

***Pastoral
Reflections
On
“the things
Jesus
commanded”***

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1. And He said to them, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” -Luke 2:49 Context: Luke 2:41-50

When Jesus gave His Great Commission to believers in Matthew 28:16-20, He said that after a person becomes a disciple and is baptized they need to be observe all that He has commanded. In the four gospels, there are at least 175 commands Jesus gives! This study will take us through those commands. Some of those commands are explicitly taught, others are implicitly taught through the example of Jesus. Luke 2:49 fits into the implicit command category. At 12 years of age, Jesus stayed behind at God’s house so he could interact with others around the Word of God. When Mary finally found him, she said to Him, “Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have sought you anxiously!” Jesus never sinned against His earthly parents, but models for us here prioritizing our relationship with God the Heavenly Father, saying, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My *heavenly* Father’s business?” We are all to obey our earthly parents in the Lord, but God comes first. The Christian will want to often gather with others in God’s house around the Word of God!

2. Then Jesus answered and said to him (John the Baptist), “Permit it to be so now (Jesus’ baptism), for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed Him. -Matthew 3:15 Context: Matthew 3:13-17

All followers of Jesus are called to be baptized in His name after coming to faith in Him (Matthew 28:16-20). When we get baptized, we are testifying that our faith is in Him alone to “lift us out” of future judgment, as the water represents death (see Romans 6:4). Just as Noah and his family were in the Ark and were lifted out of judgment waters, the believer is now in Christ and is rescued from the judgment due their sins (see I Peter 3:18-22). They have been forgiven of their sins “in Christ” and are now saved. Water baptism is the believer’s public testimony of the spiritual baptism that has already taken place when they received Christ. The Holy Spirit lives inside of them now, and they are identifying themselves with other believers (see I Cor. 12:13). Jesus did not have any sins that needed to be forgiven, so John the Baptist was shocked that He was coming for baptism. The key is that Jesus will never call us to do what He wasn’t personally willing to model! That is completely different than the sinful record of other religious figures like Mohammed and Buddha and Joseph Smith. Isn’t it wonderful to serve a God that models for His followers what He expects of them?!

3. But He answered and said, “it is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” -Matt. 4:4 Context: Matt. 4:1-4

We humans need not just physical nourishment but spiritual nourishment from God’s Word, the holy Bible. Many Christians, spiritually speaking, look and act malnourished because they simply don’t spend enough time in God’s Word!

**4. Jesus said to him (Satan), “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’”
-Matthew 4:7 Context: Matthew 4:5-7**

Don't do dumb stuff and ask God to bless it! Don't let Satan twist a Scripture passage to make you think it's okay to do something presumptuous. Answer Satan's lies and distortions with Biblical truth!

5. Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’” -Matthew 4:10 Context: Matt. 4:8-10

Don't make any deals with the Devil, or anyone or anything else trying to draw you away from God. Worship God in everything you do! Many set aside worshipping God to gain more of the world. Whether it's a shady business deal, cheating to succeed, being in a sinful relationship with someone, dishonoring God in the way you play sports, etc... God demands our ultimate allegiance, and everything we do should be done as an act of worship.

As you begin your prayer time today, thank the Lord for these commands He has given and modeled obeying. Thank God that He doesn't ask you to do anything that He Himself wasn't willing to do when He was on earth. Have you done all of these basics He's called you to? If you have accepted Him as your Savior and Lord, are you in His house the church regularly? Have you followed Him in believer's baptism? Are you as serious about spiritual food from the Bible as you are about physical food? Follow Jesus, dear friend!

6. And He (Jesus) said to those who sold doves, “Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!” Then His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.” -John 2:16-17 Context: John 2:13-17

Jesus loved the house of God! It pained Him to see it misused and become more of a marketplace than a place for the people of God to worship, and a place where the lost could hear about God and be saved. Many Jews had travelled long distances to come to the feasts at Jerusalem. It may well have met a need for them to be able to purchase a sacrifice outside the Temple. But the leaders demanded that only Temple money could be used, and when people exchanged their money for Temple money, the unnecessarily high exchange rate gave the leaders great profit. On top of that, this loud money changing was happening in the Court of the Gentiles. Gentiles could not go further into the Temple complex, meaning the only place at the Temple complex they could hear about God gave them the wrong idea about God and His people. Sadly, so many times we are also guilty of coming to church for all the wrong reasons. Many times we ask, “What's in it for me?” rather than coming with a heart to worship and pray. Many times we have little regard for the lost among us, or making sure their experience in the

church leads them closer to God, not further away. Maybe Jesus needs to turn over some of our ways of thinking about church!

7. Jesus answered and said to him (Nicodemus), “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” -John 3:3 Context: John 3:1-3

Nicodemus came to Jesus at night: Nic at night! Nicodemus was a great leader who wanted to “pat Jesus on the back,” but not in public during the day when it might affect his own reputation. Jesus blew him away by saying that he needed to be born again, something God would have to do for Nicodemus rather than something Nicodemus would do for God. WOW! We too must be born again, letting God save us by faith and not by our works! To get to Heaven requires more than being physically born (born of water, as in when a pregnant woman’s “water breaks”). To get to Heaven we need to be spiritually born, and that happens when we turn away from self-reliance and receive Jesus by faith. If you will provide the sinner, He’ll provide the Savior! In Revelation 20:11-15 we are told that those who never were born again, never saved from their sin, will be put eternally in the Lake of Fire. Going there is called the second death. Jesus died for our sins so we wouldn’t have to experience that awful place. If you are only born once, you will die twice; But if you are born twice, you’ll only die once! If you’ll turn to Jesus for salvation, you will be born again!

8. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (Jesus), that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. -John 3:16-17

What more can be said? If you believe in Jesus, you will have everlasting life. The punishment due your sins will graciously be transferred timelessly on to Christ and what He did for sinners on the cross. That’s why we call it GRACE – God’s riches at Christ’s expense. In His mercy we don’t get what we do deserve, because Christ bore our punishment. In His grace we get what we don’t deserve – Christ’s perfect righteousness will count for us on judgment day (see 2 Corinthians 5:21). John 3:17 says that Jesus came the first time to save sinners who otherwise had no hope, justly condemned because of their sin. John 3:36 goes on to say that those who never turn to Christ are still rightly under the wrath of God. I hope you believe in Jesus! Obviously this is more than intellectual belief, but it does include the facts of the gospel – that you are a sinner incapable of saving yourself, but who Christ is and what He has done for you is sufficient to save you. That belief will involve trust in Him, love for Him, and commitment to follow Him. And His gift to you for this belief will be eternal life and eternal relationship with the God who created you!

9. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.

-John 4:24 Context: John 4:19-24

It is useless to say that we love Jesus in a “spiritual” way but not be applying His truth to our lives. There is a false definition of love out there that calls for an ooey gooey feeling of love but refuses to be grounded in scriptural truth. Some have gone so far that in the name of a loving spirit they do things that violate what’s taught in the Bible. They are in sin and need to repent, and some among them are not born again believers at all. The opposite problem also happens – some are so cold-hearted that even though they zealously defend Biblical truth they never get along with any other believers, even on secondary or tertiary issues. Jesus here calls us to worship God in both spirit and truth!

10. (Jesus said) “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

-Mark 1:15 Context: Mark 1:14-15

Repent is not just some old fashioned word that Bible thumpers like me use! It is a command from Jesus to turn from our sinful preoccupation with self and selfish way of doing things, and believe the gospel. The word gospel means good news! It is good news that the God who created us died to save us and is desirous of not only relationship with us but will guide us into discovering His ways for us. Believers turn from their own selfish kingdom to letting the King reign in and through them. That’s what the kingdom of God is – Jesus Christ’s ruling over His creation, one heart at a time now, and over all things later! The word repent actually means a change of mind. The sinner used to think they were okay, now they know they are sinners before a holy God who is right to judge their rebellion. The sinner used to think that Jesus was just a religious option, now they know He is the Son of God, God the Son, and the only means of salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). The sinner used to think that salvation had to include their own deeds somehow, now they understand that salvation is received by God’s grace alone through their faith alone in Jesus Christ and His work alone!

11. Then Jesus said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

-Mark 1:17 Context: Mark 1:16-18

People sometimes say, in a negative way, “You are such a follower!” In these sinful days we are encouraged to carve out our own identity, to be our own person, to follow our heart. But in reality everybody follows somebody, some group, some ideal. Bob Dylan’s famous song said it, “You gotta serve somebody!” It’s funny how different groups think they are different, but in reality ‘jocks,’ ‘goths,’ ‘geeks,’ and gangs often act the same no matter what part of the country or world they are in. In the name of non-conformity, there sure is a lot of conformity going on! They all conform to some ideal set by somebody. Christians are known as followers of Christ. Isn’t it interesting that the first trait Jesus identified as being true of those who follow Him is

that they would be “fishers of men.” Christians should not be known primarily for big hair, fake smiles, loud suits, the kind of music they listen to, etc... They should be known as those who know Christ and make Him known!

12. When Jesus heard it, He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” -Mark 2:17 Context: Mark 2:15-17

Never try to push someone who doesn't sense his or need of Christ to make a decision for Christ. Simply share the truth with them in love and pray for them. Notice clearly in this passage that Jesus wasn't interested in dealing at that time with those self-righteous people who didn't view themselves as sinners. But to those who would freely admit that they were sinners, and felt conviction of their sin and wanted to repent and believe, Jesus always responds! What a Savior!

13. “Most assuredly I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” -John 5:24

What a great promise – those who obey the command to believe in Jesus have passed from death to life! That's what I call a reliable bridge!

14. “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; but these are they which testify about Me (Jesus). But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.” -John 5:39-40

There are a lot of people who have a lot of Bible knowledge that is essentially useless because it has not led them to have a deep, personal, abiding relationship with Christ in which they bear fruit for God. How sad! Don't let it happen to you! As you pray today, thank Jesus that He is the bridge from death to life for you. Commit that your Bible study will be a means of greater faith in God for you, and increased fruitfulness for you, not just head knowledge.

15. And He (Jesus) said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.” -Mark 2:27-28 Context: Mark 2:23-28

Some church traditions have made the Lord's Day as restrictive as the Pharisees did with the Sabbath, adding so many restrictions to it that it has become cumbersome for those who

observe it. God's plan for a day of rest and worship has not changed, but these folks sometimes forget that the main emphasis is to be a day of rest devoted to God. When it becomes more about rules than about your relationship with God, watch out! On the other hand, don't be among those who miss out on God's wonderful plan in calling us to a regular day of rest and worship! This day helps us re-charge our faith and be ready to face all that is coming in the next week. Guarding the day for its God-given purposes is a great blessing to God's people!

16. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. -Matthew 5:3

The blessings Jesus gives are in direct contrast with what the world values as being the traits of a blessed person. The world views the blessed man as the one who is rich in money, because he can "buy the earth" right now. But here Jesus essentially says that Heaven doesn't take Visa! In Matthew 6:20 Jesus urges believers to live their life now in such a way that their deeds done for Jesus are storing up for themselves treasure in Heaven. How sad to see people who don't know Jesus living for this relatively short life alone, rather than getting ready for the eternal life to come. All the riches a lost person boasts in now won't mean a thing when they are cast into the Lake of Fire. All the sacrifices Christians make now will pay off when they are with God forever!

17. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. -Matthew 5:4

Often the world says to those grieving, "Get over it," or "snap out of it." One popular man-made religion teaches you not to become too attached to people or things. That way when you lose them it won't matter as much! The Bible teaches Christians it is appropriate to grieve! In the context, Jesus may be calling us to grieve over the sin in our lives, recognizing all sin is a big deal to God. Of course one of the main consequences of sin being in the world is loss, including broken relationships and death. We should take time to reflect on loss, even as Jesus did. The shortest verse in the Bible is John 11:35. When Jesus was among those mourning the death of His friend Lazarus, we read that "Jesus wept." There's also a whole book of the Bible that shares Jeremiah's grief over the consequences of his nation's sins (Lamentations). As believers we don't "grieve as those who have no hope" but as those who know that after the "momentary troubles" of this life we will experience eternal comfort with God. But we do grieve, and we join creation in groaning (Romans 8:18-25) until Christ puts all things right!

18. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. -Matthew 5:5

The world tries to take advantage of the meek, calling them soft. Jesus says the meek will eventually inherit the (NEW) earth. Meekness is what happens when a humble person lives for God's glory instead of their own and uses their God-given talents and spiritual gifts to advance Christ's Kingdom instead of their own. David Robinson exemplified this as he helped the San

Antonio Spurs win multiple NBA titles. He was a tremendous competitor, but exemplified self-control both on and off the court. People try to take advantage of the meek on the present earth, but the meek will be the only kind of people on the New Earth (Revelation 21-22).

**19. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.
-Matthew 5:7**

The word translated “filled” is rendered “satisfied” in another translation. The Rolling Stones sang “I can’t get no satisfaction...but I’ve tried.” I can assure you they didn’t try by hungering and thirsting after righteousness! One of the shames of the Christian community is seeing so many Christians get “starry eyed” at celebrities, who upon closer analysis are some of the most dissatisfied people there are. But those who hunger and thirst after God’s righteousness – they will be satisfied by what they find! They will be filled when they are with God!

20. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. -Matthew 5:7

The world believes that if you are merciful to others you will get stepped on. But God promises you mercy when you become a person of mercy. The reality is that in almost all of our relationships people at some point let us down. And we also let others down. When those problems come, the New Testament is filled with teachings on forgiveness and moving toward each other that we are called to put into practice. Unfortunately, I have known more than one professing Christian who gave up on relationship when they felt let down by the other person. Christian, you’ve received mercy from God through Jesus’ death for your sins, how can you withhold showing mercy to others? Listen to these powerful words from the Book of James: “So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:12-13).

21. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. -Matthew 5:8

The world doesn’t think much of the pure. In sexual issues many believe that you are a fool not to experiment with sex before you marry, even saying that you need to do it before marriage with a prospective spouse to make sure you are “compatible.” What a lie from Satan! As my sister once said to some girls pressuring her to become sexually active, “I can become like you in 10 minutes, but you can never become a virgin again.” Purity will be rewarded by God for both for the lifetime single and those who one day will marry. Purity is the best marriage present you can give your future spouse if you marry one day. And God’s will is that we also stay pure within marriage, receiving all of our sexual satisfaction from our spouse. Don’t despair if you’ve blown it! When sinners repent of their sin and turn to Christ, they are washed in the blood of Jesus and made pure again! All Christians are called “the Bride of Christ,” set apart for

Him. And just as couples expect 100% faithfulness to their vows, so does the Lord from His church! The fact that forgiveness is available when we blow it should not keep us from striving by faith and the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit for purity in our lives. Are you committed to purity for Jesus?

22. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. -Matthew 5:9

So many people turn quickly to angry outbursts when they have a problem or conflict. So many times we are pulled like a tug-of-war rope between factions trying to recruit us to their side. "Come join us in our righteous indignation" comes their cry. It has become a lost art to stop, to listen, to meditate on how the Bible bears on a situation, to pray through it as an individual and with others. There is often more "heat" than "light!" And now with social media making us all broadcasters, little things become big things very quickly. Here Jesus extols the role of being a peacemaker, trying to bring people together through God's love and truth. What an example Jesus set for us by being God the Father's ambassador to earth, sacrificing His own life to make peace for sinners with God. We are like Him when we bring people to make peace with God and each other.

23. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in Heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. -Matthew 5:10-12

In the movie *Braveheart*, Mel Gibson played William Wallace, a person who had a cause he thought worth dying for. At one point a princess of England asks him, "Aren't you afraid to die?" He responded, "Everyone dies, but not everyone really lives." I don't know enough to know if William Wallace's cause was really worth dying for, but I do know that for 6,000 years men and women have been persecuted and even killed for serving God. We call being killed for the faith being "martyred." The word martyr is simply what the Greek word for witness looks like. So many early Christians were killed for their witness, they became known as martyrs for the faith. When some 20th century missionaries were martyred in South America on January 8th, 1956, Life Magazine showed a picture of the scene with the caption "Why this waste?" As Christians we believe there was no waste, that those men went straight to be with Jesus! Some of their wives actually completed the mission of taking the gospel to the very men who had killed their husbands. Those men became leaders of the church there! One of the martyred men, Jim Elliott, had written in his journal, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." If you are troubled by people for your faith, rejoice that what happens here on earth is not the whole story, and a heavenly reward awaits!

24. You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. -Matt. 5:13

In the old days, before there were refrigerators, people used salt to preserve things like meat. The salt would keep it from going rotten. Christians are called by Jesus to be the preservatives of the earth! That's why it's so important to maintain our testimony for Jesus! Because if we lose our testimony by giving in regularly to the sins of the world, being just like the world, we become rotten, unable to influence the world we have become identical to. Meat in danger of spoiling will not be preserved by spoiled salt. Neither will a lost world look to you for the way to salvation if you are rotten!

25. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven. -Matthew 5:14-16

When I was in college we would go in groups to an overlook of the area we simply called "the Bluffs." There we would sing, testify, and pray for hours. It was awesome! I'm still somewhat envious of the guys who could play the guitar and lead us in the songs of Zion! By the time we would leave the Bluffs it would usually be very dark and there would be no discernable path back to our cars. If you took the wrong path in the dark you were in trouble! Either you would be cut up by tree limbs and bushes, walk through poison ivy, or and this would have been the worst, fall 20 to 100 feet off the side of the Bluffs! So what did we do? We always followed someone with a flashlight who could light up the path, until we were smart enough to bring and use our own! That's what you are, Christian! You light the way through following God's Word. As you walk in the light of God's Word, others can follow. If they are smart, they'll get their own light as they turn to Jesus and His Word. He said, "I am the Light of the world, if a man follows Me, he will never walk in darkness!"

26. Do not think I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly I say to you, till Heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law until all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of Heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of Heaven. -Matthew 5:17-19

Don't ever let anyone tell you that God's Word is not perfect! A misconception is that the Bible is filled with errors. It is not! Jesus essentially says here that even the "commas" are perfect! All documents as old as the Bible come to us in fragments of scrolls that have been found. As the documents are found they are compared and catalogued from the fragments that are closest to

the time of original writing to later copies. No document as old as the Bible has over 1,000 of those fragments to put together, and many have just a few fragments that have been found. But we have found 5,000 plus Greek language fragments of the New Testament, and over 20,000 more later copies in other languages like Latin! NO document as old as the Bible has even close to 100% of what was originally written, meaning when those books are looked at there are parts that are missing. When all 25,000 copies of the New Testament are put together, we actually have more than 100% of it! That is, we have the perfect original, plus some later additions by copyists that really stick out when compared to the early Greek manuscripts! Similar things could be said about the Old Testament! We know with precision what the Bible says! It has been preserved miraculously and far better than any ancient document! Jesus loved His Bible and so should we. He fulfilled the Old Testament Law for all who believe. And He has given us commands that He expects those who love Him to obey! Dear friend, love Jesus and do what His Word says!

27. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of Heaven. -Matthew 5:20

Jesus says something here that must have blown those listening away! They had to be more righteous than the Pharisees to get to Heaven. But the Pharisees were so strict about following rules that whenever they could not understand an Old Testament command, they would make up a half dozen rules of their own on how to obey that command! What Jesus is saying here is to get them, and us, ready for the truth that the Apostle Paul later makes plain in his writings. It will take a perfect righteousness to get to Heaven, and you and I and the Pharisees don't measure up. But Jesus did! And when we receive Him, His perfect righteousness is counted for us as fulfilling the perfect righteousness God requires. As 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "God made Him who knew no sin to become sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him!" Salvation comes when we receive as a gift the perfect righteousness we in ourselves cannot produce! For by God's grace we are saved through faith! GRACE – God's Riches At Christ's Expense!

**28. "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire."
-Matthew 5:21-22**

Is your anger worth it? As James says, "the wrath of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God." So be slow to anger, especially when you realize that God is no longer angry with you because you have been reconciled to Him through Jesus! Notice that Jesus goes beyond the outer action to the inner thought life where the action begins. Good old Barney Fife

told us we need to “nip it in the bud.” Practice God’s way of forgiveness early when the anger first starts forming, and not only will you probably avoid doing something you can’t take back toward another person, but it will also keep you from the kind of internal health problems that come from letting anger build inside of you!

29. “Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” -Matthew 5:23-24

So simple is Jesus’ instruction here, but it is very often ignored by His disciples. Jesus says here that He wants His followers to first live in right relationship with each other, and then bring their gifts to church. Notice He also expects you to go first when you realize there is friction. When I have practiced this, I have almost always seen the result be a step forward in my friendship with the other person. People often run their mouths so much they don’t realize they have hurt others. Jesus bids us to make things right! And He took the initiative to make things right with us when He died for our sins! Who do you need to make things right with? Try to do it before the next time you go to church!

30. “Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.” -Matthew 5:25-26

From the second one of these verses, we gather that Jesus is talking about situations in which we are having a dispute with someone over an issue that if not resolved will end up going before a Judge to get settled. In I Corinthians 6 Paul urged believers in matters like this to work it out with each other and perhaps the church’s help rather than stand before civil courts. An example that immediately comes to mind is when a couple splits up and child support has to be paid. Far better to do what’s right on the front end, earning goodwill with the other party, then to have to be forced to do it by the court. Do you owe somebody money? Work out a plan to pay them back before ill will is built up and the court makes you do it anyway. It’s clear here that Jesus is concerned about our testimony for Him before those who don’t know the Lord. Is there some area you need to instantly apply this command in? Do it before the preacher has to visit you at the jail!

31. But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. -Matthew 5:28 Context: Matthew 5:27-30

Gulp! According to Jesus, it's not just a sin when the act happens, but when the thought of the act happens. The Christian wanting to please God will seek to clean up their thought life! We need to do what Job did in Job 31:1, when he said, "I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?" Job didn't want to view others as objects, but as people created in the image and likeness of God. So many people in our culture view dating as what they can get from the other person. Crass comments like "did you score?" are often heard in school bathrooms. That carnal way of thinking cheapens God's design, in which people are to seek to build others up, helping them to be a better person. When you get married, you should not be full of scars from previous relationships that cause you to mistrust your own spouse. Instead, you should be a person used to giving and receiving in true friendship and love. Make a covenant with your eyes, and with your heart, not to view others wrongly!

32. But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery. -Matthew 5:32 Context: Matthew 5:31-32

In our day many treat divorce as if it were like breaking up was in high school. Jesus clearly teaches that divorce is more than breaking a contract with each other, it is the breaking of a covenant before God. And covenants are supposed to be in effect until death. When this covenant is broken prematurely there are always hard consequences to be faced. Divorce is not the unpardonable sin, however, and it is unfortunate that many times in churches we make the innocent party in a divorce feel as guilty as the one who cheated and/or abandoned their spouse. Here Jesus uses a "strike clause" to speak of having been cheated on as grounds for divorce and presumably the possibility of remarriage later. Later in I Corinthians 7 Paul addresses the issue of spouses who have been abandoned, and the conclusion seems to be that they are free to move on and remarry. Other issues like abuse and involvement in illegal activity could fall under this teaching of "abandoning" the vows you made to your spouse. Where these kinds of sin were not involved, and spouses are just walking away from their vows without biblical grounds, Jesus indicates here that Heaven looks down and sees people who are not with the ones they are supposed to be with! Now the love of God and His ability to forgive when people repent should never be minimized. If you sinned against your spouse and it cost you the marriage, but have now recognized it as sin before God and asked His forgiveness, be assured of that forgiveness. If you and/or your spouse has re-married, you can't have the marriage back, but you can and should recognize and repent of what was sin. What Jesus is commanding here is that marriage should be honored and upheld, and that sin should be called sin. The person contemplating getting married should view their marriage as a covenant of commitment, more than simply with goo-goo eyes saying "we're in live!" Anyone considering walking away from their marriage vows without biblical grounds should re-think what they are doing to themselves and their family. Research indicates that those who stay in those marriages report they are actually happier 5 years later than those who divorce. As a Pastor I have seen

many marriages even overcome adultery and abandonment through God's grace and forgiveness.

33. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one. -Matthew 5:37 Context: Matthew 5:33-37

It's not uncommon to hear a person say, "I swear I'll do it!" Jesus says here to stop doing that! If someone asks you to do something, say, "Yes, Sir, I'll do it," or "No, Sir, I will not be able to do it." If you say you'll do something, make sure you do it! Be a man or woman of your word. When you mess up, don't say, "I swear I'll do it right next time." Instead, DO IT RIGHT NEXT TIME! Do the right thing for Jesus!

34. You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. -Matthew 5:38-39

Ouch! Let's start by saying what Jesus is not saying. Jesus is not saying it is wrong to have laws about restitution and retribution. Hunh, Danny – what does that mean? The Old Testament said when you did something wrong to somebody you should make it right. For example, if you break someone's window, you should buy that person a new window and install it. That's restitution, or restoring something. Some things, though, can't be restored. If you murder someone, you can't bring their life back. In the Old Testament that's where retribution came in. When someone murdered someone, they had to be punished, they had to forfeit their own life. Thus the idea, "an eye for eye." Notice even here the call was for the punishment to fit the crime. It's not "eye for life," but "eye for eye." I'm sure sometimes if an eye had been lost, some type of appropriate compensation was agreed to covering the value of an eye. "Eye for eye" was merely poetic language for the punishment fitting the crime. Many of the laws of Western Civilization were built on the ideas of restitution and retribution. Here Jesus calls for His followers to go beyond the law by not holding people's offenses against them, and not personally taking vengeance. This does not mean that lawlessness should reign in a "Christian" society. If someone does something violent, I want the laws of the land to punish that person lest they repeat the behavior and hurt others. At the same time, as a believer I would not try to hurt them myself, would forgive them before God, and would forgive them if they repented and asked for my forgiveness. This does not mean it would be "Christian" to allow someone to hurt someone else when it is in your power to stop them from doing it.

35. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. -Matthew 5:40-41

In the Roman Empire, soldiers could ask citizens in occupied countries to carry their heavy loads up to one mile. The citizen had to do it. Jesus here said that when they ask you to carry it one mile, you as a follower of Jesus should carry it a second mile. Why? Because the first mile is what you have to do! In the second mile is when people will realize you are doing something you don't have to do. That's when they will ask you why you are doing more than you have to. That's when you get to explain that Jesus has gone the extra mile for you by bearing your sin burden to Calvary's cross. Since He went the extra mile for you, you now go the extra mile for others! This teaching applies to all of life! It's a teenager cleaning up their room and taking out the trash before they are asked, and then helping with other chores in the house. It's a worker going above and beyond the call of duty in their profession. This principle almost always leads to opportunities to give a testimony for Jesus!

36. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. -Matthew 5:42

Jesus said give to those who ask of you, and we must give. We need to stop twice and think before we spend all of our money on extras for ourselves and neglect our ministry of giving to meet urgent needs (see Titus 3:14). But we also need to be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves" as we give. To give an alcoholic \$5 for "food" when you have a pretty good idea he'll spend it on alcohol is not a good idea. Instead, you may keep a few gift cards on you to places that sell food and gas, and give those to people in need instead of giving them cash. Remember also as you act as a "Good Samaritan" that Jesus sent His disciples out to minister to others in pairs. Don't put yourself in dangerous situations alone! Do meet needs for Jesus, but put a little thought into it!

37. But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. -Matthew 5:44 Context: Matthew 5:43-47

Many people mistakenly say that Jesus is calling for something different than what the Old Testament taught. What He is speaking against here is what the Pharisees had added to the Old Testament. They interpreted "love your neighbor" to mean "love your neighbor who is ethnically like you!" But when you read the Law you see that they were to look out for the vulnerable among them. They were to devote a portion of their crops to bless the poor and the foreigners in their midst (Lev. 23:22). In the book of Jonah we read of God's concern for the residents of the city of Nineveh at a time they were among Israel's greatest threats (Jonah 4:11). Jesus here lays it on the line for believers – if you love only yourselves, and people like

you, you are not any different than the heathen who also “take care of their own.” And so He calls those of us to follow Him to show the same love He showed us while we were rebels shaking our fists at Him. What are we called to do with people who do us wrong? Love them, pray for them, bless them, do good to them. Sound familiar? “When we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Romans 5:10).

38. Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in Heaven is perfect.

-Matthew 5:48

Perfection – that’s what we as believers are aiming at! A professor of mine used to say, “If you aim for the stars, you might not hit ‘em, but you will get further than aiming at the moon!” Of course, none of us can perfectly obey! In part what Jesus was doing here was driving us to realize that we all are imperfect sinners who need Him as our Savior from sin. I love the quote that says, “I can’t, but Jesus never said I could! Jesus can in and through me, and He promised that He would!” Salvation comes by God’s grace alone through our faith alone in Jesus Christ alone! But once He lives in us, our striving should be to obey everything He has commanded us! Our failures will keep us humble and dependent on Him and asking for forgiveness when we disobey. But just as a married person is seeking to be 100% faithful to their spouse, that is our goal in our walk with Jesus!

39. Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in Heaven.

-Matthew 6:1

Context: Matthew 6:1-4

Enough of Photo Opportunity Christianity! Fellow believers, let’s do the right things because they are the right things to do, for God’s glory not our own! Be a God-pleaser, not a man-pleaser! Heaven is not impressed with your efforts to impress people. We are told throughout the New Testament that one day in Heaven God will reward openly things done for Him secretly in this lifetime. Fellow believers, as you give seek the applause of Heaven rather than the applause of men!

40. And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men.

Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

-Matthew 6:5-6

Context: Matt. 6:5-8

Be a person of prayer! Your first commitment in prayer needs to be alone time with God and His Word in a quiet place. Don’t have loud music playing, the television, computer, or smart

phone distracting you – make this your time with God! Do pray with others also, because that is certainly called for in the Bible. But don't pray to God to impress men. Usually neither God nor man is impressed! Just as God will reward your giving one day, He will also reward you for being a prayer warrior!

41. In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. -Matthew 6:9-13 Context: Matthew 6:7-15

The Lord's Prayer given here is so wonderful! It is filled with the way we should think in prayer! We should remember that God is holy, completely different than we are, filled always with absolutely pure motives. We should desire His rule and His will always, not merely asking Him to bless what we have decided to do! We should thank Him for all of life's blessings and His provision. We should have forgiving hearts towards those who have hurt us, even as God has forgiven us in Christ Jesus! This beautiful prayer should serve as a model for us to be God focused and saturated in our praying. It can be meaningful when believers recite the exact words together, but we need to be careful not to recite it without really having a prayerful spirit. Just two verses before I in Matthew 6:7 Jesus warned against vain recitations in prayer! May the Lord's Prayer never be that for a believer!

42. Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. -Mathew 6:16-18

Notice that Jesus said, "when" you fast, not "if" you fast! We do not fast to twist God's arm and "make" Him respond (as if our actions could!). We fast to humbly express our dependence on Him. When the inevitable "rumbly in our tummy" appears, it will remind us to pray! Many times after a big meal, we feel not like praying but taking a nap! We are so connected to the physical, sensory world through eating, and rightfully so. Food is the fuel that keeps us going! When God leads us to fast through a meal, or two, or more, we are training our flesh that there is more to life than "bread alone." The key is not the fasting itself, but more time and focus in prayerful communion with our Heavenly Father!

43. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. -Matthew 6:19-21

These are very tough verses for the average American Christian! From childhood we have gloried in our possessions and accomplishments! As teenagers we feel incomplete if we don't have cars. As adults we want big houses. We work very hard to have enough resources to retire early. Now it is clear from Scripture that we must take care of our own families, and there is nothing super-spiritual about holding back any necessity your family members need. But Jesus tells us here that for His followers He is not nearly as interested in us raising our standard of living as He is us raising our standard of giving! As families we should love Jesus enough to seriously evaluate how much of our "treasure" is spent on things that don't really last. As individuals and families who want to make a difference for Jesus we should press on in storing up treasure in Heaven by our actions that meet real needs, by our giving, and by our intentionally witnessing to other people!

44. No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (money). -Matthew 6:24

Don't let money be your master, Christian! The Bible is quite clear that you will face many difficulties if you have the wrong attitude about money, viewing yourself as the owner of it instead of God. God wants us to be stewards of the resources He has entrusted us with, and to use them to advance His kingdom on earth. If instead you constantly think of how much YOU possess, the reality may very well be that those things possess you! You can't take it with you when you die, but you can send it ahead! That is, you can store up treasure in Heaven by using your possessions to advance Christ's Kingdom now! Thank God for mission – minded Christians, and for mission – minded churches!

45. Therefore, do not worry saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear.' -Matthew 6:31 Context: Matthew 6:25-32

Believers are commanded by our Lord Jesus not to worry. This may be the most disobeyed command for the average Christian! Interestingly, the things Jesus says not to worry about are all things we do need: food, drink, and clothing. Jesus is not saying 'don't eat, drink or be clothed,' but He is clearly confronting our preoccupation with these things throughout a day. He is saying our spiritual faith should take priority over our physical needs. What would happen in your life if you began to spend as much time in prayer and Bible study as you do getting

yourself physically ready for a day? What would happen if you spent as much time meetings needs and witnessing as you did shopping for more clothes to wear?

46. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. -Matthew 6:33 Context: Matthew 6:25-34

Jesus first, people! That's really what it's all about! My alma mater's motto is "Christ Above All!" Another Christian college's motto is "In all things Christ pre-eminent!" Even the details of life are important to God, but none should be pursued apart from our faith in Jesus. He is our first priority, and changes the way we view all other areas of life. God dealt with me once about not just being a soccer player who happened to be a Christian, but being a Christian who glorifies God through soccer! Brothers and sisters in Christ, stop compartmentalizing your faith – let your love for Jesus shine through in every area of your life now!

47. Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with what measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye;' and look, a plank is in your eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. -Matthew 7:1-5

What needed verses! Remember that God is the judge we will all stand before, not us. He has been so patient with us, and we need to be patient with others. Notice a couple of things here. First, He is not saying that nothing will be judged by God. That wouldn't make sense when there are dozens of judgments Jesus makes in these 3 chapters we call the Sermon on the Mount! Remember that by His all-important judgment lust is as necessary to deal with as adultery! Secondly, note that Jesus is not saying that confrontation of others shouldn't happen. But we shouldn't ask others to deal with something we are unwilling to deal with ourselves. The Pharisees were famous for expecting more from the people than they were willing to do. This passage instructs us to not live to judge others and to constantly be applying God's word to our own lives. In that spirit of humility we may then be able to talk to others about sin, as Jesus instructs in Matthew 18:15-20 and the Word of God demonstrates in I Corinthians 5:9-13. Those passages make clear that even though there are times to confront sin in others, the hope is that they will return to Jesus and His church with a renewed faith and obedience. The entire process should not be marked with us being self-righteous and judgmental, but humbly desiring what's best for the individual and church family.

48. Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces. -Matthew 7:6

What in the world does this verse mean? Simply that it is foolish of mature Christians to share with non-Christians their deeply held biblical convictions and expect approval from them. Many times in my Christian life I have shared with an unsaved friend or family member some of the things God had been teaching me from the Bible, only to have them scoff at me and even mock me to others. With such people we should lovingly share what we can and pray for them, but not expect them to understand the deep things God is doing in our lives at a heart level. As Jesus reminds us here, Pigs in mud don't appreciate a pearl necklace! And those in sin don't appreciate what God is doing in the lives of the saints! This is one of the reasons God places us in churches with brothers and sisters in Christ who should affirm us when we apply the Bibles in our daily lives. If a so-called Christian does not affirm your biblical choices, say "Oink, oink" and walk away!

49. Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. -Matthew 7:7 Context: Matthew 7:7-11

A former Pastor of mine often said, "God wants to give revival more than we want to receive it." He was right! Most of the time we live as functional Atheists, going through life as if we are all alone. Jesus here says, "Ask...seek...knock." He envisions a lifestyle of regularly spending time with God and discussing our needs and desires with Him. The way the Greek reads it is "keep asking...keep seeking...keep knocking!" Do you have anyone in your life that you can turn to when in need and ask them for help, seek them out, and knock on their door knowing they will be there for you? Jesus says here that God is there like that for you! Can't you envision Him "opening" His door and letting you in? I delight when one of my children seeks me out to spend time with them, and asks me something that I can help them with. I delight in giving them good gifts! Isn't it neat that Jesus wants us to think of God like that?

50. Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. -Matthew 7:12

This has always been referred to as the golden rule by Christians. In a dozen words Jesus sums up the ethical teaching of the Old Testament. If you want people to respect you and your property, you need to respect them and their property. Almost all laws are made to try and legislate the fair treatment of people. For the Christian, it can be summed up in 12 words from Him, "whatever you want men to do to you, do also for them!" Note we are called not to wait for them to treat us right, we are to proactively treat them right! Let it start with you!

51. 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. -Matthew 7:13-14

Friend, if you can 'take or leave' obedience to Christ's commands, you cannot have assurance that you are a born again Christian. When Christ speaks of the narrow way, He is speaking of His way. I had a coach once who often said, "It's my way or the highway." When it came to playing that sport, we had to do exactly what he asked us to do in the way that he asked us to do it, or we were off the team. Friend, in the Christian life it's either Christ's way or the highway to Hell. You must come on His terms of repentance and faith. You are a sinner whose only hope is Christ's blood shed to take away your sin. You are turning from being the boss of your own life and confessing that from now on 'Jesus is Lord.' As Roman 10:9 says, "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." There is no other way for you to be saved, only Jesus (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

52. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. -Matthew 7:15 Context: Matthew 7:15-20

Many people are so hungry for meaning in their lives that they are susceptible to those who would manipulate their emotions and call it the work of God in their lives. Much time and money is spent to get people to believe that this or that movement is from the miraculous hand of God. I hope you understand that most ministries that are on television or radio pay for the airtime to put themselves on the air. Thank God for solid Bible preaching ministries that are out there! But be on the lookout for "Wolves in sheep's clothing," false preachers who want to "fleece" gullible, non-discerning sheep out of their hard-earned money. Jesus said "look for the fruit." False prophets and teachers always start sounding good, but over time they will encourage you to be dependent on them for the way you view God, salvation, and success in the Christian life. Biblical faith always encourages you to stand under the authority of God's Word, not the authority of this or that teacher. Don't be deceived by men or women in expensive clothes that ask you to give money to the Lord but give you their address. Jesus died for the church, not Brother Fleecesheep's TV Miracle and Deliverance Ministry.

53. Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord,' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in Heaven. -Matthew 7:21 Context: Matthew 7:21-23

Note here that true disciples of Jesus are not characterized by the kind of outward show they can put on, but by doing God's will, by doing the things God wants them to do as recorded in the Bible. Jesus will say "Depart from me," or "Get out of My face," to everyone who really practices lawlessness most of the time, even if they claim to know Jesus! God wants us to be people who "Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:8).

54. 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: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

-Matthew 7:24-25 Context: Matthew 7:24-29

Always remember this: Jesus Christ and His words are the rock we are to build our lives upon! Why is it that so many trailers blow away during hurricanes and tornadoes? It is because they have little or no foundation. Beach houses often blow away during hurricanes. Why? Because they were built on sand! These houses can look beautiful and be very impressive, but storms wipe them out. People often build their lives on faulty foundations: the way they look, who they are dating or married to, the job they have, the things they possess, their health. All of those things can be taken away from them by things beyond their control. If you build your sense of identity around circumstantial things that a storm of life can take away, you will always simply be up and down according to your circumstances, and if the storm is big enough, it will wipe you out! But if your sense of identity is built on Christ and His Words, you will be ready for the inevitable storms of life. Other things can be taken away, but Christ is in your life to stay! Jesus doesn't promise the believer they won't face storms, but that His presence in their life will get them through life's storms!

55. Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

-Matthew 11:28 Context: Matthew 11:28-30

Keith Green sang a song that had the following lyrics, as if sung to the believer from Jesus: "My son, my son, why are you striving, you can't add one thing to what's been done for you; I did it all when I was dying, rest in your faith my peace will come to you; because when I hear the praises start, my child, I want to rain upon you, blessings that will fill your heart, I see no stain upon you, because you are My child, and you know Me, to Me you're only holy, nothing that you've done, remains, only what you do for Me!" Precious brothers and sisters in Christ. It is not a burden to work for a good boss. Satan works you hard and mocks you in return. Jesus has given you rest through faith in Him and showers you with His love! Rest in Him today!

56. Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come. -Matthew 12:31-32

This is often referred to as the unpardonable sin – the one that cannot be forgiven. So what is it? Well, we know from Jesus' words in John 16:8-10 that one of the roles of God the Holy Spirit is to convict people in the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come. Jesus then clarified by saying 'of sin, because they do not believe in Me, of judgment, because I go to My

Father and you see Me no more, and of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.’ Here Jesus elevated to the top of the sin list unbelief in Jesus. God the Holy Spirit is constantly convicting the people of this world of their need of Jesus for salvation from the judgment due their sins, the judgment that will surely come on the individual because of their sinful rebellion against God. The unpardonable sin is the lifelong rejection of Jesus, which is a sin against God the Holy Spirit because He has actively been at work convicting the sinner of gospel truth. Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart, turn to Jesus for salvation. Note also that by calling rejection of the Holy Spirit blasphemy, Jesus is identifying the Holy Spirit as part of the Triune God! So when people do turn to Jesus for salvation and become God’s disciple, Matthew 28: 19 says they are to be baptized in the name (singular) of the Father and of the Son and of the Spirit (the Triune God, the ‘Us’ of Genesis 1).

57. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. -Matthew 12:36-37

GULP! Do *YOU* think that what you say matters to God? Jesus sure does! With your words you can glorify God and build up others by speaking the truth in love. With your words you can also grieve the Holy Spirit and hinder what God wants to do in the lives of others. Take these words by Jesus very seriously, ask for His forgiveness for your careless tongue, and gain a new resolve to use your words for God’s glory. Heaven is taking note!

58. For whoever does the will of God is My brother and sister and mother. -Mark 3:35 Context: Mark 3:31-35

Jesus puts obedience to God above everything else, including family loyalty. In fact, He announced the church as a new kind of family, with God as the Father and believers as sons and daughters of His, brothers and sisters of each other. In this passage Jesus’ mom and brothers came wanting to see Him. It has been suggested based on John 7:5 that they may have been embarrassed by the growing opposition to Jesus’ ministry, and thought they were ‘helping’ Him by getting Him away from the crowds around Him. Jesus wasn’t having any of it! In fact, He uses this occasion to call all His followers of all time to put love for God and doing what He wants (His will as recorded in the Bible) above everything else. Over the years I have seen committed young Christians, many feeling a call to full-time ministry, face this same kind of pressure from their own families, even church going families. “Ease up a little on that fervency,” they’ll say, “we’re Christians also, but we don’t go all out about it like you do!” Brothers and sisters, when you face that kind of pressure from even well-meaning but misguided family members, say a prayer of thanks that Jesus Himself experienced that pressure from His earthly family. He persevered in doing God’s will, and later His unbelieving brothers Jude and James became

believers and wrote the books that bear their names. Those times you stand alone for God may be what eventually leads your own family members to a deeper walk with God!

59. He who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

-Matthew 13:23 Context: Matthew 13:18-23 (the parable of the sower explained)

Notice verse 23 says this group of people “understood” the word spoken to them. This is not said of the others. The person described in verse 19 did not understand at all. The one in verses 20-21 accepted what they heard gladly until trouble came along and failed to “endure,” since there was no root to their faith. The one in verse 22 liked the word until they realized it would mean a different use for their time and resources than they had planned. Of only the last one are we told they “understood” and went on to bear gospel fruit. When it comes to assurance of salvation, it is probably only this last person that should have it, the person who is trusting Christ alone for salvation, and actively seeking to put Him first in every area of their life. If you fall into one of the other categories, you need to evaluate whether Jesus is really your Lord and Savior, or just a kind of “mascot” for your life.

60. Then He said to them, “Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.”

-Mark 4:24-25

Believers need to be F.A.T. – Faithful, Available, Teachable! When you hear a truth from God’s Word, you become responsible for applying it in your life. That’s why I take notes every time I hear a preacher speak. I’m looking for at least one gem that will help me grow. In school you take notes because the material covered might be on a test one day. For Christians, LIFE is the test! Study to show yourself approved, so you can learn more and be more useful for Jesus. Remember that the Christian call is to be a “doer” of the Word, not a hearer only! In this passage Jesus extols being careful “hearers,” making sure what you hear is biblically sound. Then He goes beyond that to applying the teaching you have been given to life. If you hear a gallon’s worth of teaching but only do a quart worth of obeying, something is wrong! But if you hear a gallon’s worth and put it into practice in your life, God will entrust you with even more life impact. But according to Jesus here, if you don’t apply what you are hearing, you’ll spring leaks!

61. Let both (wheat and tares) grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn. -Matt. 13:30 Context: Matt. 13:24-30

Jesus is not teaching here that unrepentant sinful conduct should be tolerated in churches (see Matthew 18 and I Corinthians 5). He IS teaching that Satan will be successful in planting in even the best of churches those who can say the right things and appear to be the right thing and yet are as lost as a swan in a snowstorm. Jesus here indicates that being too zealous to identify everyone who is a false disciple may very well injure the faith of true believers and get the church side-tracked from its purposes. Jesus teaches here that God will justly take care of all such things at the “harvest.”

62. Again the Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. -Matt. 13:44

Salvation is free, but it will cost you everything! You can't buy it, because you couldn't possibly afford it! You can't earn it, because your best efforts are like filthy rags. When you try to wash the mud off a window with a filthy rag, it simply smears the mud. Our best efforts are like that! But there is something required for us to give God to gain the Kingdom of Heaven. What is it? 100% of us! He gives us Himself and eternal life! In exchange we give Him the control center of our life. We fire ourselves as our own boss and submit to Jesus as our Lord and Savior. This call to surrender all to Jesus from the moment of conversion is seen in Romans 10:9, where Paul writes, “if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” It would be insufficient to say Jesus is Lord if you weren't indeed committing yourself to follow Him as your Lord. The man in Jesus' little parable sold everything he had so that he could gain the field with the treasure in it. We don't really have much, but Jesus demands it all, and in exchange He gives us far more. We're the winners in that deal! Because not only will we gain eternal life, but with Jesus in control we will begin to experience more abundant life now, more and more becoming who God created us to be! He specializes in the “extreme makeover” of sinners like you and I!

63. Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace, be still!” And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. -Mark 4:39 Context: Mark 4:35-40

A simple observation: there's no such thing as mother nature! Jesus sovereignly controls all things, including the weather. The Son controls the sun. The Son controls “el nino” patterns. Sin in the world affects the weather (Romans 8:18-23), but the Lord can start and stop a storm anytime He likes (Matthew 5:45). Here he calmed a raging sea. An even greater miracle is that He is able to calm the storm raging in your heart! Let Jesus say to your troubled heart, “Peace, be still!”

64. However, Jesus did not permit him (to go with Jesus), but said to him, “Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had compassion on you.” -Mark 5:19 Context: Mark 5:1-20

The last passage showed us that creation obeys Jesus. This passage shows us that demons have to obey Jesus also. Jesus commanded the demons to leave this man, and they did. So many people worry so much about the power of Satan and demons that they live in fear. God doesn't want that! But he also doesn't want us fighting Satan and demons in our own strength. Occasionally you will hear a child say, “My daddy can whip your daddy!” Fellow Christian, our God has whipped Satan and his demons! The book of Job seems to indicate that Satan has to get permission from God to work woe (see Job 1-2). Both Genesis 50:20 and Romans 8:28 show us that God can bring great good out of the unspeakable evil we have faced. As we turn to Christ in those times, we grow and God receives glory. The next time demons flex their muscles in your face, tell them “My Daddy can whip you and your daddy!” James 4:7 says, “resist the Devil and he will flee from you.” Here in Mark 5 Jesus delivered this man from demon possession. The relieved man would have loved to leave everything (including his reputation as the demon possessed man) and go with Jesus. But Jesus had the man stay right where he was and share what Jesus had done for him within his sphere of influence. He's calling you and I to do the same, to tell others the “great things the Lord has done.”

65. As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken (of the death of Jairus' daughter), He said to the ruler of the Synagogue (Jairus), “Do not be afraid; only believe.” -Mark 5:36 Context: Mark 5:21-43

In this passage Jesus restores Jairus' dead daughter back to life! Whereas Satan has come to kill, steal, and destroy (John 10:10a), Jesus gives life (John 10:10b). Jesus is omnipotent, He is all-powerful! That means that He can heal you and I and our loves ones, no matter what the age or problem we have. Of course, if we are healed and given more life now, we will still die, so all physical healings are temporary compared to the greater need we all have for eternal life! Thank God that every believer will live forever with Christ after this life! One time as a Pastor I prayed for a lady to be healed of cancer, and she said it felt like lightning went through her body. The next time she went to the doctor he said there was no sign of cancer! Praise the Lord! A few years later she got another kind of cancer. We prayed again, but this time she died. I had the privilege of doing her funeral. Praise the Lord – she will never have to experience physical pain again. All this to say that faith in Jesus means we don't have to be afraid as we face the inevitable difficulties of this life. Brothers and sisters, “Do not be afraid, only believe!”

66. And when He had come into the house, the blind man came to Him. And Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” -Matthew 9:29 Context: Matt. 9:27-31

Jesus is still asking us that question today, “Do you believe He is able to do this?” “This” does not mean a nice car or a coke and a smile, but that He who controls the sea, the heavenly realm and death will act in your best interest when you trust Him to. The key to faith is the object of the faith! And Jesus is God the Son, able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him (Hebrews 7:25). Do *YOU* believe that your Jesus can meet every need in your life? Are you trusting Him even when He says ‘no’ to your prayer now so He can give you a greater ‘yes’ to come? Hat tip to Beth Moore, who has said, “Whenever God says no, it’s for a greater yes!” If you have struggled with having faith, remember the key is not you at all, but the object of your faith – and the only One worthy of total faith and trust is God! Place your faithy unreservedly in Jesus!

