

The Jesus **Lectures-1**

THE ***KINGDOM*** ***OF GOD***

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THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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DISCLAIMER and PREFACE

This book is part of my attempt to answer the following question: “*If Jesus were to briefly visit Earth today with the purpose of giving his followers an interim evaluation on how they are collectively doing—what would he say?*”

Although this book is closely based on the authorized teachings of Jesus found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the actual words are imagined. Therefore, you are welcome to take from this book what is helpful while discarding the rest. This is the first of a **ten-book series**, so there’s lots to consider.

In this book, Jesus is depicted describing in detail events of his life that are only briefly excerpted within the pages of Holy Scripture. He talks at length about his interactions with people, gives background to situations, and provides historical information that complements the short accounts found in the New Testament. Much of the additional information which I imagine Jesus telling us today is derived from sometimes-conflicting authoritative Bible commentaries, plus different translations of the Bible, plus other historical writings (see *Reference Materials*). As such, reading this book could give you a fresh and deeper perspective on the brief accounts written in the Holy Bible about critical events which occurred in Jesus’ life.

You may discover new, intriguing insights which help you better-understand the profound teachings of Jesus. Any changes in your life provoked thereby, however, should be carefully considered before implementation—since they may have dramatic ramifications!

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Section 1:
THE KINGDOM AND YOU

(See Matthew 13:31-33)



It is with great pleasure that I, Jesus of Nazareth, have the honor of speaking to you today. Thank you for inviting me here. This is the first of **ten lectures**. I hope you can attend all my talks. I have valuable information for you, provided from a higher perspective. I hope to assist you, my dear followers, in applying my first-century teachings to your current era. I am not here to bring the final Rapture. I'm simply

delivering a brief series of lectures giving you feedback on how you are doing.

Please know that I've closely observed your efforts, which are often quite commendable. I know it's been tough for you. Though you have many societal and technological advances, the same or similarly difficult problems persist from the first century. Also, you have new challenges that no one back then could have imagined. Rest assured that I'm not conducting this brief inspection visit to criticize you, rather to commend and encourage. Yet I'll call it straight. Where you fall down, I'll discuss it. But instead of condemning your inevitable stumbles, I'll extend a helping hand to lift you back onto your feet. I'm on your side!

So, how are things going in your own life? I know you face many specific trials, tribulations, and heartaches. I feel your pain and will do everything I can to assist you. But be aware that the assistance I have to give may not be exactly what you want from me. If you're expecting me to work a miracle to instantly solve all your problems, or give you lots of earthly goods, or to make your life comfortable—then you will be disappointed.

Let me put it bluntly: I did *not* come to Earth to make you comfortable. Instead, I came here to offer you the thing you *most* need: a true, heavenly friend.

Yes, I'd like to be your *true* friend, one who does the following things:

- **still loves** you even when you do bad things;
- **stands by** you no matter what;
- **applauds** you when you do good,
- but also **helps you learn** from your mistakes in order to do better;
- does **not desert you** in times of personal failure, but is there to pick you up when you fall;
- **tells you constructive truth** even if it hurts;
- **cheers for you** and celebrates your victories;

- and **cries with sincere tears**—feeling a void on this Earth that will never be filled—when you are finally crushed by the heavy hand of Mother Nature.

To you, my friend, I have something of the greatest importance to say, which hopefully will give you great confidence and peace in confronting today's modern world: *God loves you and wants you to come to Him*. Indeed, the reason I was sent to Earth was to *help you move closer to God*.

So why can't you find your own way? Simple: your "animal hearts" are focused on all the wrong things. I'm sorry if that offends you, but it's true. If I were not your friend, then I would not say these things to you. If I didn't really care for you, I'd just give a soothing platitude like "God loves you," leaving it at that! Instead, I want you to see how things *really* are—and as such, for you to have the opportunity to take a far better path (even though if it may be more difficult) in your brief time here on Earth.

Here's the 'take-home' message: in order to "come to God," you must be willing to TRANSFORM YOUR OWN HEART. Yes, I know that sounds frightening, especially when I shout. But don't be scared or discouraged. I will help you. *Together*, we will make it all the way into the loving arms of Almighty God! Yes, I realize that some doctrines popular today say: "surrender to God and *He* will transform your heart." Of course, God will help you. But God wills that YOU do most of the actual required tasks. It's only *when you decide to actively work on your own heart* that your faith in me becomes real.

I know that you sincerely desire to find God, even if it's sometimes for the wrong reasons. Sure, you want to be part of God's heavenly realm. But often you have your sights set on the *wrong* path, the *wrong* objectives, and the *wrong* final destination. My dear friends, I applaud your devout hunt for the **God's Kingdom**. But *The Kingdom of God* is not what you think. It is at once far *smaller* and far *greater* than anything you now desire!

Consider this: in regard to whatever Nation in which you now physically reside on Earth, your “animal heart” longs for certain conditions...

