give in hearing from the Lord. The same measure we use is what the Lord will use to measure back to us in terms of instructions, grace, etc.

✍ (c) What are the things we normally labor to build in life physically and spiritually? Give practical examples.

It is clear that such things include physical houses, business and career; we also labor to build our marriages, children, relationships, decisions, our calling or ministry, local church, etc.

Each of these demands that we go to the Lord first, and continually, hear him over the matter and do what He says if our lives, careers, homes, and children will be able to stand the storms that will of necessity come against us.

What have you been laboring to build in your life? Do you consult Jesus about it? Is He the foundation, the Author and the Originator of it? Or He is just one of the counselors and invitees to watch you build?

✍ (d) Discuss the importance of doing what Jesus says to you. Matt.7:21; Jn.2:1-8; Jas 1:21-25; 2Cor.10:4, 6; Lk.11:28.

Obedience is the key to getting God to be on your side. When you obey whatever the Lord says to you, a door is opened to you into the kingdom of heaven; then Heaven and heavenly resources are put at your disposal to accomplish what you are building and to fight for you in times of rain, storms, and winds. You will be blessed in whatever you do as you obey the Lord's instructions to you.

But when you neglect God's instructions and follow the inclinations of your heart, you will build something but surely, whatever you build will not be able to withstand the storms of this life. Great shall be the fall of your building. May the Lord grant you understanding!

2. THE TWO HEARERS OF GOD'S WORD.

✍ (A) **Identify the two categories of people who hear the word of God in these Scriptures: Lk.6:47-49; Matt.7:21.**

One category hears God's word and does (obeys) it; the other category hears the word of God but does nothing about it. Note however, that both categories hear the word. The difference lies in the action taken about what they heard. To which category do you belong?

✍ (b) **What makes one category wise and the other foolish in this parable? Matt.7:24-27.**

Discuss the wisdom of the wise category and the foolishness of the foolish one. **Prov.3:5-7; Prov.1:7, 24-33; Heb.11:6; Ps.14:1; Prov.29:1.**

It is wisdom to put aside your own wisdom and follow the instructions of the Lord, the only wise God. When you do so, you will certainly receive what God has promised because God watches over His word to perform it. He is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

The other man is foolish because he had the privilege of hearing instructions, yet he did nothing about it. That will bring him sudden destruction. Calamity will surely come upon him and his building and that without remedy.

How and on what have you been building your life, your home, and your children? Could it be that your present troubles in life and in your home are the result of your disregarding God's instructions on these issues?

Do not keep going on in your mistake. You can still turn it over to Jesus and follow Him on in obedience henceforth. If you are willing and obedient you shall eat the good of the land.

✍ **(c) Why, in your own understanding, do we also often act foolishly in response to the word of God that we hear?**

Discuss practically.

Mk.4:16-19; Lk.9:26; 2Kg 5:10-14; Lk.5:4-6.

Lack of concentration of our attention on God's instructions and little or no meditation on God's word that we hear, hinder the word from taking root in our hearts.

And once it has no roots, it also bears no fruit. At other times thinking much over our personal cares and worries in life is the reason for our foolishness. Even when the word of God that will handle such problems comes to us, it is immediately choked by our worries and rendered unfruitful; consequently we do nothing about it.

Sometimes it is **the deceit that our 'riches'** of past experience on how to handle such problems, **'riches'** of men and materials in whom we trust to help solve the problem that make us foolish people.

Sometimes **the simplicity of the instructions** and solution to our problems given by God's word is the basis of our disregarding such instructions as it almost happened to Naaman and Peter.

It may also be because of the **seeming shame and reproach** that we may likely face in the midst of men as we take steps to obey. There could also be many other reasons why we often act foolishly in response to God's word.

As for you, why do you do so? And what did you gain from such foolish responses in time past? He who is often rebuked and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

✍ (d) How can we ensure we are wise and obedient each time we hear God speak to us?

Matt.13:23; Lk.8:15; Josh.1:8; Lk.2:19, 51; Prov.2:1-4; Matt.6:21; Heb. 4:2-3.

Understanding is an important bedrock to obedience. It will be difficult to obey the word of God that you do not understand. The word of God is the wisdom of God. Therefore get wisdom. But with all your getting, get understanding. However, understanding comes only as we concentrate our attention and thoughts prayerfully on the word of God we hear, and meditating upon it.

Each word and instruction from God that came to Mary about Jesus both before and after His birth were kept in her heart. She thought about them, pondering them in her heart. But for Joseph, no such thing was written about him. No wonder then, that Mary eventually believed in Jesus and became her son's disciple, while Joseph had no such experience written about him.

Between the act of hearing and that of obeying the sayings of the Master, there are these very important but silent processes that must take place in the heart of the hearer: receiving the word, meditating on it, understanding it, keeping it in the heart, and persevering with it in obedience in order for it to bear fruit in our lives.

How do you handle the word of God that comes to you?

3. THE TWO FOUNDATIONS.

✍ (a) What is a foundation? Of what importance is it to a house?