**67. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”
-Matthew 9:37-38 Context: Matthew 9:35-38**

Won’t you join in prayer that Christian laborers will be raised up for the harvest of souls in our own churches, communities, country, and around the world? It is our privilege as believers to pray for the raising up of harvest laborers, and to pray for those actively engaged in the harvest! But be careful! After Jesus asked the 12 and others gathered to pray for harvest workers, in chapter 10 He sent them out as harvesters! Essentially all believers are called to be doing their part in the harvest! This starts right in their own churches! As each member uses their talents and spiritual gifts and does their individual part, were told that grows the body (Ephesians 4:16). As the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) and the book of Acts demonstrates, the church is the primary vehicle God gave us to reach harvest fields. This of course means that churches need to be vigilant in not focusing inward to the neglect of our outward responsibilities. The New Testament models a large amount of inward growth coming from outward focus on the harvest fields within us as we attempt to reach our own church children, around us in our community as we reach out, and all the way to the end of the earth! Pray for harvest workers; Be a harvest worker!

68. Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. -Matthew 10:16 Context: Matthew 10:16-17

Sheep are known for their dependence upon their shepherd. When they stray, they need to be corralled; when they fall down, they have to be helped up. Wolves are known for making meals of sheep. Here in breaking with the sheep analogy, Jesus tells believers to keep the innocence of sheep and doves, but to be “wise as serpents.” We need to be careful as Christ’s followers to

keep our innocence by not becoming jaded and cynical about people's motives, thus discouraging any efforts to help them physically and spiritually. But we also need the common sense of the serpent as we are "sent out" to help people. Here's an example of what this might look like: You and a Christian friend are walking down the road and a man asks for help so he can get a meal. If you give the man money, he may very well go and spend the money on alcohol or drugs, in which case you have not helped him at all. A wiser course of action is the get gifts cards to a fast food restaurant and gas stations in advance, and be ready to give them out along with a gospel tract like the kinds your church puts out to use. Another aspect of wisdom is to remember that often times scriptures teach us some of the how to go with the what. The what is that Jesus gave us the parable of the Good Samaritan, where the one man helped the other, bidding us to help people of all backgrounds. The how is that Jesus sent His disciples out in pairs to meet needs, not alone. When two believers or more are meeting needs together, they often avoid the mistakes we make when we reach out alone. The times we do reach out alone, like Philip with the Ethiopian (Acts 8), those should be the exception to the practice of reaching out together!

69. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given you in that hour what they should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. -Matthew 10:19-20 Context: Matthew 10:17-20

The context of a passage must always be remembered: the 12 disciples had been sent out on this mission to their lost countrymen. Some have used this verse to say that when you are completely unprepared to witness to somebody, God will give you the words to say. But this text specifically refers to the times when believers will be standing in front of hostile governing authorities and questioned for their message and their mission. It is a fair application to say that in times like that God will be with you and will help you know how to "defend yourself" in a way that brings Jesus glory! Elsewhere we are told to study to show ourselves approved, and also to always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us. So do adequately study the Scriptures and the culture you are witnessing in order to adequately share the gospel. But don't have anxiety about what you will say in the myriads of ways you can be harassed and persecuted for sharing the gospel. In those moments the faithful child of God will be assisted from Heaven!

70. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell. -Matthew 10:28 Context: Matt. 10:28-33

We often are afraid of what other people think when we share the gospel with them. We ask ourselves, "Will they still like me? Will they think I'm a freak? Will they punch me in the nose? Will I lose my job?" In keeping with the context here, we recognize that Christians then and around the world were also asking, "will they arrest me?" or "will they kill me?" Fear is natural,

but remember that God's love inside of the believer is supernatural! We all need to be more concerned about what God thinks than what man thinks! Persecutors once told a Christian, "If you do not stop talking about Jesus, I am going to kill you!" The Christian said, "You can't kill me, because I'm already dead! Jesus now lives in my heart, and if you take my life, you'll be doing me a favor, because you'll just be sending me to spend eternity with Jesus!" The Persecutor was struck in that moment by the power of God to have a man respond that way, and he and others trusted Christ that very day because they wanted what that man had – something (really Someone) to live and die for!

71. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. -Matthew 10:37

It is a tremendous thing when multiple generations in the same family are all following Jesus! Unfortunately, many people who love Jesus don't have parents and/or children who love Jesus. Jesus call us as individuals to confess Him before men, even when those we love do not. Historically and around the world today some people are basically kicked out of their families when they get baptized as a Christian. In America, a growing phenomenon is parents walking away from the faith because their children have walked away from the faith. The Bible is clear: any relationship that we put ahead of our relationship with Christ is idolatry. This does not mean we stop loving our prodigal children (and parents), but it does mean Christ comes first and that we don't join sinful loved ones in rebellion against God! Our fidelity to Christ is among the things God may use to bring them to Christ!

72. And He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. -Matthew 10:38-39

Jesus here lays out the challenge for us all: being willing to die for Jesus. That's what happened on a cross: death. Taking up our cross means a daily dying to self, and living for Christ instead. When you study the lives of those "martyred," or killed for their faith in Jesus, you don't find people with a death wish. You find people who lived for Jesus, and as they were obedient by faith in Him, they were put in circumstances where routine obedience got them "martyred." Interestingly, the word martyr is Greek for witness, which all of us are called to do. So many Christians in the early church were killed for their witness, the word martyr became synonymous with death for the faith. So don't read this passage and think that to be super Christian you have to die for Jesus, simply be a faithful witness for Him, whatever the circumstances. He will take care of the rest, including rewarding you later for any "loss" suffered due to faithfulness now!

73. He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward. -Matthew 10:40-42

I want to receive rewards in Heaven, don't you? After speaking about those who courageously and boldly live and proclaim their faith despite negative repercussions, here Jesus says He will reward those who take care of His disciples that the world mistreats. Do you know a Christian whose family has rejected them for following Jesus? Maybe God wants to meet their needs through you! God may call you to fund the education of a future Christian worker who has been cut off from their family. Maybe through Voice of the Martyrs you can help the family of a Pastor who has been killed for the faith. Maybe through Baptist Global Response you can provide clean water to an entire village. It will all be rewarded one day by Jesus!

74. And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd.

-Mark 6:34 Context: Mark 6:30-44

We are perhaps most like Jesus when, moved with compassion, we teach someone the ways of God and meet their physical needs to boot! Here is the event in which Jesus fed 5,000 men. But even as He met their physical need for food, the text reads that He was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He knew He was their Good Shepherd, the One who would lay down His life for the sheep. In John 6 we read that after Jesus fed the 5,000 He told them He is the Bread of Life. If anyone believes in Jesus, they have their biggest need met – the need for salvation, the need for the Eternal Shepherd! In our own lives today we will come across many needs. In addition to the physical and emotional needs teachers, medical people, and others will see, people have the spiritual need of Jesus. May we be moved with compassion as we go through this day!

75. And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw Him and were troubled. But immediately He talked with them and said to them, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.

-Mark 6:49-50 Context: Mark 6:45-52

I don't know what kind of storm you are in right now, but I know this: Jesus has not forgotten you. He first commanded them to cheer up and let His presence calm their fear. Only after that did He actually calm their storm. Sometimes He allows your individual storm to continue longer than you wish, but you can experience His calming peace in the midst of the turbulent storm if you will obey His command here. In Hebrews 13:5 He has promised never to leave or forsake

His disciples. In Hebrews 13:6 he concludes that because of that we can say boldly, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” Cultivate a growing sense of how Jesus is ever-present with you as you face storms. God’s got this!

76. Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.” -John 6:26-27

Jesus gives spiritual food, just as He gave them physical food. Here He encourages the people to “labor” to receive the food He gives. There are many points that could be made from this passage, but perhaps it’s best to take this as an encouragement to make sure you “prepare and eat” your spiritual food daily. So many people complain that they are too busy to maintain personal devotions to God through Bible study and prayer. Indeed it is a “Labor” to maintain your time with God. But it also takes labor to feed yourself, clothe yourself, study for tests, perform work assignments, etc. Jesus is saying here that obtaining spiritual food should be top priority in your life! Everything of value is worth expending “labor on.” Nothing is more important than your relationship with God, and treasures await in the Bible for those who will labor to find them!

**77. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.
-John 6:40 Context: John 6:35-40**

What a precious promise from Jesus! Has He broken through to you in salvation? Have you “seen” Him, and believed in Him and made Him the Savior and Lord of your life? Then He WILL raise you at the last day! In the movie “Bug’s Life” one of the bugs is flying intently toward a bug zapping light. Another bug tells him to stop, but he says, “I can’t help it, so pretty” as he flies toward the light! In Star Trek they have a Tractor Beam that locks on to shuttleships and draws them into the bay. God’s grace is like that – shining a light from Heaven on you that you can’t explain, but all you can do from that point on is follow Jesus! What a precious truth coming from the lips of our dear Savior!

78. Jesus therefore answered and said to them, “Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.” -John 6:43-44 Context: John 6:43-49

People often complain about what they don’t understand. Jesus says here not to complain about God’s amazing grace simply because it doesn’t fit with our mindset. We want to have to

do something to earn our salvation. Jesus says here that God is at work drawing people to salvation. Instead of asking what and how questions we should rejoice and “eat” the bread of life, being fully nourished on Christ and His ability to save us and raise us up with Him in Heaven! In verses 60-69 many turn away from Jesus when He talks like this. As He turns to the disciples and asks if they also want to leave, Peter essentially says, “We’ve got nowhere else to go – You are our hope for eternal life, Jesus!” That’s assurance of salvation – knowing that you have nowhere and no one else to go to for salvation except Jesus! Those who can take or leave Jesus, on the other hand, can’t be certain they are really His.

79. He answered and said to them, Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: “This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they also worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”

-Mark 7:6-7 Context: Mark 7:5-12

Many people suppose that the Pharisees problem was only that they had added a lot of dumb rules to the beautiful instruction of the Old Testament law. Certainly they HAD done that, but there were also times when they neglected Old Testament law by adding new rules that helped them actually neglect their responsibilities. Here they question Jesus by asking Him about some of their rules on hand washing. Jesus answers by challenging them on why they have let their disciples neglect to care for the financial needs of their parents. They had made it possible for their disciples to neglect the clear command to honor their parents. Paul said those who do such things are worse than unbelievers (I Timothy 5:8). Pharisees then and now hurt people by demanding of them “extra” rules that often keep people from focusing on main things, like caring for our immediate family members. Don’t neglect the “Main things” to appease Pharisees in your life.

80. There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man.

-Mark 7:15 Context: Mark 7:14-23

Jesus’ statement must have absolutely blown his hearers away. His main point is that sin starts in the mind and heart and will. Again, His listeners had demonized external things rather than get to the internal “heart of the matter.” And our wicked hearts are the heart of the matter. Jesus wanted them to deal with who they were as sinners in need of life changing grace. He didn’t want them to be nit-picky rule followers trying to keep 90 miles away from the nearest potential sin. They were so obsessed with the clean and unclean outward rules they had added to the Old Testament law that they hadn’t dealt with their inward sin.

81. But He answered and said, “Every plant which My Heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted.” -Matthew 15:13 Context: Matthew 15:12-14

Jesus speaks these words to go along with His confrontation of the Pharisees. His disciples were concerned that He had offended the Pharisees. The problem with the Pharisees was that they had become obsessed with following the rules they had added to the Law of Moses instead of following the Lord who had given the Law of Moses and the basic instructions of the Law that would lead to love for God and love for neighbor. Jesus basically says that God did not plant their kind of legalism in their hearts. That kind of religiosity without faith in God had not been planted by God at all. The day was coming when all such “plants” would be uprooted by God! Theirs was not the great faith of their forefathers Abraham and Moses and David. Instead their legalism was so far from faith in God that they were like blind men leading blind men – both were in danger of falling into a ditch.

**82. “A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.” And He left them and departed.
-Matthew 16:4 Context: Matthew 16:1-4**

Jesus frequently spoke about avoiding the mistakes of those who substituted all kinds of stuff for faith in God. This time it was asking for a “sign.” But Jesus didn’t come to amuse us, entertain us, to put on “the greatest show on earth.” He came to save sinners! “You want a sign,” Jesus said, “look for the sign of Jonah.” He was referring to His resurrection from the dead on the third day after His death. Just as Jonah who was as good as dead was spit out of the great fish on the third day, Jesus came out of the tomb on the third day. Remember that Jesus said this before He died. After He rose from the dead, His disciples saw Him alive and remembered that He had spoken these things. There are always those who demand a miracle, but there is no greater miracle than Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, that totally transformed the life of those early disciples. If you want a changed life, go to Jesus, who rose from the dead and gives life to all those who come to God the Father through faith in Him!

83. “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” -Matthew 16:18 Context: Matthew 16:13-19

Everyone in Jesus’ day, as today, was asking who Jesus really was. But Jesus always makes it personal with us, and makes you personally decide whether He is going to be your Lord and Savior or not. If He becomes your Lord and Savior, he will use your “confession” to build His church, and the gates of Hades won’t be able to keep you from crashing through Satan’s strongholds in Jesus’ name. Many Christians today have this all wrong. They worry whether their nice little gates will be able to keep Satan out. They are on the defensive, hoping not to mess up too bad before they die. Jesus here says that it is Satan who has to keep going down to

Home Depot for new gates because real Christians keep knocking down his gates, untying his captives and setting them free! Yeah! Jailbreaks for Jesus happen every day as Satan's prisoners are set free in the matchless name of Jesus! At the Day of Pentecost in Acts chapter two 3,000 such souls were set free. Today, 3,000 souls are saved and set free every hour around the world as Christians take the gospel right through Satan's gates!

84. But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

-Mark 8:33 Context: Mark 8:31-33

Christian, you are not obliged to take the advice of even a strong Christian friend when it is against the revealed will of God. In the great book *Pilgrim's Progress* there is a great scene in which a man named Hopeful confesses that he had followed the man named Christian down the wrong road, even knowing it was the wrong road, solely because he was deferring to Christian's more mature faith. Jesus here tells us that keeping our minds focused in on obedience to God sometimes will mean rejecting as flat out wrong the advice of even other Christians. Remember that just before this Peter had given a great confession of who Jesus is. From this we learn that the will of God as revealed in the Bible is our guide, not the feelings of others. There will be times we need to speak the truth in love to each other, and urge our fellow believers to choose God's truth over Satan's lies!

85. "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels."

-Luke 9:26 Context: Luke 9:23-26

The Newsboys song said it well, "What are we sneaking around for?" Christian, we have accepted Jesus, THE Way, THE Truth, THE Life!!! We DON'T have to be afraid of what people think! We CAN live for Jesus and make the most of every opportunity He gives to do the right thing and to share His love with others. The Newsboys conclusion should be our own, "I'm not ashamed to speak the name of Jesus Christ!"

86. And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."

-Mark 9:28-29 Context: Mark 9:14-29

Christian, as much as you and I want to help others, there are going to be situations that we will not be able to fix by our own efforts. Of course God always can heal and fix broken situations, so we always need to make our main ministry for people that of intense prayer. This is not a cop out. An example would be for parents of a young adult who see their child making all the

wrong decisions despite the parent's warnings. But in hardness of heart the young person goes right on sinning, and for the parent to constantly bring it up may mean the loss of the relationship. In such a situation the parent should keep on loving the child and keep the relationship going, all the while intensely praying and fasting for their child. Jesus can heal when all of our efforts have failed!

87. And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." -Mark 9:35 Context: Mark 9:33-37

Being a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ means viewing yourself as His servant and the servant of a world in need. People who refuse to meet needs they see are not committed servants but immature Christians, if they are Christians at all. But servanthood takes humility. As I was writing this I was interrupted by a call from a Christian brother of mine who is in a wheelchair. He needed somebody to come and empty his bag and prepare his lunch because his help had failed to show up. My first thought was to grumble about this assignment, but it is exactly what God wants me to do right now, at this very point of the day. So I'll be back in a while because the Master has given me an opportunity to practice what I preach! Jesus redirected His disciples that day. They were arguing about which was the greatest. He told them what Heaven thinks – the greatest disciples are the ones who serve in Jesus' name!

Postscript – I originally wrote that many years ago, and that dear brother is now in Heaven. There were many opportunities over the years to minister to him as unto Christ, like Jesus said in Matthew 25, "In as much as you've done it unto the least of these my brethren, you've done it unto Me." Funny thing though, I know I received more in prayer support from my dear brother over the years than any physical support I gave him.