Quite naturally, you want the following things:

- to be **comfortable**;
- to be **safe** from your enemies;
- to live with your family and tribe in **peace** and **prosperity**;
- to have some degree of personal **power**;
- to be **in charge** of your own destiny;
- and even to **dictate what others should think and do**—i.e., what *you* know to be in their best interests.

Am I right? In your heart of hearts, don't you desire those conditions for the Nation in which you now physically exist? And isn't it just natural, then, for you to apply the very same parameters to your vision of the Kingdom of God? But I'm here to certify that though those points might indeed make for a secure *earthly* Nation, they *don't* apply to *God's* Kingdom. If you are looking for God's Kingdom to satisfy those objectives, you are mistaken.

Why? Because, first of all, The Kingdom of God is not a “place” for you to live and reside—it is a *state of mind*. Let me be perfectly clear. God's true Kingdom is *not* an earthly kingdom for elevating your social status, or for being protected from problems, or living “happily ever after.” Neither is it a means to gain the upper hand for dominating and controlling other people. No, the true Kingdom of God is *you* coming to grips with the deepest, darkest recesses of your own spiritual character. Your task is to recognize and *rise above* the genetically engrained characteristics defining you as just another smart animal. In the true *Kingdom of God*, you gratefully acknowledge your highest responsibilities, while simultaneously subsuming your own ego into the Lord of the Universe.

That is NOT a place to be safe and comfortable. It is a challenging *state of mind* in which you will face the toughest *tests* of your entire life. It is far *smaller* than you imagine because

it's NOT a grand societal framework for governing and controlling others. As such, it is *not* some overarching government, neither a military complex, nor even a tradition-bound religious structure. The Kingdom's focus is NOT in controlling *other* people—but *you controlling yourself!*

Please listen closely. Let me tell you the *most important* characteristics of *God's Kingdom...*

In general, the KINGDOM OF GOD is these four things:

- 1) a persistent, ***nagging notion*** of what's possible;
- 2) a ***fresh idea*** when it seems there's no way forward;
- 3) a ***bright star*** that guides you when you're lost in the darkness out in the wilderness;
- 4) and a ***new capability*** that radically changes everything!

Sure, it's only natural to look for a superhero who will dramatically ride to our rescue, saving us from our enemies. We'd all like for someone in authority to magically lift the burdens from our backs, take away our problems, and give us an easy life. Some look for God Himself to swoop down from Heaven, instantly making our lives perfect. Indeed, some of you came here today hoping I will cure your ills with a miracle, as I did in the first century. But today I'm here to give feedback, not provide miracles. I tell you again that the purpose of the Kingdom of God is *not* to take away all your problems! I repeat, *I* am not here, today, to make your lives comfortable.

Yes, I feel your pain. Yes, I will do what I can to help you with your immediate problems. And if you choose to carefully follow all my teachings, you *will* find the *best possible* comfort, peace, and safety. But what I bring to you is far smaller and far greater than a place for *temporary* security, *precarious* stability, or *ephemeral* power.

From my higher perspective, in a comparative “snap” of my fingers, your physical bodies will crumble into dust. When that happens in a (relative) “second” from now, what will it matter if you obsessed about personal comfort, security, and health? Your physical bodies will be *dead*. And a whole new generation will succeed you, squabbling over what few items

you've passed down to them; as they likewise continue to obsess on acquiring their own status, possessions, and power.

Wake up, people! Look beyond your immediate physical needs. Understand that a looming, inescapable, *disaster* faces each of you! You cannot avoid that which you daily see happening to others around you. No matter if they owned *all* the land, or ruled *all* the people, or destroyed *all* their enemies... they all vanish like a morning mist on the meadow. For God's sake, don't be like them: *just smart animals!*

If all you care about is getting a Kingdom where by God's power you rule and dominate, how are you any different from all the lesser creatures on Earth? Don't they all seek the same thing: spending their time battling, scrambling, and struggling to be safe, well-fed, and warm? Sure, God knows you need those things. Those indeed are priorities of *physical* existence. But if you put *God* first, then all those *other* necessities will be *better*-met than if you had ignored our Heavenly Father!

Even though physical needs are important, they should not be the AIM of your life; certainly not your concept of what the Kingdom of God is all about. Food, shelter, and security *are* necessary. But you need something *else* that's even *more* important than those physical things!

So let me help you learn more about what the true Kingdom of God can be for you...