1Cor.3:10; Lk.14:28-29; Ps.11:3

The starting point in building any house is the foundation. It

is the basis, the thing upon which the whole building stands; it bears the weight of the house. If anything happens to the foundation of a house, it automatically affects the building itself.

✍ **(b) What forms the rocky foundation in this parable? What forms the sandy foundation? Matt.7:24-27.**

Each time you hear the word of God, you have automatically laid foundation, whether you obey it or not. As the Lord gives you an instruction over any matter, a building process starts.

The word of God that you hear and obey automatically forms a rocky foundation for your life capable of making you stand firm in times of trials. But the word of God you hear and do not obey forms a sandy foundation.

Such things may look beautiful on the surface, and make you think with them, you can succeed without obeying the instructions given to you by the Lord. But surely, a time of trial is coming upon every house, whether built on the rock or on sand. The seemingly beautiful and successfully completed house but built on sand will fall at such times, and great shall be its fall.

Paying attention to obeying the sayings of the Lord may look like a fence or a cage, a restriction to our lives. But on the long run, His fence shall prove to be our defence in times of trouble. You stand to lose nothing by obeying the word of God.

4. TRIALS: . . . THE RAIN, THE FLOODS, AND THE WIND

✍ **(a) Compare the trials that came upon the two houses in this parable (Matt.7:25, 27).**

What did you discover? What does that teach you as you hear God's word? **1Cor.10:1-13; 1Pet.5:9.**

You will discover that the trials that came upon the house built on the rock were the same as that which came on the house built on sand. There is no partiality. Each word of God we hear and each lesson we learn from God's word as we study, attracts trials.

As examinations are to students, so are trials to believers. Faith if not tried, is not yet faith. Whether you obey what God says to you or not, you will face the trial. If you pass the examination, you will be promoted, having gained an experience. But if you fail, your life will experience a definite fall. It will not remain as it was before facing the trials. May God grant you understanding.

✍ (b) The Trials And Our Lives

☞ *i. Discuss the significance of each of these trials on the house in this parable.* **Matt.7:25; Gen.7:11-13;17.**

☞ *ii. How does each affect our lives and whatever we are building when we hear and obey God's instructions?* **Isa. 59:19;Isa.43:1-2**

☞ *iii. What will be the effect of these trials on our lives if we have previously done nothing about what the Lord said to us?* **Ps.11:3; Matt.7:26-27.**

The strength and the usefulness of a house depend on the foundation, the walls; and the roof, not so much on the paint used or the decorations around it.

You will discover therefore that the trials that came on each of the houses in this parable were directed to these three parts of the building: The rain to test the roof, the flood to try the foundation, and the wind to test the walls as well as the roof.

When a man pays attention to what the Lord says and

obeys it, God stands by him in times of trial to ensure that he stands. His obedience to God's Word over such a matter forms a rock under him and he shall not be moved.

But that is not so with the disobedient, with a man who is full of himself and his own ideas, who hears what God says about a matter but does not obey. He will fall and great shall be his fall.

(c) What is the significance of trials in the life of every believer who hears the word of God?

Deut. 8:2; Jer.17:10; Jas 1:2-4; 1Pet.1:6-7; Mk.4:16-17; Rom 5:3-4.

Each time we hear the word of God, we must expect the rain, wind, and flood to try our faith. God is not moved by people who just hear His word, but those who hear and obey it. A quick obedience to the word of God we hear preserves and keeps us from falling in times of trial.

How urgently and eagerly do you obey God?

CONCLUSION

Each time you hear the word of God, you have automatically started building something. What forms the foundation depends on whether you obey what God says or not. The key for any house to stand is not in its appearance but its foundation.

And just as any physical house is tried by forces of nature (the rain, the flood, and the wind), so also is our faith. Faith must be tried in order to find out what it is based upon. If based on what God says, the house stands. But if based on any other thing it is certainly going to fall.

Life and continual living in the kingdom is based on constant

obedience to the word of God. It is the bedrock for Kingdom Lifestyle.

On what are you building your life? On what God says or what men say? What is the foundation of your family? Who led you into the career you are currently pursuing? What did God say to you before you started the work you are presently doing; and even as you do it, do you take time to hear Him constantly and obey what He says?

'Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock.' **(Matt.7:24).**

May you be counted among the wise by the Lord both now and in eternity in Jesus' Name. Amen!

Personal Assessment Questions

☞ 1. What definite action and steps have you taken on the issues God has raised variously in the course of these series of studies?

☞ Share with us what has happened in your life since you took these studies.

☞ 2. Have you experienced the "rains", the "storm", and the "floods" on your life and walk with the LORD?

Share vividly with us what you went through

and how you came out.

What scars were left on you?

☞ 3. Has your 'hearing' of His sayings improved, since you undertook these studies?

☞ What would you like to share as your testimony on this?

☞ 4. Briefly discuss your present life style after going through the studies of the Kingdom Lifestyle.