88. "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me." -Mark 9:37 Context: Mark 9:33-37

I had a wonderful time serving my friend in the wheelchair that day. I always got more out of our times together than I gave. He had so much wisdom to share and loves to share it with boneheads like me. Jesus made things so simple. To Him it was always about people. We are to do what He did – love and serve people. Here Jesus says believers should always receive children in His name. All around us families are asking for help, and wild children are looking for guidance. Let's commit to looking after all the ones we can for Jesus' glory, okay? As a Pastor I have noticed the most unhappy people in the church are often people who don't have any connection to children in the church. Their own kids and grandkids either don't go to church or go elsewhere, and they have not found ways to interact with children at the church. I have seen some of these grumpy people transformed into more joyful people when they found ways to interact with children in the church or one of the children's outreach ministries. In a very real

way, being involved with the next generation helps us receive Heaven's smile, as Jesus indicates here!

89. "For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward. But whoever causes one of these little ones to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea." -Mark 9:41-42 Context: Mark 9:38-42

Brothers and sisters in Christ, always be on the lookout for opportunities to bless other Christians. The key here is to help meet their pressing needs. And even as you meet their physical needs give them spiritual encouragement. How sad it is that some young people only receive negative words and looks from some churchgoers. Here Jesus says you will receive a reward for building up others in the body of Christ! But He also says you'll be in real trouble with Heaven if you make the little ones stumble! Little ones here includes not only children, but is also clearly a reference to growing disciples of all ages who have a need. Paul later gives the weaker brother principle in Romans 14. He anticipates that mature believers will not be easily offended or guarding their turf in the church, but will be looking for ways to minister to weaker brothers in the church. Sometimes that involves ministry to children, others times to new Christians, other times helping those who have an overwhelming temporary need, such as those experiencing loss or persecution. Make sure your actions will be rewarded by Heaven!

90. "Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another." -Mark 9:50 Context: Mark 9:43-50

While you are watching out for others, be reminded that you will lose all your credibility and people will mock you if you are not a living example of the difference that Jesus makes. Be careful little eyes what you see. Be careful little ears what you hear. Be careful little feet where you go. Some visual media needs to remain off limits for you as a believer. Some music needs to be off limits for you as a believer. Some places you used to go need to be shunned now, especially if you would go by yourself and not with other believers. The Proverb is as necessary today as it was 3,000 years ago: "Guard your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life." But it's not just what you keep out of your head and heart, but what you put in. A recent study showed young people spend 200 minutes a day on their phone, but only 3% read the Bible daily. Many times those of us who are older don' fare much better. Let me challenge you to "salt up your life" by getting back into the Bible yourself and with others!

91. Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in Heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in Heaven. For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. -Matthew 18:10-11 Context: Matthew 18:10-14

This verse informs us that God so loves the little children that will become big people that He has assigned angels to watch over them. That being the case, does any Christian have the right to despise another person who has been created by God? Absolutely not, but we are to love our fellow sinners in the name of Jesus. We are to view people as lost sheep that need to be sought out with the good news of the salvation that comes from receiving Jesus. That was Jesus' mission, and it is ours: to seek and to save that which is lost!

92. Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. -Matthew 18:15 Context: Matthew 18:15-20

Many of the conflicts people have in church would be resolved if we would just take our Lord's words here to heart. We talk to other people about a person we have had a problem with rather than go directly and talk with the person we have a problem with. The New Testament has so many wonderful teachings on resolving conflict, but none are of any use if we don't start with this one combined with a forgiving spirit. Come on church, let's do it Jesus' way! Get beyond the surface of things to the heart level – engage your brothers and sisters in Christ, listening with both ears and with both eyes, and giving and receiving forgiveness. If things don't get resolved, do what Jesus said next, bring in a more mature believer or two to help resolve the matter. It was in this context of coming together AFTER a problem that Jesus gave this promise: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

93. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you? And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him (End of Jesus' Parable of the Unforgiving Servant). Then Jesus said, "So My Heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses." -Matthew 18:33-35 Context: Matthew 18:21-35

Ouch! Could Jesus be any clearer?! If in your heart you refuse to forgive others their sin against you, you can't be certain God has forgiven you? Why? Because when a person is truly saved, the heart of the Savior becomes the heart of the saved: reconciliation! That does not mean you condone or endorse what the other person has done, or that it is not wise to set up boundaries with them going forward. But it does mean that you release the ill-will you hold toward them that is really eating you up on the inside. Someone said it well, "Unforgiveness is a poison you drink hoping another will die – but you are the one dying!" The growing Christian will forgive

first for sake of the glory of God, because they have been forgiven by God. They will forgive secondly for the sake of themselves, because our Creator didn't create us to hold on to such emotions. And thirdly, they forgive for the sake of the other person, in hopes of what God can still do in that person's life.

94. Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

-Matthew 8:21-22

Context: Matthew 8:18-22

Jesus wants our full obedience – NOW! This fellow was basically saying, "in a couple of years, I will have fewer responsibilities – then I will unreservedly serve you." Here we note that it would have been a good thing to wait and help the family by burying his father. I Timothy 5:8 says believers are worse than unbelievers if they don't take care of their family responsibilities. Jesus' strong response makes us wonder if the father was still living at this point – I think he probably was. Thus the funeral wouldn't be within the week, but more like within the next decade. Like a lot of us, the man was only willing to put serving Jesus second until an unspecified "tomorrow." Jesus wasn't having any of it! He had called this man to obey Him NOW, and delayed obedience was disobedience! Are you pushing obedience to Jesus out to your own unspecified "tomorrow?" Quit it! Follow the Lord's call on your life!

95. But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." And they went to another village.

-Luke 9:55-56

Context: Luke 9:51-56

We must leave judgment and retaliation to God. Here James and John wanted to call down fire from Heaven to roast a Samaritan village that didn't receive Jesus. Jesus told them they didn't understand where the spirit they had manifested came from. And then He said what this first coming to earth and the following church age would be all about – saving people! Those are the days we are in now before necessary judgment comes – days of taking the good news of eternal life in Jesus to all nations. In John 10:10 we get a great description from Jesus about the difference between Satan and Jesus" The thief comes to kill, steal, and destroy, but I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full!" Leave judgment for judgment day – these are the days in which we persuade people with words, prayers, and acts of service!

96. If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment. -John 7:23-24

We are so bad as people about judging each other based on appearance and external matters. Jesus says here that appearance is not the issue, but the reality of things behind the appearance. Jesus is always getting beyond surface issues to the heart of the matter. They thought it looked bad to make a man well on the Sabbath because it deviated from what their extra man-made traditions taught was acceptable on the Sabbath. They were also jealous that Jesus hadn't checked with them to make sure it was okay to do this. Jesus basically says here that it's always right to do good on the Sabbath. It is a no-brainer! Later the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:16-17 that because of how Christ makes lives new when they receive Him, "from now on we regard no one according to the flesh...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new." A few verses later he says those of us who know Christ are ambassadors for Christ, urging sinners to be reconciled to God. May we all look beyond outward appearance to the needs of our fellow sinners. Christians are sinners saved by God's grace reaching out to sinners still under the wrath due their sins, urging them to be reconciled to God.

97. On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not glorified. -John 7:38-40

Praise the Lord we are now living in the days of the New Covenant, the days since Jesus died for our sins, rose from the dead, and has returned to Heaven and resumed the glorified position He had always had as God the Son (John 17:5). When a sinner like you or me turns to Christ, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14). And it is impossible for God the Holy Spirit to be inside someone and not be flowing out like living water! Galatians 6:22-23a says "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." This does not mean that Christians won't ever struggle with sin, but it does mean we have spiritual power within us because we have God the Holy Spirit within us, and as Philippians 1:6 says "He who began a good work within us will be faithful to complete it until the Day of Christ." So just as you did at salvation, continually come to Christ and drink! Be flushed of sin and filled with the Holy Spirit who lives within you!

98. Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” -John 8:12

I am so glad that the God who created the world stepped into it when sin had made it a dark place, and lit the world up with His glory. Jesus and His Word are a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. He is our Way, and He leads the way. So don't walk in darkness any more – follow Him! The first thing you need to understand to live abundantly in Christ is that anything His Word asks of you will be better for you than leaning on your own understanding and disobeying Him. I certainly want what's best for me, and following Jesus has always been better for me than the times I foolishly went my own way! You must begin by truly believing that following Jesus and His teachings will lead you to become the best possible you! Satan will always try to get you to doubt the truth and goodness of God and His teachings. But listening to Satan and rejecting God's Word will always lead you down a path of darkness until you repent and return to the life of following Jesus!

99. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins. -John 8:24

This is one of the most explicit claims Jesus made to being God. The word He is in italics because in the Greek it is not there – Jesus said that if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins. He is saying that He is equivalent to the I AM that met Moses at the burning bush. Jesus was saying that He is equivalent to Yahweh. John chapter 8 contains three of the great I AM statements in John's gospel. By the end of the chapter the religious leaders want to kill Him for blasphemy (saying He is God). The prophet Joel had said in Joel 2:32 that whoever calls on the name of Yahweh (the LORD) will be saved. That's the passage that said that the Holy Spirit would be poured out in the last days. Peter preached from that passage in Acts 2, convincingly arguing that Jesus had died for their sins and risen from the dead and is both their Lord (and Messiah). When the people recognized the truth of what Peter was preaching, they asked Peter what they should do in response. He told them to repent of their sin, believe in Jesus, and declare their faith publicly in baptism in the Name of Jesus. Calling upon Jesus for salvation would mean the forgiveness of their sins and salvation, and they would receive the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Then Peter said, “This promise is not only to those there that day, and their children, but to all who are afar off” (See Acts 2:14-39). If you have never done so, believe that Jesus is the Great I Am, and call out to Jesus for salvation from your sins. Don't die in your sins, but trust in the one who died FOR your sins and saves those who turn to Him!

100. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My Disciples indeed. And you shall know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free.”

-John 8:31-32

Context: John 8:31-36

Make no mistake about it: It is meaningless to say you believe in Jesus and scorn anything He teaches. Jesus makes it very clear here that His true disciples “abide” in His word. Abide means to dwell, or to live in. True Christians are those who have called on Jesus for salvation and are now letting Christ’s words form who they are becoming in Him. He is their way, their truth, their life! All this is possible because of the salvation He has graciously provided them. As verse 36 says, “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” At salvation the believer gains a perfect standing in Christ as God’s adopted child. As the believer abides in Christ’s word, they progressively look more like a member of God’s family, both enjoying the benefits and seeking to live up to the family name! God has adopted you and I into His family, fellow believer – let’s grow together in Him by abiding in His word!

101. “Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.”

-John 8:51

Context: John 8:42-52

Hebrews 11:4 tells us this about Adam and Eve’s son Abel: “even though he is dead, he yet speaks.” In Luke 23:43 the thief on the cross next to Jesus who believed in Him was told by Jesus, “today you will be with Me in Paradise.” And in 2 Corinthians 5:8 we read that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. With integrity Christians can speak of departed believers as ones who will never see death, specifically what Revelation 20:15 calls the second death. John 8:51 goes along with these great promises and concludes the true Christian shall never see that death. But it also makes clear that those who can claim these promises are those who “keep” Christ’s word! Having believed in Jesus, they have prioritized doing what Jesus said. This doesn’t mean believers always obey perfectly, but their trajectory is set – they love Jesus and desire to do what He says. When they sin, they agree with God’s Word that it was sin, repent, and get back on track with Jesus. The ones Jesus rebuked rejected following Jesus, and will experience the second death, which involves being in the Lake of Fire forever (Revelation 20:15). Those who have followed Jesus will never see that death.

102. “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.”

-John 9:3

Context: John 9:1-3

I love these words of Jesus! There’s really no such thing in God’s eyes as people that aren’t “normal.” God delights in the different kinds of people He has made. The important thing is that every person as an individual realizes the chief reason they are here is “to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” “Challenged” people who understand this are much better off than those who just don’t get it. The disciples were products of their society, and thus asked Jesus who had

sinned to cause the man's blindness, him or his parents. What I love about Jesus' answer is that no miracle needed to happen to make His response in John 9:3 true. God has received great glory through blind people like Fanny Crosby, the writer of wonderful hymns like *To God be the glory* and *Blessed assurance*. In John 9 Jesus does open the blind man's eyes to see, but He also makes clear that those who are spiritually blind have the real problem.

103. Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains." -John 9:41 Context: John 9:35-41

Sinful pride is a bigger problem than any physical challenge anyone has. Willfully staying spiritually blind and rejecting your need of Jesus is the real problem the world has. Every individual on earth needs to 'see' that they are a sinner incapable of saving themselves, and that their only hope is believing in, trusting in, and giving their allegiance and obedience to Jesus. Give yourself to Jesus right now if you never have! Pray a prayer like this: *Dear God, I know that I am a sinner, and You are right to judge my sins. Thank you Jesus for taking the punishment due my sins on Yourself at the cross. I believe You died for my sins, but rose from the dead to show Your power over Satan, sin, death, and Hell. I turn from being the lord of my own life to receiving You as my Savior and Lord. I will follow You the rest of my days! In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.*

104. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. -John 10:5 Context: John 10:1-5

A lot of Christians whine and complain about how hard it is to know what the right thing to do is in these crazy times we live in. That's simply not true. What it means to follow Jesus is clearly laid out in the Bible. Obedience isn't complicated, it just takes courage to do what the Bible clearly says instead of giving in to the thousands of voices of strangers. For instance, God's Word makes clear that sex is only to be engaged in within the marriage covenant of a man and woman for the purposes of bonding and possible procreation. Every other use of sex is sin, a perversion of God's intent. All non-biblical uses of sex need to be repented of as part of fully turning to Jesus. Here Jesus says His followers, His sheep, don't follow the voice of strangers. Why not? Because they have spent so much time listening to the voice of Jesus, their Shepherd, they only respond to that voice. To spot counterfeit bills agents are trained to know the real thing. They don't spend a lot of time looking at counterfeits. They don't have to! Counterfeits are obvious when you are very familiar with the real thing! The sheep flee strangers because they know the stranger's voice is not the Shepherds. Jesus will always lead you in the right way. Follow His voice, and flee from others. Obedience isn't complicated, it just takes the courage to act on what you know to be true!

105. “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

-John 10:10

Context: John 10:9-18

The thief wants to steal your joy, kill your innocence, and destroy your effectiveness. Jesus wants you to know pure joy, innocent laughter, and great effectiveness. He wants you to have REAL life! Sin always takes you further than you want to go, keeps you longer than you want to stay, and costs more than you were ever willing to pay. Wise up! Repent of sin and follow Jesus. He loves you, and anything He asks you to do in His Word will be for your good and His glory!

106. “Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in Heaven.” -Luke 10:20 Context: Luke 10:17-20

This verse comes from a very specific passage involving 70 people that Jesus sent out on a limited mission. We can learn from it, but we should not rip verses out of their context and claim them as promises for today. For instance, in verse 4 Jesus told them to go without money, supplies, or sandals. That was obviously for those on that limited mission trip, because people we see on mission trips in the book of Acts are not seen doing likewise. Some have used verse 19 to justify snake handling as a form of worship. Such careless use of scripture is ridiculous! But there is a timeless gem in verse 20 we are intended to draw a great principle from. As Christians we are to rejoice in the fact that our names are written in Heaven! We don't rejoice because we did or didn't see results from our gospel efforts, or because we did or didn't see great miracles happen. Sometimes we will see tangible success from our efforts, other times we will not. In God's economy our main efforts may have been prayers that will won't be fully answered for generations to come. We are to rejoice primarily in our salvation which is secure in Christ regardless of how God chooses to use our efforts. Jesus' words to them and to us are such a blessing. They had seen God move greatly, but Jesus knew there would be times when they would wonder if they made any impact at all. And so He told them and us to rejoice not in our fickle circumstances, but in our salvation!

107. “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” And he said, “He who showed mercy on him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.” -Luke 10:36-37 Context: Luke 10:25-37

Religious status means nothing if you don't help people. The religious people didn't help the man with the need, but the Good Samaritan did! You may have walked an aisle, been baptized, regularly attended church, taken classes, memorized scripture and even held church positions. If you don't love and help people in Jesus' name, you've missed one of the key things our faith is about. Galatians 5:6 says, “In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.” Titus 3:14 says, “Let our people also learn to

maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.” Do you love Jesus? Then love others in His name, even people from radically different backgrounds than your own.

108. And Jesus answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken from her.” -Luke 10:41-42 Context: Luke 10:38-42

What great verses! Jesus is not saying that details don’t need to be dealt with. They do. But when it is time to hear from Jesus, we need to stop what we are doing and hear from Jesus! Maybe Martha had fallen prey to societal expectations that the women folk needed to be getting the next meal ready while the men folk dealt with religious things. Jesus’ words make clear He wanted everybody to hear what He teaches and experience Him. What a shame that so many of us go through a day frantically, like chickens with our heads cut off, consumed with the next thing we have to do. We all need to cultivate time to sit at Jesus’ feet and hear from Him, and let His Spirit shine the light of His Word on our day so we can see more clearly how to serve Him. These are also great verses for worship services we attend. We need to put out of our mind other things so we can receive the Word that is preached to us!