THE KINGDOM OF GOD can be the following fourteen *specific* things:

- 1) a ***dawning AWARENESS*** that you are more than just a smart animal;
- 2) a ***painful OPENING*** of your eyes to a higher reality;
- 3) ***ultimate PERMISSION*** to do noble things that previously you'd thought beyond your reach;
- 4) a ***helpful LICENSE*** to act differently than everybody else;
- 5) a ***new CONNECTION*** that changes your fundamentals;
- 6) a ***fresh TASTE*** of a flavor you've never before experienced;

- 7) a **unique COLOR** that you've never seen before;
- 8) an entirely **different WORLD** where you can live out your greatest and most noble dreams;
- 9) the **exciting START** of something for which you cannot predict the ending, but changes your life completely;
- 10) a tiny bit of **spiritual YEAST** that when kneaded into the "flour" of your heart and "cooked" properly, will change the gooey mass of your chaotic existence into an ordered loaf of flaky, hot, delicious, and productive NUTRITION;
- 11) a tiny, hard, seemingly dead kernel—revealed as a **Godly SEED** that when planted into fertile ground and watered, sprouts into a luxurious plant; and from thence into a strong and mighty tree. It will take root in your heart and turn your life into a *living monument* to God, of which you will be justifiably proud;
- 12) a **cataclysmic TRIGGER** that begins something which may end up far greater and grander than anything you can now conceive;
- 13) not a "destination," but an **inward JOURNEY** into the depths of your own mind, breaking through into a new reality, and then taking you up to touch the very face of God Himself;
- 14) and **not some "happy place"** to sit back and do nothing, whether on this Earth or in the hereafter;
- 15) rather, each of you acquiring **personal ENLIGHTENMENT** to truly *know and understand yourself*.

You see, in the Kingdom of God, you cannot do the following things:

- **hide** from yourself;
- **pretend** you are something you are not;
- **obscure** your motivations, which become as obvious as your actions;
- **blame** other people or entities for your own bad behavior;
- **justify** unreasonable actions;

- or **excuse** counter-productive, disrespectful, ugly, or dishonorable deeds by falsely claiming them to be allowed by the Lord of the Universe!

No, the *true* Kingdom of God deals with the real “you.” It fully reveals you to *yourself*. And if what you see sometimes horrifies, scares, or makes you ashamed—don’t quit. Why? Because having just a tiny, infinitesimal amount of true Godliness *in your mind* can initiate a long-term process, ending up in full “TRANSFORMATION.”

Yes, I know many of you look for the Kingdom of God in the following places:

- *Jerusalem;*
- *the Temple;*
- *your Synagogue;*
- *your Church building;*
- *Your religious group;*
- or try to establish the Kingdom of God in your own *town, village, or homeland.*

But if that’s the case... then you are wrong. The *only* place to establish the Kingdom of God is *IN YOUR OWN HEART*. Sorry about shouting again, but this point is critical. The Kingdom of God is *not* in that “other” person’s heart, but yours! You are *wasting* your time if you concentrate on imposing God’s Kingdom—either upon yourself or others—*outside* your own mind.

Do you want to be even better than you are now? Do you want to rise to fulfill your highest potential? Do you want to be proud of what you’re becoming? Do you want to rise above being just another smart animal? Then *seek first the Kingdom of God* where it truly resides *in the depths of your own mind...* and all those other lesser priorities will be “added to your life!”

In my original mission to Earth, I gave many details for **The Kingdom of God** which support what I’ve just now said. In the next sections of this speech (and throughout all

the remaining nine lectures), I will lay out those details by *describing situations and events* summarized in the Gospels of the New Testament. If you think you know those stories already, think again! “Truth” is multidimensional. Open your minds and hearts to going DEEPER, HIGHER, WIDER, MORE-COMPLEX, and ever MORE-SUBSTANTIAL. Only then are you ready to explore with me the details of the true *Kingdom of God*. It is a fascinating journey!

So, first let me tell you a story about ***beautiful treasure...***

Section 2:

THE VALUE OF THE KINGDOM

(See *Matthew 13:44-46*)

What importance, then, should you place on finding and becoming a part of the Kingdom of God? Well, let me tell you this story about something everyone thought was of no importance; and what a man eventually gave up to possess it...

The Hidden Treasure

Once there was a man who wanted to be rich. Though he was not poor, he just barely scraped by month to month. He owned a modest house. He had his own small business making sandals. But he was by no means wealthy. In good months he turned a small profit. But in bad months he wound up in the red.

He had a faithful wife and good children. To his credit, he wanted to be rich not just for his own sake, but to provide the best for his family. Life for them was a constant struggle. Often his family did not know if they'd have food the next day, particularly during the cold winter months. His wife took in sewing and washing to help make ends meet. But what she earned was never enough to get them through rough stretches.

He was a religious man. He regularly attended worship services, prayed daily, followed all the required rituals, refrained from harming others, and tried to comply with all God's commands. In fact, he wanted to be rich not just to make his family's life easier, but to accomplish great things advancing the works of God.

Though outwardly studious, devout, hardworking, and stoic—inwardly he was weary, discouraged, exhausted, and

increasingly confused. He tried talking to his local priest, who told him to accept what God had given him while not desiring more. That discouraged him even further. His deepening depression began to worry his friends and family.

Though outwardly accepting the priest's criticism of his motives, the man sincerely felt he was justified trying to get rich. He didn't want to become wealthy just to live in luxury. He was willing to work hard earning his money. And yet the Lord did not bless his efforts. Because even though he constantly tried to find new ways to get rich, all he did was fail.

He tried introducing new product-lines at his business, but nothing "took off." He tried franchising his sandals shop, but no one was interested. He tried working twice as hard, often continuing through the night without even taking time to sleep! But the hectic pace just wore him out. He tried investing meager occasional profits, but that just lost him his money. He even tried gambling at the local tavern, but lost more than he won...

Finally, feeling thoroughly defeated, he decided to take some time off. He felt he had to get away from everything—work, family, and religious duties—and go off into the wilderness. He wanted to get as far away as possible from his regular life, hoping to gain perspective. He thought that maybe without the many demands of everyday life constantly harassing him, he could "clear his head" and come up with a winning strategy for getting rich.

His family, other relatives, and friends were deeply concerned about him. They didn't want him going off by himself. But they realized it would be good for him to take a break. His loving wife agreed to take on even more extra duties. Friends volunteered to keep his sandals shop open while he went off on his "sabbatical."

So, waving goodbye to his gathered family and friends, he hiked off into the surrounding hills, taking with him only a small backpack. He took enough food and water to survive for a week or more, determined to get away from the well-worn trails—completely away from everyone!

As he trudged along, hour after hour, he felt an increasing sense of foreboding... as if something terrible was waiting for

him in the wilderness. But all around him was just silence, rocky hills, and sand. The wilderness he was hiking through looked like the most-desolate, emptiest place in the entire world.

A few scrubby bushes grew here and there in parched, dry soil. The only animals he saw were a couple lizards scampering across some rocks. Then, far overhead, he spotted circling birds—doubtless *vultures* waiting for him to drop dead! They were poised to swoop down and feast on his rotting flesh. It was a sobering thought...

Yes, it was scary. But he felt at-one with the drab, empty landscape. The land was just like him! There was nothing of any value there at all. He embraced the desolation. The wilderness seemed to confirm that his entire life had been a total waste.

Then he topped a hill to discover a low valley where once ran abundant water. Now only a dried-up riverbed snaked down its center. Over to his right were ancient foundations of a small town, poking-up through overlying layers of wind-blown dirt and sand. A thriving village once sat there—where people worked, loved, married, raised children, and lived out their lives. Now it was just ruins...

“Just like me,” he muttered.

Over to his left he saw large, flattened plots that once were fields. Here and there a lonely tree thrust-up, sporting only a few bare branches. Other than the scraggly trees and an occasional dried-up bush, the fields were empty and dead. It was a desert where once lush crops had supported a vibrant town.

The man, weary from his long climb into the hills, walked to the nearest protruding foundation. He noticed it had black scorch marks baked deep into its surface. Not just drought and famine had decimated this village. It also fell prey to attackers who burned it to the ground! Whatever prosperity this people had enjoyed was illusionary at best. The town’s vitality was snatched away by evil men, or leached away slowly by Mother Nature.

Further discouraged, the man sat down on the blackened stones. He untied his backpack and let it drop to the ground at his feet. Leaning forward, he put his head in his hands and

cried. He sobbed like a little baby. All his pent-up emotions came to the surface. Years of failure bubbled out as salty tears streaming down his face. He felt completely at home in the pathetic, long-dead town. He knew without a doubt he was a loser, a dried-up husk of a man. Finally, he was at the end of a long and futile journey.

He lifted up his hands towards the heavens and shouted: *“Why Lord? Why is life so hard? Why can’t I amount to anything? Why does everything I try fail? Why can’t I succeed?”*

Nothing answered back except for a whistling, cold wind sweeping through the valley. But out across the dry riverbed, something caught his eye. It was one of the circling birds, gliding down to a landing. The big back bird flapped to a stop, perched upon a bare, twisted branch high on one of the few standing trees. There, it spread its wings wide, poised for an instant, then launched itself back up into the sky.

Curious, the man staggered to his feet, leaving behind his backpack. He wearily trudged over to where the tree stood alone, there in an empty, desolate field. Expecting perhaps some miracle to happen, the man was again disappointed. That field was just as drab, dry, and windswept as all the others around. It was just another useless, empty patch of ugly wasteland—of no use or value to anyone!

“Wait, what’s this?” he said, squinting.

At the base of the tree, he saw a large flat rock. It seemed unnaturally rectangular, as if it had been deliberately placed there. Could it be a marking stone? Though it was heavy, he managed to grip an edge, lift it up a bit, and after much struggling lever it off to the side. Underneath, smaller rocks were arranged as if to hide something deeper—a small crypt or cavity?