109. And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, “Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You.” But He said, “More than that, blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it.” -Luke 11:27-28

How sad it must make Jesus to see some come close to worshipping Mary, or describing her as a Co-Redeemer with Jesus. One Pope even wore on his robe a sash that said, “totally devoted to you, Mary.” Listen up: Do NOT venerate a person! Do NOT think you need to go through any saint to get to God. And realize this: the one who is blessed is the one who hears God’s Word and does what it says! Mary did that. She was an example of a godly woman. But Jesus is the One to glorify, along with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, our Triune God!

110. And He (Jesus) said, “Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.” -Luke 11:46 Context: Luke 11:37-52

Lawyers here refers to a type of religious lawyer, who along with the Pharisees carefully made sure they understood what the Law said. They loved to be bosses over people, and added in many restrictive rules for the little people to follow on top of the simplicity of Old Testament teaching. Jesus here rebukes them for loading burdensome “extras” on God’s people. Some

religious leaders today do similar things, expecting “their” people to carry out their every whim in the name of Jesus. Jesus here makes clear that any leader who isn’t a servant at heart and in practice isn’t worth following. I once helped a family move their belongings (their very *heavy* belongings) off of a moving truck and into their house while their very able-bodied Pastor ate pizza in the living room. Such things should not be!

111. In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one another, He began to say to His disciples first of all, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.” -Luke 12:1-3

These verses deserve a slow and thoughtful reading. Go through them again. Most of the Pharisees did what they did not out of love for God, but to impress their fellow men. It was enough for them to be considered “good” people by those they were trying to impress. Jesus knew that their hearts were far from him, and in secret their minds were cesspools of sin. In pride they judged others for not doing the outward things they did, but did not humble their sinful hearts before God. Leaven starts out small inside dough but eventually spreads like cancer to every part of the dough, ruining it. Hiding our sins instead of confessing them and dealing with them does that in the church. When we live and act as phonies our sins continue to eat us up from the inside out. Jesus says one day all will be revealed. Meditate on this statement: “The sins we uncover through confession to God He will cover with His blood and forgive, but the sins we cover up God will uncover one day.” Don’t be like the Pharisees and think you can fool God. Get it right now before it’s too late!

112. “And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear. Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into Hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!” -Luke 5:4-5

Sadly, history reveals many times Christians have had to apply these words all the way out to being killed for their faith. Sometimes it is from governments, sometimes it is those of another religion, and many times even from members of their family. Insults, harassment, persecution and even martyrdom are often experienced by those who follow Christ. Far from being a thing of the past, we are told that there have been more killed for their faith in the last century than the previous centuries combined. Persecutors cannot do the Christian any eternal harm – because for the believer the moment they are absent from the body they will be present with the Lord and one day get a perfect new body! Having feared God as their rightful Judge, they have thrown themselves on “the mercy of the court!” And because of Jesus the repentant sinner looks into their Judge’s eyes and finds the Savior there! Having that proper fear of God

they no longer have to fear what any person can do to them! Many times those who have done the killing were so impressed with the boldness of the believer in the face of death that later they too turn to the Lord for salvation.

113. “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” -Luke 12:15 Context: Luke 15:15-21

Jesus is very serious about Him being the most important person and “possession” in our lives. Here he speaks of the person who spends their entire life gathering possessions to spend on themselves. When they die they won’t have any eternal benefit from the possessions piled up here. Many people like this say, “You can’t take it with you.” Our response is, “you can’t take it with you, but you can send it ahead!” The use of our time and treasure here stores up for ourselves treasure in Heaven, making us “rich toward God” instead of ourselves. The Bible makes very clear that we can add to our heavenly retirement portfolio now through both generous and sacrificial living and giving! Another great benefit is that in the here and now Jesus means all the more to us as our best “treasure!”

114. “Blessed are those servants, whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them.” -Luke 12:37 Context: Luke 12:35-40

Jesus is coming back for His church one day! Will he find you ready, able to say that you have prioritized serving Him? Oh to hear Jesus say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant!” What a wonderful picture Jesus presents of the privilege of serving God and others. Here he hints that even in the future Jesus won’t think anything of having us sit in His presence and bringing us the cup of coffee as we fellowship together! If that is true of Jesus, we should never begrudge the opportunities He gives us now to serve others in His name!

115. “Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division.” -Luke 12:51 Context: Luke 12:49-53

Do what, Jesus? I thought that with Jesus we all will have “peace on earth, goodwill toward men.” That verse is Luke 2:14, and will be completely true when Christ returns and reigns on earth after His second coming. Only those who receive Jesus as Savior will experience THAT physical peace on earth THEN. Those who receive Him as Savior NOW experience God’s spiritual peace that comes from being reconciled to God! Of course where many people have accepted Christ and share His love with others, great goodwill toward men is exhibited. Much of the world has benefited from the change the gospel brings not only to individuals but communities. But Jesus makes very clear here that there will remain a division when those who

have received Him and those who have rejected Him interact. Jesus is not saying you have to take a negative posture against your family. He is saying that from now on Jesus is your first loyalty, and all other loyalties now are viewed through your faith. Inevitably this causes division when others insist that you put them before God, or practice sin with them. That's when the division is felt! As believers we honor every person we can everywhere we go, but we are never to compromise our faith to try to achieve peace with men. It just doesn't work that way!

116. There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that those Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you no, but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." -Luke 13:1-5

In an earlier entry we saw that people born with "disabilities" are not that way because of sin. Here we see that bad things don't always happen to people because of sin. That can be the case, such as the flood in Noah's day, which was a judgment on their sin. But we should never speculate that bad things have happened to someone because they had sinned. Job's friends were certain that secret sin must have been the cause of Job's troubles, but they were wrong! Jesus here places the emphasis not on what led to what we would view as untimely deaths, but what will happen to anyone who dies who has not repented of their sin and turned to Jesus for salvation. We are all going to die, and for some of us it will happen suddenly and far younger than we thought. The key is to be ready to face death because we have made peace with God. If you haven't, you will always fear death. And you will miss out on eternity with God after this life, instead facing eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire. When the Psalmists and Jesus used the word perish, they meant being cut off from life on the future new earth with the redeemed of all ages (See Psalm 37:22 and Revelation 20:11-22:5). Jesus commands you to repent and believe, so do not delay!

117. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." -John 10:27-28 Context: John 10:22-30

Praise the Lord for the eternal life Jesus gives to His sheep, to those who hear His voice and follow Him. We are commanded to follow the voice of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He calls us to salvation! He calls us to follow Him! He calls us to do what He has commanded in the Scripture! According to this great passage, our lives are in God's hands! How's that for a sense of security in His saving love! Let's follow Jesus!

118. “When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

-Luke 14:12-14

What have you personally done lately for those who will never be able to pay you back? What has your church family done lately for those who will never be able to pay you back? What has your small group at church done lately for those who will never be able to pay it back? What Jesus says here is so wonderfully convicting! That’s especially true because we are those who could never pay back Jesus for what He has done for us! Having freely received from One we can’t pay back, we are freely to give to others who can’t pay us back! Please don’t go by this entry too quickly. Ask God to use these verses to take you, your church, and your small group out of your comfort zone. But notice also there is a promise with these verses. God will pay you back later and then some when the ultimate reward ceremony comes! On that day don’t just be found looking on while others are rewarded! As 2 John 2:8 urges, work in faith so you can receive a full reward!

119. “So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.”

-Luke 14:33

Context: Luke 14:25-33

A movie from the 1990’s contained the famous line, “You can’t handle the truth!” Friend, can you handle the truth that Jesus expects all you have to be under His rule if you are His disciple? Or can you not handle the Truth?! Many reject Christ when they realize that 100% of who we are must be yielded to His Lordship! If He is not Lord OF all, He may not be Lord AT all! He must be first in our lives: before our parents and siblings, before our spouse and children, before our friends. If they turn from the faith, we will not! If they demand we put them before our faith, we will not! The Lord is patient with us as this truth settles into our lives, but He is also unrelenting – He will not allow anything to displace Him as the rightful Lord of our lives – not relationships, not accomplishments, not money. He will frustrate all efforts to find ultimate meaning in things created rather than the Creator. Here Jesus urges us to be proactive in following Him like a builder building a tower or a king going to war. We are urged to devote all we have to putting Christ first in our lives!

120. “I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in Heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.”

-Luke 15:7

Context: Luke 15:1-7

Do you want to make Heaven party? Lead someone to Christ! And throw parties for sinners here also! Tell them about Jesus! Every time someone comes to Christ, there is more joy in Heaven than over 99 people who are already faithfully following Christ. Think about that! The Bible is clear throughout that Heaven loves to see Christians faithfully following Christ. As 3 John 4 says, "I have no greater joy than my children walking in truth." Multiply the great joy we have when people faithfully following Christ times the number 99, and we see how great a joy it is when a lost person is added to God's family! Let's cause Heaven multitudinous joy! Let's walk in the Truth ourselves, AND introduce newly saved people to the party!

121. "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in what is much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon (money), who will commit to your trust true riches. And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (money)."

-Luke 16:10-13 Context: Luke 16:1-13

Many times in churches people get nervous when the preacher preaches on money or "stewardship." But the reason preachers talk so much about the stewardship of what God has entrusted to us is that the topic comes up throughout the Bible. That includes many times the Lord Jesus spoke of it, as He does here in the Parable of the Unjust Steward. Money is a wonderful tool to use for God's glory, but the pursuit of it can easily become an idol in our lives that competes with serving God. Additionally, the hoarding of it and overuse of it on selfish pursuits often show we view it as ours instead of something entrusted to us by God. God warned the Israelites about this. He told them not to "say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth...(Deuteronomy 8:17-18)." The Bible makes clear that the child of God is to view 100% of the resources they have generated as ultimately belonging to God, and to view themselves as stewards, or managers of what God has entrusted to them. It makes all the difference for a Christian if they view their resources as ultimately belonging to themselves or God. For me it is settled that it all belongs to God, so I am looking to invest it in ways that build His kingdom, not my own. As I have gained more income, I have sought for my standard of giving to increase, not merely my standard of living. How about you? How are you doing at managing what the Lord has entrusted to you for His glory?

122. Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. And He said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.” -Luke 16:14-15

We must all decide whether we are going to be men pleasers or God pleasers. It is not that we seek out conflict with others. Some people seem to actually enjoy being rude to others and getting into conflicts with others. There’s nothing godly about that. But if we live out Christ’s teaching, it will bring conflict with others who reject what Jesus said. Sadly, that will even happen within our churches. Here Jesus says putting love of money and what the world system values ahead of love of God is an abomination in his sight! That’s the same word the Old Testament uses for how God feels about perverse sexual acts! We have to decide now whether we will compromise in our own lives to get along with others, or intentionally and consistently live by God’s design for our lives in all areas, regardless of the cost. Commit now to following Jesus no matter what!

123. “And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down to eat’? But will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink.’? Does he think thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you were commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’” -Luke 17:7-10

I was watching college wrestling recently, and a young man perfectly executed a move to come back and win the match. Immediately after the match, a reporter asked him how he executed that brilliant move. I love the kid’s response, “That’s my job! The coaches have drilled me to do that in that situation hundreds of times. That’s my job!” You may recognize that lots of coaches and athletes are emphasizing that right now: “Do your job!” In football defense some players are given one job on specific plays. For instance, when the quarterback appears to be handing a ball off to go right, one player will stay on the left to tackle him if he keeps it or if it gets reversed in the other direction. When he does his job, he can stop the play from hurting his team. It’s okay to applaud him for making the tackle, but he was really just doing what he was coached to do. I have run into many church members over the years who don’t feel like they are being recognized enough and want to quit the area of service God has called them to. It is nice to get thanked every now and then, and as a Pastor I have tried to say lots of “thank you’s.” And Jesus also implanted in our minds a sense of looking forward to hearing Him say to us, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” But here He reminds us not to do our daily service for Him as if we are exceptional for obeying Him. Let’s just do our job like the Coach has trained us to do!

124. “Remember Lot’s wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.” -Luke 17:32-33

When you start following Christ, don’t look back! A wise Christian once said, “if you are truly saved, you can no longer comfortably live the life you once did because you are no longer the person you once were.” You may fall into sin as a Christian, but if you are truly saved you will increasingly hate the sin and earnestly desire to be rid of it. Lot made it out of Sodom and Gomorrah because he was a righteous man. He brought his wife out, but she still loved Sodom’s ways in her heart, and looked back longingly at what she had ‘lost.’ God judged her rebellion along with the sinners back in the city, turning her into a pillar of salt. Yuck! Christian, do not love the sinful world system or the things of the sinful world system. You may think you own them, only to find they own you. I love the Christian song that says, “It’s hard to imagine the freedom you find, from the things that you leave behind.”

125. Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die? Do you believe this?” -John 11:25-26

Note that Jesus says here that the one who will never die is the one who believes in Him and who lives in Him. To believe in Jesus is to live in Jesus, to become His follower. He didn’t come to just give you Hell insurance, He came to save you and have you enter into an eternal relationship with God. You may wonder how Jesus can speak of a person dying, yet living. There are actually two deaths people face. The first death is the physical death of their body. The second death is the spiritual death that cuts off the possibility of forever living with God. People who turn to Jesus for salvation are “born again” (John 3:3) and will not experience that second death. Revelation 20:14-15 says that all rebels against God who won’t turn to Jesus for salvation will face this second death. The second death will involve eternity apart from God’s comforting presence in the Lake of Fire. Think through this riddle: “He who is only born once will die twice; but he who is born twice will only die once.” You too must be born again by believing and living in Jesus.

126. Jesus wept. -John 11:35 Context: John 11:32-34

Jesus wept. The Creator of life wept as He considered the death of His friend Lazarus. Think of it: The One who one day will wipe away our tears (Rev. 21:4) has Himself shed tears! In this study we have been considering both the explicit commands of Jesus and the implicit commands of Jesus. Explicit commands are direct commands like Matthew 6:20, “Lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven.” Implicit commands include the things He modeled for us that we also want to live out in our lives. Jesus wept, and we are called to weep also. Behind Jesus’ tears was His great love and compassion. He wept because of the consequences sin has on

individuals, families, neighborhoods, schools, cities, and nations. If Adam and Eve had never sinned, death would never have come into the world. There are days coming when there will be no tears, and the joy of the Lord is to be a present reality for those of us who are saved. But blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted (Matthew 5:24). Jesus wept is the shortest verse in the Bible, but has one of the largest meanings! Our God cares about each and every one of us. The very next verse shows that many saw Jesus tears and said, "See how He loved him!" Their hearts were open to what Jesus did and said next because of His tears. Maybe if we enter into the pain of a lost world more than we do, and take time to weep with those who weep, maybe people will listen to us more when we talk to them about Jesus!

127. "And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" -Luke 18:7-8 Context: Luke 18:1-8

Jesus spoke these words after telling the parable of the persistent widow. He speaks of a judge who doesn't really care about the needs of a woman, but because she is wearing him out with her persistent pleas for justice, the judge gives in and grants her request! Many of us in authority can relate to having someone do this to us, like a child will do with their parents. What makes the story understandable is that we can relate to the irritation of the judge and his desire to get the woman out of his face. But the way Jesus tells the story and makes the above statements, He actually seems to be encouraging us to cry out to God day and night. Some people don't pray because they don't want to bother God with their problems. Jesus here says, "Bring it on! If an unjust, unloving judge will grant the request of an old woman to get her off his case, how much more will a just and loving God hear and grant the persistent prayers of those who love Him!" Don't lose heart, brothers and sisters! The God who loves us and wants us to cry out to Him will answer our prayers 'yes,' 'no,' or 'wait' for His glory and our good! Whenever our loving Father says 'no' or 'wait' it is for a greater yes in His perfect timing. But He also has a challenge for us: When Jesus returns, will He find you expressing faith and trust in Him, or will He find you trying to solve all of your problems on your own, living as if you were really an Atheist with no belief in God?

128. Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all I possess.' But the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for

everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

-Luke 18:1-8

God is not impressed at all with self-righteousness. He is impressed when sinners humbly acknowledge how much they need Him and turn to Him alone for salvation. As James said, “Humble yourselves in the sigh of the Lord, and He will lift you up!” Two men came to church that day who were lost sinners before a holy God. One of them did many religious things, the other did not. Unfortunately, the man made the same mistake many in churches make today. He was trusting in the religious things He did to make him right with God. Naturally, he felt entitled to judge the other guy who did not do those religious things. His faith was really in himself as a good person, a better person than others. Surely God was impressed with him! The tax collector had no such pretense. He knew he was a lost sinner before a holy God, and simply cried out in faith for God to save Him, and God did! Romans 5:1 says “Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 4:5 says, “But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.” Justification comes through faith alone in Christ alone, not our works before or after salvation. A person who is thus saved will do good works for Jesus going forward, but they know forever that those good works are the fruit, not the root, of their justification! Those who truly understand that do not maintain a judgmental attitude toward other sinners. They know and understand that if God can save them, He can save anybody. The godliest people you ever meet are the most aware of their own sinfulness, and the Lord’s graciousness in saving them. They don’t compare themselves to others any longer, but to the Holy God who had them dead to rights as sinners, yet gave them eternal salvation in Christ!

129. Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.” But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. -Mark 10:21-22 Context: Mark 10:17-22

This encounter started with a wealthy young man running up to Jesus and saying “Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” Later when a sinner under the conviction of the Holy Spirit asked Paul and Silas that question, they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31).” As a preacher I love it when a sinner has come to know their need for salvation and I get to help them turn to Jesus! But Jesus has an advantage on human evangelists: Jesus is God and knows all things. Jesus knew this particular man was looking for eternal life in the future without changing his earthly priorities now. Jesus knew the man was willing to give partial focus to religious things, such as obeying the second half of the Ten Commandments, the parts about doing right by your fellow man. But Jesus also knew the man was not willing to love God with his whole heart, an undivided heart, because of his love for his possessions. The first part of the Ten Commands call for loving God with your whole, undivided heart and saying no to the worship of other things. Simply stated, what we

worship is what we ascribe worth to. Like the man that day, many of us love and worship our stuff instead of God, which is idolatry. For the man to be truly saved, he had to go from viewing himself as the owner of *his* stuff to viewing himself as a steward of God's stuff. In other words, he had to turn to Jesus not only as Savior, but also as the Lord, or Boss, of his life. Many people reading this need to do the exact same thing. Romans 10:9 says "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Saying "Jesus is Lord" means nothing if you don't intend to follow Him in all areas of your life. What the man didn't know that day is that Jesus often turns right around to the one who surrenders all to Him and places them back in charge of those things or even greater things. He did that for me and soccer. I had played soccer for my own glory instead of His, and He demanded I give it up. It was heart-wrenching, but I did. Later He gave it back to me, and playing and coaching for His glory brought more joy into my life than had ever come when it competed with Jesus for my worship. It's hard to imagine the freedom we find, from the things that we leave behind!

130. Then Peter began to say to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You." So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time -houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions – but in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first." -Mark 10:28-31

Notice the contrast with the passage before. The wealthy young man from the last passage will have treasure in this life but not in the next. Meanwhile, those who let Jesus be their Lord in this life and have used 'their' possessions for His glory will have treasures in Heaven. Even when their home life is hard because they believe and other family members don't they are not alone - they have received hundreds of new spiritual family members in churches who will encourage them in their Christian walk. The leaving houses and families here does not mean a believing person can leave their unbelieving spouse or children (see I Corinthians 7:10-16). If we don't fulfill our family responsibilities, we actually have denied the faith (I Timothy 5:8). What Jesus is referring to applies to many things, like when a believer is forced to leave their house by unbelieving relatives, which often happens around the world. It also refers to times a Christian answers a call to missions elsewhere, and is chastised for it by relatives, which unfortunately even happens from churchgoing relatives. This life is so short compared to eternity, and God will honor forever those decisions made with eternity in mind!

131. So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the Temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the Temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He would not allow anyone to carry wares

through the Temple. Then He taught, saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’”

-Mark 11:15-17

In this passage Jesus perfectly displayed “righteous anger.” Some things are not okay, and must be firmly addressed. What made Jesus so angry? The place where sacrifices were being sold and money was being changed was the Court of the Gentiles at the Temple. Only Jews could further than this as they made their way toward the place only Jewish priests could be. In other words, if there was a Gentile who had come to Jerusalem’s Temple wanting to know more about Yahweh and turn to Him in prayer, this was the place. In addition to many prayers for Jews, Solomon had prayed this when he dedicated the Temple – “Moreover, concerning a foreigner, who is not of Your people Israel, but has come from a far country for the sake of Your great name and Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm, when they come and pray in this Temple; then hear from Heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, that all peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You, as do Your people Israel” (2 Chronicles 6:32-33a). What upset Jesus the most that day was not the sale of resources that might help worshippers, but their callous indifference to the lost people in their midst. May the things we do at church draw the lost to Jesus, not hinder them from hearing about Him!

132. But Jesus answered them, saying, “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” -John 12:23-25

Jesus spoke here of His own death for sinners. When a seed gets put in the ground, it doesn’t look like much has happened. But in the fullness of time a harvest comes from the seed. Loving your own life is like taking the seed and putting it on a display shelf. Nothing of eternal significance will happen until the seed is planted in the ground. Jesus gave up His life to deal with our sin, but on the third day rose from the dead, the firstfruits of all believers who will one day also rise! What Jesus did didn’t make sense at the time, but now is understood to be the moment eternity changed for all who trust in Him. We too are called to “lay our lives down.” In other words, believers are called to die to self, to plant ourselves in hard places we wouldn’t have otherwise, sometimes for decades, trusting God to bring the harvest in His due time! Not only will we have eternal life, but so will all those who came to Christ because we didn’t keep the seed to ourselves!

133. “If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.” -John 12:26

What beautiful words – “Where I am, My servant will be also.” I hope that’s the theme of your life. I hope that when you see God at work, you will join Him in what He is doing!” A servant of Jesus is a follower of Jesus, and a follower of Jesus is a servant of Jesus. They do the things Jesus would do if He was physically here. He is physically here through the Body of Christ, His Church. The word for serve in the Greek language is the word we get Deacon from. If you are a Deacon, let these words particularly challenge you – “If anyone deacons Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My deacon will be also!”

134. “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him – the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.” -John 12:48 Context: John 12:42-50

People often wonder what the unpardonable sin is. It is listed here: unbelief that rejects Jesus and His authoritative words. Despite the Holy Spirit’s work to bring a sinner to humbly turn from their sin to Christ, they refuse to receive Jesus. Many of the Pharisees had secretly believed in Him but were so afraid of how their ‘friends’ would react that they didn’t publicly acknowledge Christ. A ‘faith’ that won’t acknowledge Christ before others isn’t really worth much at all, though. In Matthew 10 Jesus said you had to acknowledge Him before men to be acknowledged by Him before the Heavenly Father. It is words like that and others Jesus spoke that will testify against us on judgment day if we don’t act on what Jesus said now!

135. So Jesus answered and said to them, “Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.” -Mark 11:22-24

Earlier Jesus said that some types of demons only come out by fasting and prayer. By referring to the mountain being cast into the sea Jesus is referring to the fact that when believers pray in faith they can see the impossible happen. Not that they can do it, but that nothing is impossible with the God who they are praying to. If God wills it, He can make impossible happen! Believers need to leave the impossible situations in their lives with God in prayer. He will answer ‘yes,’ ‘no,’ or ‘not yet’ for our good and His glory. And whenever He says ‘no,’ it will be for His greater ‘yes.’ Knowing this brings us great confidence as we pray! Be careful though not to view these verses as a ‘genie in a bottle’ type promise. Believers are not promised they or their loved ones won’t have struggles and hardships and sufferings in this life. Believers are not promised that their own bad decisions or the bad decisions of others won’t have consequences. Believers are not promised that God will give them what they want if it doesn’t square with what He knows

they need. Believers are promised that God's peace and presence will guard the one who presents their requests to Him (Philippians 4:6-7). Have faith in God!

136. "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.' He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said to Him, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him." -Matthew 21:28-32

In Jesus' eyes a promise to do something doesn't mean anything unless it is followed up on. Many people have rededicated their life outwardly to the Lord dozens of times, but have never really inwardly yielded their heart to Jesus as the Boss of their lives. How many make the promise with their lips but never live the faith with their lives. Such promises from unyielded hearts do not impress the Lord. The Book of James states, "faith without works is dead." Jesus refers to others here that at one time flat out refused instruction, but later were convicted of their sin and went on to do the will of the Father. The promise keepers are the ones who will be in the Kingdom of God, not those who were only promise makers. All of us as sinners rebelled against the Father's heart and the Father's commands. As rebels we rejected the command to repent and believe. Those who will enter the Kingdom of God have turned from that sinful rejection of God and now embrace His call to work in the Father's vineyard!

137. And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." -Matthew 22:21b Context: Matthew 22:15-22

The Pharisees tried to trick Jesus. The people hated paying the tax to their Roman occupiers. If Jesus said that God's people owed no allegiance to anyone but God would have made the crowds happy, but would have gotten Him arrested by the Romans. If Jesus had given full allegiance to the Roman government that would have enraged the crowds. Either answer would fall into the Pharisees trap. They thought the "rhetorical fastball" they had thrown would "strike out" Jesus. But Jesus knocked their fastball out of the park! He told them that His followers will be good citizens and pay their taxes (and obey other laws), but all the while they will be careful to serve God as well. Christians should be among the best citizens their countries have, and will only disobey their countries laws when those laws require us to violate our faith. But Christians are also citizens of Heaven, ambassadors for Christ, and we will seek to advance Heavenly values as we live here on earth. A brilliant dimension of Jesus' answer is that ultimately God allows countries to rise and fall, so we can trust that He Himself will eventually deal with injustices done by countries. In a very real sense all things are God's. These verses are

foundational to the promotion of religious liberty – even as Christians respect their countries laws, the best countries will respect the religious liberty of all their citizens, including Christians. Baptists have always understood that they didn't need and shouldn't seek the power of the state to advance Baptist churches. People are born into their countries, but people are born again into churches within those countries. One of the great errors of church history has been country sponsored churches!

138. Jesus answered and said to them, “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.” -Matthew 22:29 Context: Matthew 22:23-30

The Sadducees were the next group that tried to trick Jesus. Their problem was that they rejected portions of the Old Testament and its teachings. They flatly rejected the idea that there would be life after death. So they set up a mocking, hypothetical question about a woman married multiple times before she died – “which one will be her husband in the coming resurrection?” They really thought they had Jesus! But what they didn't understand and appreciate was that Jesus was an Expert on the subject, because Heaven was where He lived! His statement that there is no marriage in Heaven is very interesting, but far more significant is how He clearly states that departed saints are not gone but very much alive and waiting the next part of God's plan. Jesus pointed them to the Scripture where God does not say to Moses He was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob but that He IS the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – PRESENT TENSE! Everyday people all around us are asking questions about God and matters of eternal truth. We too will be mistaken unless we obey Jesus' implicit command to know the Scriptures and the power of God!

139. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, but have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.” -Matthew 23:23 Context: Matthew 23:23-28

All of the outward religious things you do mean nothing if you don't practice justice, mercy, and faith. In Micah 6:8 God told the Jewish people that what He required of them was to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God. That was most likely what Jesus was referring to. The Pharisees had lost this simple yet joyful approach to life by adding so many extras to the Old Testament law. Interestingly, Jesus here reinforces the biblical command to tithe (Give ten percent of one's income to God's work) when He says “these you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.” If we are not careful, commands like church attendance (Hebrews 10:25) and tithing can become checklist items in an outward show of religion that forget the internal heart God wants us to have, a heart to “do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God!” Do it all for Jesus with an overflowing heart!

140. And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He also saw a certain poor widow putting in two mites. So He said, "Truly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood she had." -Luke 21:1-4

Jesus is not impressed when anyone gives their leftovers to God! He is impressed when people give their best to the Lord – as He was in Genesis 4:4-5 when Abel brought the first and the fattest from the flock and we are told "the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering." Intentional, joyful, sacrificial giving does not go unnoticed in Heaven, and that's why Jesus pointed it out while He was on earth! Let's have the heart of the great givers of the Bible, including this dear woman. She would have agreed with King David, who in 2 Samuel 24:24 vowed not to give to the Lord His God "that which costs me nothing." She would have been a good member of the churches of Macedonia, who Paul bragged on when he said they gave "According to their ability, and beyond their ability." God has a way of taking care of those who generously give to His work, as He said in Philippians 4:19 – "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

141. Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down." -Matthew 24:1-2

Jesus doesn't want us to be too impressed with external things like important buildings. The disciples were in awe of the way that the Roman Herod had built up the Temple area in Jerusalem. Shocking them, Jesus predicted the Temple's destruction. In A.D. 70, another Roman brought an army in and decimated the city and Temple, fulfilling the words of Jesus. Biblical prophecy informs us that in the future there will again be a Temple as part of God keeping His promises. But during this church age every person who turns to Jesus Christ for salvation actually becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit (See I Corinthians 3:16-17). Jesus is far more interested in Christians glorifying God in these earthly bodies which are His temple than He is in the external buildings we gather in. Many times church members are far more committed to their church buildings than they are to glorifying God in their mobile temples! Church buildings are great vehicles for God's purposes, but don't miss Jesus' rebuke about what matters eternally!

142. And Jesus answered and said to them: “Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.”

-Matthew 24:4-5 Context: Matthew 24:3-31

Let no one deceive you, fellow Christian! False Christs and False teachers are out there, claiming to show the way to God, but enslaving their followers with false claims. Mohammed of Islam fits this category. Rejecting Jesus as the Son of God and the only means of salvation, Mohammed claimed to speak for Allah. In the Koran he presents a works based salvation that included his later demands that the able bodied join him in raids against non-Muslims. In a similar way, Joseph Smith of Mormonism also urged the rejection of what churches had previously taught in favor of what he now said came from God through him alone. The so-called revelation he received became the Book of Mormon. But neither Muhammed or Joseph Smith led a sinless life like Jesus did. Neither fulfilled prophecies made hundreds of years before their birth like Jesus did. Neither did miracles to back up their claims like Jesus did. Neither died for your sins like Jesus did. And neither rose from the dead like Jesus did! False Christ’s, Prophets and Teachers rise up with their own ambition to have people follow them. They always reject that Jesus is part of the eternal Triune Godhead, and that trusting His work on the cross is alone the basis of salvation, not a system of human works. Jesus warned us in advance so we would be able to clearly identify these imposters as false, fake, and phony! Don’t be taken in and don’t pretend there can be fellowship with those who reject the Biblically revealed Jesus!

143. “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of Heaven, but My Father only...Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming...Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

-Matthew 24:36, 42, 44 Context: 24:32-51

Matthew chapters 24 and 25 contain Jesus’ Olivet Discourse, in which he discusses events leading up to and including end times events and the eventual Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Knowing Jesus is going to return to earth should lead believers to live with a sense of immanency. If you had an important court date coming up that could lead to time in prison, that impending date would “overshadow” everything else you do now. Now imagine that court date wasn’t set, but that they could come for you at any moment! That’s what it means to live with a sense of immanency. It’s not a source of dread for believers, but an ardent desire to be found faithfully serving Christ when He comes. It is a source of dread for unbelievers, because it moves them one step closer to Judgment Day and the Lake of Fire. If you don’t know Christ, you want to “settle out of court” now by asking Jesus to save you from your sins.

144. “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. And all the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will

set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'" -Matthew 25:31-39

What a powerful passage! This may be part of the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20:11-15 or it may be a separate judgment before Christ's Thousand Year reign described in Revelation 20:4-6. That's a fascinating thing to study. We also wonder whether Christ's words about this ministry to those who are His brothers is especially directed at deeds done to help His physical brothers, meaning those of Jewish descent, or persecuted Christians, or both. Later in Galatians 6:10 Paul urges believers to "do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." Regardless of how we think through those things, though, don't miss how powerful it is to think of moments of ministry to the least of these as moments we are helping Jesus Himself! What a powerful image for us as we help others in Jesus' name! True believers will be characterized by a lifestyle of doing these kinds of things. This passage does not demonstrate that salvation comes by doing these deeds but that the truly saved will be characterized by these kinds of deeds. Said another way, "Ministry to others is the fruit of salvation, not the root!" So here's the question for you? Is this kind of lifestyle seen in your praying and actions and giving, starting with the people of God and working outwards to others as you are able? Or do you need to make some changes before you appear before Christ?

145. "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not cloth Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' Then they also will answer Him, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." -Matthew 25:41-46

This is the second part of the passage we looked at in the last entry. It bears repeating again: This passage does not demonstrate that salvation comes by doing these deeds but that the truly saved will be characterized by these kinds of deeds. Said another way, "Ministry to others is the fruit of salvation, not the root!" If you do not know the Lord, don't rip these verses out of

context and think doing these things will save you. No, you still need to repent of your sinful rebellion against God and turn to Jesus for salvation (see Romans 3:23-4:5). But this passage should convict the non-believer in another way – “it’s not about you!” God has expectations that your life will be a blessing to others on earth in and through the name of Jesus, yet you live for you. Having rejected Jesus Christ’s call to salvation, you probably don’t think very highly of those who follow Him either. Verse 40 shows that Jesus primarily intends here things done to help God’s people on earth who are often mistreated by non-believers. Yet your lips have too often been full of insults, and your actions have been full of disdain for Jesus’ “brethren.” Please repent and turn to Jesus! Get on the right side of His coming judgment! Don’t join the Devil and the demonic angels in everlasting punishment!