The man was intrigued. What lay buried in this apparently empty, useless field? Even though the sun was going down, the man couldn’t wait for the next day to dawn. He started feverishly hauling out buried rocks, digging with his bare hands. Though his fingers were bleeding, he went deeper and deeper into the hard dirt beneath the unearthed stones.

Then the ground felt different, a bit softer. Furiously, the man kept scratching, deepening the hole, tossing out the excess dirt. Then, just as the last rays of the sun were vanishing, his torn hands struck something smooth and hard. It was a large pottery vessel! He eagerly clawed the dirt away from its sides, wiggled it back and forth, and with a great effort heaved it up to the surface.

It was very heavy. Ripping off its sealed lid, the man was astonished in the dim light to see *glittering gold coins, flashing jewels, and slabs of silver*. It was a TREASURE! Likely it was someone's life-savings from that burned-out village. It had sat hidden and safe all these many years buried beneath that seemingly barren field. It could make him rich beyond his wildest dreams!

"Oh, my God!" he exclaimed, stunned.

Thinking carefully, the man decided on a course of action. He carefully replaced the lid. Then he lowered the heavy pot back into its deep hole. He pushed back in the scooped-out dirt, returned the protecting smaller stones, and slid the covering slab back into its place. Then he smoothed out the signs of his digging, such that the spot looked the same as when he found it.

The next day, after getting some rest sleeping on the ground in the burnt-out village, he began the long trek back home. When he arrived, he looked different than when he'd left. His wife, kids, and friends remarked on how *invigorated, energized, and enthusiastic* he'd become. His face seemed to radiate joy! He smiled all the time. They were delighted with the change from his previously grim, depressed, and sullen state. Surely the journey had been good for him?

But then their happiness turned to puzzlement—and puzzlement to dismay—when he abruptly closed and sold his sandals-making business, packed his family off to relatives, sold their house, and put all their remaining meager possessions up for auction!

Everyone thought he'd gone stark raving mad. And then their concern deepened even further. Without any explanation to anyone, the man took all the money he'd acquired to

the recorder of deeds to purchase a useless, empty spread of land somewhere off in the middle of nowhere!

Hearing this, his wife and relatives were on the verge of disowning him and having him committed to an insane asylum. Surely, he'd gone crazy! Why was he giving up all his possessions, his livelihood, his means of survival, every bit of his money, and even risking losing his own beloved family in order to acquire *nothing*?

But, begging his family and friends to reserve judgment, the man then led them on a trek back into the wilderness to see his new, legally purchased property. He showed them the empty valley, the burnt remnants of the ancient town, the dried-up riverbed, and the parched, dead fields.

"See?" he smiled, waving his hands all around, laughing at their confusion. "Isn't it magnificent?"

His companions were now certain he'd gone crazy.

"This is what I found!" He exclaimed. "I've purchased that which to everybody else, even you, looks *useless, empty*, and of *no value* whatsoever. And I agree! It looked the same to me when I first got here. And to make matters even worse, in order to acquire all this, I've given up EVERYTHING THAT ALL OF YOU REGARD AS HAVING VALUE!" he shouted to the heavens.

Then, more softly, he stated: "From my previous life, I've sold everything deemed precious and dear. Hah!"

Before they could drag him away to an insane asylum, he ran away from them. They saw him off at a distance, frantically digging in an empty field. He tossed rocks out of a deepening hole, finally dragging up to the surface an old, dirt-caked pot. Upon smashing it open with one of his dug-out rocks, his friends and neighbors were astonished: tumbled onto the ground was a gleaming pile of GOLD, SILVER, and JEWELS!

Triumphantly sitting down amongst his incredible wealth, he laughed wildly. He held dazzling fistfuls of the treasure up for all to see. "Am I so crazy now?" he cackled in glee.

And so, the man returned with his family, relatives, and friends to his town. There, he bought back his old house, his

business, and all his possessions. He kept enough of his new-found wealth to improve the lot of his family, friends, and town. The remainder he donated to the local synagogue to advance the works of God.

And even though hard times still periodically came upon him, his family, and his town, the man never again sank into a deep depression or questioned the providence of God. Whatever he had was enough. Every small pleasure throughout the day was savored. A beautiful sunset was enough to cause him to stop working, race home, and hug his wife and kids. Each pair of sandals he finished was a celebration of talents and creative skills he now knew came straight from God.

Eventually the man died. His possessions were split up according to law and custom. His individual life merged back into history. His name was forgotten. Even the town where he lived was eventually burned down by enemies, its remnants eroded by environmental changes. Little of the town remains today. Of the man, all which persists is his story...

Yet his story was told and retold across the generations: about *the man who gave up everything in order to gain what seemed to everyone else to be but a worthless patch of empty land!* Yet that seemingly foolhardy transaction changed his life completely.

Such—is the Kingdom of God!

Or, consider yet another story illustrating the value of the Kingdom of God: about the nature of “beauty.”

The Greatest Beauty of Them All

This story is about a wealthy merchant who collected precious gems—yet lacked the most *BEAUTIFUL* treasure of them all. To find it was his consuming passion.

He already owned the largest white *diamonds*, the deepest-red *rubies*, the purest shimmering-green *emeralds*, and the largest glittering-white *pearls*. Also, he had specimens of every other type of gem known to man. He had spent many years acquiring the very best of each jewel. It was a fabulous collection, unequaled throughout the world, worth a fortune.

But still the man searched for the perfect, largest, and most beautiful prize of them all. He'd heard of a unique, one-of-a-kind, **SOLID BLACK PEARL** of flawless texture and shape; newly discovered, of such quality and size the world had never before seen!

Searching for the object of his dreams became his obsession. He delegated most of his commercial duties to underlings. He devoted almost all his time to hunting for that perfect black pearl. He traveled to many far-off lands chasing-down rumors of its existence. But it was all fruitless...

He began to suspect that it didn't really exist. He almost gave up. Finally, he chanced upon a small jewelry shop in a port city. Under heavy guard, he was taken to the back of the store. A vault was opened and he was allowed to briefly view a *mammoth black pearl* of exquisite shape and texture. There could be no doubt. This was the reputed one-and-only *perfect* black pearl. It was real!

On being allowed to pick it up, he was astonished that it was large enough to fill his entire hand! Light broke from its surface, shimmering with all the colors of the rainbow. His trembling fingers confirmed that it was *warm* to the touch, pulsing with an inner life. It spread feelings of good will, transcendent glory, and spiritual completeness. It was the *essence* of pure beauty!

"How much?" the merchant whispered; his voice muted in awe.

The seller calmly quoted a price that was beyond that ever paid for a single pearl in the entire history of the world.

“If you don’t want it, others will pay,” its present owner insisted.

Speechless at the quoted gigantic price, the merchant handed back the gleaming, giant pearl. He managed to gulp out a reply: “Give me one week,” he gasped, and left.

Truly, that was more money than the merchant had ever imagined spending on anything. He wasn’t even sure that despite his existing wealth and connections, he could *ever* raise that much! It would require selling-off everything he possessed, including all of his other treasures acquired so lovingly over the years. But what was of *most* value?

He was determined to try!

So, he put out word that he was selling his entire collection. He invited representatives of all major investors in the world to come view his superb collection. Kings and Queens sent their emissaries. The wealthiest business men arrived in person. And one by one, he watched his precious, magnificent jewels sold to the highest bidders.

Then he borrowed as much as possible, called in his own loans to others, and cashed in all his investments...

One week to the day, accompanied by a platoon of his own heavily armed guards, he returned to the gem shop. His men rolled in a large, wheeled, treasure-chest and opened it. Inside was a great quantity of gold coins. Yes, it was literally a king’s ransom. It was everything that the merchant had in the world. And he was *gladly* trading it all to acquire that one, unique, perfect black pearl.

The shop’s owner nodded, satisfied, and handed over the pearl. So, the merchant held in his hand THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THING HE’D EVER SEEN, knowing it was *his!* And even though he now possessed nothing else, the merchant knew without a doubt that he was the *richest man in the entire world.*

Such—is the Kingdom of God.

Section 3:
THE COMPARATIVE VALUE
OF THE WORLD

(See *Luke 12:13-31*,
Luke 16:19-31,
and *Luke 20:20-26*)

But the value of the Kingdom of God cannot be determined in isolation. Sure, it may be worth a king's ransom. But what if *other* things we hold dear have equal or *greater* value? Then, it's just one of several things we hold dear. So, we must be very clear on how much we love what *we already* have...

You want what is yours. You fight with others to get what you decide *should* be yours. And if someone steals something from you, you *hate* them, scheming to wreck terrible revenge upon their heads! Is this not a natural reaction to what we call "our own"?

Commonly held religious law authorizes a person to demand "an eye for an eye," or "a tooth for a tooth." This is widely regarded as "just," despite such revenge often perpetuating hatred and violence in the name of God! Some of you go so far as to sue, in the courts of secular law, your *very own relatives*—in order to get what you think is yours.

In other words, many of you are willing to place your **physical possessions** above peace, above family, and sometimes even above God Himself. Why?

Are you so blind as to throw away the *most* valuable things of life in order to selfishly horde physical possessions? What, then, is the *true value* of those physical possessions?

Well, you think that without them you will die—and in this you are correct. Without food, shelter, or the means to stop your enemies, both you and your family will perish. Quite rightly, you hold your physical possessions in high esteem. But they are *not* the *most* important aspects of life. Nor should they be the sum total of your existence.

The *poorest* person in our world can be *rich* in the most valuable things, including the following seven:

- 1) amazing **life-experience**;
- 2) a keen **appreciation** of God’s daily gifts;
- 3) constructive **positive connections** with dear friends and family;
- 4) developed, personal **survival skills**;
- 5) accumulated **practical wisdom**;
- 6) **spiritual solidity** of character and reputation; and
- 7) the acutely perceived **presence of God** Himself.