146. “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I do.”

-John 13:14-15

Context: John 13:1-17

Jesus’ words here do not mean that we need to have foot-washing ceremonies (although those can be very meaningful). He means that Christians are to serve one another in love. No act of service is too small for any true believer. In those days they wore sandals everywhere they went, walking on dusty roads. When they came into a house, their feet were filthy. It was basic hospitality to meet that need as a person came into your dwelling. That had not happened when Jesus and the disciples came into the dwelling. Perhaps the disciples were complaining that it had not been done! What did Jesus do? He took up the basin and the towel and did the work of a servant, meeting the need of the moment. Like Jesus we are called to meet needs when we see them! We see it when a church member mows the grass on the softball field so others can play on the field later that day. We see it when a football team captain helps the team manager carry the water to the practice field. The next time you see a need you can meet, do it, and you too are among the foot-washers!

147. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

-John 13:34-35

Love is to mark us as disciples. Not the wishy-washy pseudo-love that never confronts sin in our own lives or others, but the deep kind of love that helps us grow more like Christ together and move beyond besetting sins. I am reminded of the man who brought a new Christian into his home to stay until he got back on his feet. The new Christian had just resolved to turn from drugs and didn’t want his host’s children to see him go through withdrawal symptoms. The host refused to let him leave. He put blankets on him that night when the new believer had the shakes and shivers and sweats that come from withdrawal. What did the kids see next? They

saw their godly father stay with the man through the night and even at times hold him. They saw their dad do what Jesus had done – come near with God’s help! That’s love!

148. Then He said to them, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” -Luke 22:15-16 Context: Luke 22:14-20

Jesus gave us the Lord’s Supper to visually remind us of His body broken for us, His blood shed for us – the source of our salvation. What wonderful commands to obey: eat and drink in remembrance that because we have trusted Jesus alone for salvation, we now have eternal life in Jesus our Lord! The Lord’s Supper reminds us that the only reason we are going to Heaven is because Christ’s body was broken for us, His blood shed for us. Partaking of the elements symbolizes that we have spiritually partaken of His offer to give eternal life to all who believe! What a day it will be when Jesus personally leads us in the Lord’s Supper at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb spoken of in Revelation 19! Until then, let us rejoice when we take the Lord’s Supper together, as we proclaim the life giving sacrificial death of the Lord (I Cor. 11:26).

149. Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. -John 14:1-3 Context: John 14:1-11

What a blessed command we are called to obey – “Let not your heart be troubled!” What can calm a troubled heart? Belief in Jesus which leads to knowing God as Father, and getting to be with this blessed God forever after this life. So many of the commands have a promise attached. Believe in Jesus and receive eternal life (John 3:16). Receive Jesus and become a child of God (John 1:12). Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you (James 4:8). And here – let not your heart be troubled, but believe – I am preparing your place in Heaven!

150. Most assuredly I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these will he will do, because I go to My Father. -John 14:12 Context: John 14:12-18

What is Jesus saying here? He is saying that after He ascends to the Father and the Holy Spirit indwells believers (see John 7:37-39; Eph. 1:13-14), the full power of the gospel will then be unleashed through believers as they share how Jesus saves! Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost and this promise began to be fulfilled – 3,000 people were saved that day! Researchers tell us that today 3,000 people are saved on average every hour of every day around the world! Wherever Biblical faith has gone since the days of the early church incredible

things have happened. From the churches Paul planted around the Roman Empire in the first century to unreached people groups being engaged today, “greater works” are still happening through those who follow Christ. But since it is all energized by the Spirit of Christ, it is really Him doing it through us. Let us resolve to do the same kind of deeds Jesus did for His honor and glory!

151. “I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” -John 15:5 Context: John 15:4-9

Fellow believers, without Jesus we can do nothing of eternal significance! Even as we do things that make *this* world a better place, we are to keep in mind making an eternal difference in the lives of others. And Jesus tells us that will not happen unless we abide in Him. He is our strength, which we appropriate by abiding in Him. Just as the branch is sustained by the vine, Christians are sustained by their relationship with Jesus! When the branch is separated from the vine, it withers and die. When we fail to abide in Jesus, we began to wither and we won’t be able to bear any more fruit. I like to think of “gospel math.” I was a “zero” before I was saved by Jesus. In Jesus I’m a “10” because Jesus is a “10.” Take away Jesus from my life and what do I have – “zero” all over again! I’m glad He makes clear I am eternally secure in Him! But to bear the maximum amount of fruit for Him I need to abide in Him, and the fruit will naturally be produced, bringing glory to God the Father!

152. “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” -John 15:13 Context: John 15:11-17

Jesus Himself was the greatest example of this when He died for sinners so they could go to Heaven and be with Him rather than go to Hell! It is also a beautiful verse to celebrate those who in service to their country gave their lives so their countrymen could remain free. But laying down your life is more than dying for another. It is a lifestyle that practices J.O.Y. That’s putting Jesus first, Others before yourself, and then also taking care of Your own best interests. Jesus. Others. Yourself. JOY! Laying down your life for others means wetting aside your own agenda so you can look around at the needs of people around you and be a blessing to them! It is practicing an unselfish lifestyle, loving others as you love yourself. Have you laid down your life for your friends? Aren’t you glad that you are not just Jesus’ servant, but His friend? He chose us to be His friends and share His love with others. When you set aside your time and talents, and treasure to bless others, you are laying down your life.

153. “Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.” -John 16:7 Context: John 16:7-14

Many times a Christian will exclaim, "If I could only have lived when Jesus lived, and walked with Him, my faith would be stronger." Here Jesus actually challenges that! Jesus says to those who walked with Him that it will be to their advantage (and ours) when He returns to Heaven. Why? Because with Jesus' work completed God the Holy Spirit will help people come to Christ for salvation and indwell those who believe (John 7:37-39; Ephesians 1:13-14). From inside of them, the Holy Spirit prompts believers to remember and apply what they have read in the Bible. He prompts them to meet the needs He helps them see around them. 2 Timothy 1:7 says this indwelling Holy Spirit gives us power, love, and a sound mind! It will be wonderful to be with Jesus in Heaven one day soon, but in the mean-time here on earth we as believers have an advantage Old Testament saints did not have on earth -the permanently indwelling Holy Spirit!

154. "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." -John 16:33

Brothers and sisters in Christ, here is an important truth you need to know – in the world you will have troubles related to being a follower of Christ. Some today think that if trouble comes to the Christian they must have done something wrong. The reality is that Christians face all the normal troubles that come from living in a sin-stained world PLUS troubles related to following Christ in a world that rejects Him. Paul later assured Timothy that "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). If you seek to live and witness for Jesus, there is a price to pay. For some that means being mocked, insulted, and rejected by loved ones. For others it has meant suffering physical harm and even death. In the midst of this sobering news Jesus commands us to be of good cheer. Why? Because He has overcome the world! The rest of life on this earth will be the only "Hell" the believer ever experiences. After this life it will all be Heaven! Conversely, for unbelievers, this world is the only thing close to Heaven they will experience, and then Hell awaits if they don't turn to Jesus. As believers we can't always take comfort in our changing circumstances but we can take comfort that Jesus has overcome the world. In World War II my granddad was a Marine on a transport plane flying toward Japan when the Japanese surrendered. The war was over, but there were still battles to fight. My granddad's plane was redirected to Japanese occupied China where they were to convince entrenched Japanese soldiers that they had lost. The Japanese soldiers refused to believe, and fresh battles ensued with live bullets being fired! So it is in the Christian life! Jesus has won the war, but Satan and his demons still have to be rooted out of their strongholds. Victory ultimately is ours, but necessary battles continue!

155. "Watch and pray, let you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." -Mark 14:38 -Context: Mark 14:32-42

As we learn to pray, it is important to note that God always answers prayer. He answers "yes," "no," or "wait" according to what best fits His ultimate will. As Beth Moore has said, "whenever

God says no, it is for a greater yes. Jesus models receiving a “no” answer to prayer in this passage. In His humanness Jesus asked if He could forego taking the cup He was due to drink. The cup was the wrath of God that must be poured out on sinners because of their defiance of their Holy God. Justice demanded the sin be dealt with. As sinners none of us was able to deal with that cup. Jesus the eternal Son of God had come to earth to drink that cup as our substitute so we could live. Yet here in His humanness the Son of Man expressed the same very human feelings we all have to avoid suffering. But Jesus added to His request, “nevertheless, not My *human* will but Yours be done.” Because Jesus was absolutely committed to the divine will He entrusted Himself to the Father’s answer, even if it meant hearing no, and going on to the cross to bear the sins of the world! And that’s exactly what He did. We too must pray with total confidence that God’s answer will be best for us and our world, even when we do not understand, even when the answer is no or wait. We also note that if we are going to increase our prayer time, it is going to be a battle of discipline as our spirit fights with our flesh. Don’t be found sleeping on your watch, fellow Christian! Get to your battle station of prayer!

156. So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?” -John 18:11 Context: John 18:1-11

Note Jesus’ resolve here. Just before this Jesus had struggled within Himself and in prayer over “drinking the cup,” that is, embracing the events that would lead to His death on the cross for our sins on Skull mountain (Calvary). But it was the Father’s will, so in love He obeyed. Here Peter tries to take the matter into his own hands. But Jesus made clear to Peter and to us that violence must never happen in the name of Jesus. Jesus knew He must fulfill His mission so that John 3:16 would be in the Bible! From this we learn that obedience often is costly, and though our feelings and even our family or friends may try to dissuade us, we must do what God is calling us to do!

157. Pilate therefore said to Him, “Are You a king then?” Jesus answered, “You say rightly that I am a King. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the Truth. Everyone who is of the Truth hears My voice.” -John 18:37 Context: John 18:36-38

Christian, you are an alien in this world – your ultimate citizenship is in Heaven now. If you love the Truth, you will be drawn to Jesus because He is the Truth! In the very next verse Pilate looked at Jesus quizzically and said, “What is truth?” Pilate was used to people cowering before him because as the Roman authority he was about to pronounce judgment. In Pilate’s mind truth was relative, and was defined by the ones with the power. Yet here was Jesus, Truth personified, standing before Pilate, and he didn’t quite know how to respond. At one of Jimi Hendrix’s last concerts, a man yelled, “Jimi, you are the truth.” Hendrix stopped the concert abruptly and said, “No, no, I’m not the truth – If anyone here knows what the truth is come on

up here and tell us.” No one came forward. A few weeks later Jimi Hendrix was dead. If only someone had shared with him that Jesus is THE Way, THE Truth, THE Life, and no one comes to God the Father and Heaven except through faith in Jesus.

158. Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.” And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

-Luke 23:42-43 Context: Luke 23:39-43

Remember that it is never too late to obey the command to call on the name of Jesus for salvation. Acts 4:12 says “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved!” The thief dying beside Jesus did that right before he died. Talk about your “death bed conversions!” When Jesus said, “Assuredly,” He was saying the “Double Amen.” He said, “Amen! Amen! I say to you, TODAY you will be with Me in Paradise.” Jesus saved that man on the spot, despite all the sinful things he had done. Jesus will respond to your faith also. Faith in Him will save you. Faith in Him will lead to you bearing fruit! Live by faith in Jesus – live to hear Him say “Amen, Amen” to you!

159. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

-Matthew 27:46 Context: Matthew 27:45-46

God is holy and cannot look directly at sin. That’s why in the book of Romans sinners are called God’s enemies. At the moment Jesus hung on that cross and made this statement He was bearing the hideous sin of the world on Himself. And something happened in that moment that had never happened before in the Godhead. God the Father turned His back on God the Son, and Jesus felt the pain and isolation from His Father He had never known before and never will again. That’s why He cried out, “Why have you forsaken Me?” The pain He felt in that moment obviously hurt Him more than all the physical pain of the crucifixion. And He did that for you and me, so we could have our sin dealt with and be reconciled to God. We rightly say that salvation has nothing to do with works, but to get it technically right we should say that salvation has nothing to do with *OUR* works. Salvation only comes because Jesus Christ was able to do the work that none of us could do either for ourselves or for others! He became our sin-bearer, so we could be salvation-bearers! Do you need to ask what the implicit command(s) are for us from this passage? Remember the cost, be forever grateful to God, and live by faith in Jesus!

160. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. -John 19:30 Context: John 19:28-30

The mission Jesus had been sent to do He had done! He had died for the sin of the world. Here Jesus voluntarily gave up His spirit. He not only had the power to lay His life down, but to raise Himself from the dead and return to His place in Heaven! Christian friend, you also have a mission that God is calling you to. Never minimize your role in God’s plan. Part of what God desires to accomplish in this world He desires to accomplish through you. God has chosen to work through people like you and me, despite our faithlessness and fickleness! He has called us to be salt and light in this world. Just as David served the purposes of God in His generation (Acts 13:36), we are to finish the work God has for us in ours!

161. Then He said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. -Luke 24:25-27 Context: Luke 24:13-27

Let’s commit to studying the Bible and believing what it says! Wouldn’t you love to have been there to hear Jesus Himself exposit the Old Testament prophecies about Himself – like that He would be from the Jewish tribe of Judah (Genesis 49); be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7) in Bethlehem yet have always existed (Micah 5); be a direct descendant of King David and reign on his throne (Isaiah 9); would minister extensively in Galilee to Jews and to Gentiles (Isaiah 9); would be a priest in the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110); would die as a substitute for sinners yet come back to life (Isaiah 53). Jesus probably showed and explained these and many other prophecies to them! Reading the Old Testament would never be the same again for them or for us! The Messiah will return one day and fulfill the rest of the Bible’s promises! Let us read often – and not be slow to believe!

162. And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” -John 20:28-29 Context: John 20:24-31

I have never seen Jesus with my physical eyes, but He has become my Savior and best friend. I am closer to Him than any other earthly relationship I have, including my beloved wife of over 25 years. I know that sounds odd to an unbelieving world who insists they can only act on what they see. Thomas and the other disciples placed their faith in Jesus because they saw Him alive after death! Jesus knew subsequent generations would have to believe not because of what they saw physically but on the testimony of those first witnesses and the testimony of those with transformed lives later on. By faith I invited the same Jesus to save me that saved my friend Doug Barr. The Holy Spirit made the words of the Bible compelling to me, and I have

been following Jesus ever since! The command is to believe in Jesus and love Him back even though He is not physically with us. I love the fact that Jesus here pronounced a blessing to all those who would believe with spiritual eyes. One day we will get to see Jesus face to face! I believe! I hope you do as well! “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2-3).

163. Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. -Luke 24:46-48 Context: Luke 24:44-49

Here Jesus tells us what the basis content of our salvation message is. We need to tell people that Christ had to die for our sins but rose from the dead to show His power over Satan, sin, death, and Hell. We need to call people to turn from a sense of self-sufficiency apart from Christ to total reliance on Christ for salvation! The word repentance means a change of mind. I used to think I was okay without God – now I know I’m a sinner who needs God. I used to think Christ was a religious option among many – now I know He’s the only way to have my sins forgiven and be reconciled to God. I used to live for myself – now I want to live for God and put others before myself. We need to call people to this repentance and faith in Jesus, and then let those who receive Christ know that their sins are forgiven. What a privilege we have to join 2,000 years worth of Christians who have been sharing this Good News!

164. He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, you know things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep.” -John 21:17 Context: John 21:15-19

If you love Jesus, you’ll feed His people. It really is that simple. Many churches have more people on planning committees than they have people actually doing ministry! They spend lots of time talking about doing ministry but some never get around to doing ministry! What the Lord wants is people who love Him to share His love in word and deed with a world in need. We are called to feed His sheep when the church gathers and when it scatters. We are called to feed the 99 safe in the fold, and the one who has wandered from the fold (Luke 16). We are also called to help reach the other sheep God has, those who will become believers through our witness (John 17:20, John 10:16). It is a calling that involves focus and time! Jesus told His first disciples that they would be fishers of men. But here He calls us to also be shepherds of sheep. It is a much more demanding analogy! With fish, we catch them, we eat them, we go home! Shepherding, however, involves loving patience and perseverance with creatures that are

prone to wander and get into precarious positions! Do you love Jesus? Then love others in His name at all times!

165. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in Heaven and on earth. Go, therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. -Matthew 28:18-20

We come to the verses that inspired this study! We have now looked at the things Jesus commanded of we His people. This final command in the gospels is known as Christ’s Great Commission to His believers. As individuals and as churches we are to go to all the ethnicities of the world and share the good news of salvation in Jesus’ name! When people trust Christ we are to baptize them in the Name of the Triune God. Every true believer then becomes a follower of Jesus Christ, learning all that He has commanded and doing what He says. But Matthew’s gospel ends with a heartening promise – that Christ will be with us spiritually every step of the way as we put His commands into practice in our lives! And then we will be with Him forever!