Please don’t misunderstand me. Despite my having lived in the first century an impoverished life as an itinerant preacher, I am *not* ordering you to celebrate poverty. Many terrible things come from poverty, including: disease, suffering, defenselessness, heartache, and early death. Likewise, neither am I necessarily against your becoming wealthy. Having many physical possessions can indeed help you accomplish great good in this world. But for many people, including some religious people, THEIR NUMBER ONE CONCERN—*as revealed by their actions*—is acquiring and keeping their physical possessions.

Again, sorry to shout. I get excited...

Your life is *more* than just your house, your means of transportation, your job, your land, your cattle, your “stuff,” or your money. Those physical possessions are merely a *means* to an end, not the end itself. Getting and keeping those things should not be your life’s “AIM.” They are not the purpose of your existence. They are *part* of the “means” by which

you can get to where you *really* want to go. And even then, they are only “enablers” that *might* help you—which, in the end, are *not* absolutely necessary!

Again, there are many people who have NONE of those desired physical possessions, yet still succeed *amazingly* well—particularly at **moving closer to God**. And without God, no matter how many physical possessions we may own... *we have nothing*.

Even the explicit promise of our physical possessions—keeping us alive and safe—is an ephemeral illusion. The richest person in the world can “out of the blue” drop dead. The highest official of the land might be killed by accident or assassination. All the money in the world will not keep you, tomorrow, from being yet another day older. Each day you are one day closer to your death.

The wealthiest and most powerful individuals seemingly should be the most secure and happiest. Yet they are often the most insecure and terrified. With all their incredible wealth, they may live cowering in armed enclosures surrounded by bodyguards, never knowing when an enemy or even close relative will slip them poison in their soup! With them dead, their wealth is up for grabs...

If you spend your life acquiring and hoarding physical possessions, in the end you may be able to buy an impressive tomb within which to hide your rotting bones. And even *that* physical monument will become a target for grave robbers. But those who are *rich towards God* will reap a great and everlasting reward—starting in this life then continuing into the existence to come.

Thus is the Kingdom of God.

Or, consider the Example of a wealthy but greedy farmer...

The Wealthy Farmer

A rich farmer had a particularly good harvest. Everything he planted that year grew up in abundance. In fact, he had such a great harvest that he and his family could neither eat nor sell it all. He had so much extra crop that he simply did not know what to do with it all!

Should he give it to the poor and hungry to soothe their misery? Should he give it to the synagogue in appreciation for God's providence? Should he trade it for more land so he could be even more productive? Should he divide the excess amongst his hired hands who faithfully labored for him at low wages?

He decided to do none of those potentially worthy things. Instead, he decided to tear down all his existing barns and build, in their places, even larger storage facilities—*in order to keep all the excess harvest for his own self!*

The farmer rationalized his decision like this: "I've worked hard for years accumulating this great abundance. I have it now because of *my* expertise being an excellent farmer. I *deserve* the security and luxury these huge stores of grain will bring me. In fact, I think I'll *retire* and dedicate myself to enjoying the fruits of my labor. From now on I'll just relax and concentrate on having fun. I'm set for many years into the future. Yes!"

But that very night God demanded the farmer's soul. Despite his great accumulation of physical possessions, the man was laid helpless, defenseless, and naked before God. His possessions could neither deter nor stop God. And so, the farmer died. A lifetime of greed, selfishness, and disregard for the less fortunate earned him eternity *cast down* from the presence of God. Why?—because in God's sight the farmer brought nothing of value. Though he had accumulated great physical wealth on Earth, he'd lived an *empty* spiritual life. So, he died unloved. The world was better off for his passing.

The farmer was a fool. He spent all his energy preparing for a comfortable retirement which never arrived. He thought he was rich when in reality he was poor.

To be rich towards God, the farmer might have done the following:

- 1) **understood** and appreciated that *all* good comes from God;
- 2) **been thankful** for his God-give strength, talents, and resources;
- 3) **shared** his excess with those in need;
- 4) **supported** the work of his local religious group;
- 5) determined to use his retirement time **unselfishly** to do more than just have fun;
- 6) built strong **positive connections** throughout his life with those around him; and
- 7) **celebrated** moving ever closer to God.

Those activities might have developed the man's character and soul into an offering pleasing to God. But silos stuffed with grain mean nothing to God. A solid portfolio of retirement investments means nothing to God. Being the head of some successful business means nothing to God. An enjoyable retirement attending fun parties. It is the *quality of our characters* responsibly expressing Godly Creativity which makes us rich in God's eyes.

Therefore, I—Jesus of Nazareth—encourage you to *not* be overly concerned about what you're going to eat, what clothes you're going to wear, if you're going to stay healthy, or even if you'll be alive tomorrow. Of course, all those things are important. But they are *not* the sum total of "you," whether in this life or the life to come. Your existence is much *more* than food you put in your mouth. Your bodies are far *more* than an outward layer of clothes. YOU are *more* than just a functioning unit of flesh, blood, and bones... which crumbles into dust once it dies!

Do you want other people to evaluate you only on the basis of how nice your clothes are, how fancy the food is that you eat, or how young and healthy you appear? Yes, I know many people do exactly that! But does that *define* you?

Or, is **the quality of your Godly character** far *greater* and *much* more important than your outward, physical

attributes? Be *rich towards God* and you truly will have real wealth and security.

Such is the Kingdom of God.

But if it's too difficult to put your own immediate life into perspective, then consider birds and flowers...

God's Providence in Nature

My dear friends, BIRDS fly all around us. Look at them!

Aren't they amazingly beautiful with all their dazzling colors, fine feathers, and streamlined shapes? But in order to acquire their magnificence, do these birds plant crops? Do they harvest grain from those crops? Do they store their harvested grain in barns and silos? No! But God still feeds and clothes the birds, even though they lack jobs, careers, houses, and money. Do you think that in God's sight *you* are less important than birds? If God sees to the well-being of birds, don't you think he'll provide for you the things you require to live and survive?

Of course, those birds have their own tasks they must accomplish. They must do all the things necessary for finding and getting food, building their nests, laying their eggs, raising their hatchlings, and fending off predators. In fact, birds must work very hard and industriously in order to survive and thrive. Birds don't get a "free ride" and neither do we. We must all do our part in order to receive God's many blessings.

But it's very easy and tempting to let yourself become just a very smart bird—spending your entire life focused *only* on getting food, buying a house, making babies, raising the children, acquiring wealth, and guarding yourself from enemies... so that your children in turn might obsess entirely on doing the exact same things, over and over and over into the future!

Are you only a smart bird? Of course not! You are **God's children**, capable of rising to a level higher than even the fleetest bird could ever fly. So, don't limit your potential by denying the power of God. When you define your life only in terms of your physical possessions, you reject your elevated, God-given heritage.

Or, consider the FLOWERS swaying wild and spontaneously around you in the fields...

Aren't they magnificent? Feel their many different textures. Smell their fragrant aromas. Marvel at their graceful forms. Be inspired by their vivid colors—reds, whites, blues,

purples, and yellows. Are they not stunningly beautiful, glorious adornments to the wild weeds growing in the fields?

So *how*, then, do these lowly plants in the fields acquire magnificence that surpasses even Kings? I tell you this: Solomon, with all his fabulous wealth and glory, was not dressed equal to that of the flowers in the field. Do the plants in the meadows work at jobs? Do they earn money? Do they purchase exotic silks? Do they spin threads into fine fabrics? Do they buy expensive paints and dyes? Do they hire expert artists? No. God supplies all that they require.

Sure, there are tasks that even plants must do. They must exercise their engrained capabilities for sprouting, growing, flowering, seeding, and spreading. A sickly plant that's unable to do its part will die. But the glory of flowering plants comes not from their getting a good job, earning lots of money, and amassing physical possessions. Yet the beauty of the grass of the field is *transient*. Whereas today they may be in full bloom, tomorrow they're withered, dried-up, and rotting on the ground. We consider them so useless that we gather them up in piles and burn them!

If God so magnificently clothes even lowly, ephemeral weeds, how much more will he clothe you? Are you not God's beloved children? Don't you believe that God loves you as much as He loves weeds or birds? Why then do you obsess on things that are merely enablers or ornaments to your physical existence?

Have faith, my friends. *Trust* in God's ultimate providence. Such is the Kingdom of God, a place that captures your heart...

Your Treasure and Your Heart

Let me ask you another question. This is a serious question. I'd like you to ponder upon it. *What do you desire to have more than anything else in the world?* If you are honest with yourself, what is it that you want more than anything? In other words, *where* is your heart? Where are your true affections?

Is the greatest desire of your heart to get a high-level job? Is it to get expensive clothes? Is it to own the best transportation? Is it to live in a magnificent mansion? Is it to have a large chest filled to overflowing with gold coins and precious jewels? Is it to have fame? Is it to have power bending others to your will, forcing them to accept what you believe?

All those things are obsessions of people who reject God. Their entire lives are filled with struggling for those things, fighting over them, and hoarding them. But that's understandable. After all, what do they have to look forward to other than those worldly goals? For them, the best they can hope is to die comfortable. So why not make their brief existence as luxurious and pleasant as possible?

Your heavenly Father knows that you require the necessities of life. If you do the work which He has assigned to you, in the way the Prophets taught, God will do His part. I know this may be hard for you to believe, but God loves you *far more* than he loves the lowly weeds of the fields or the birds of the air, to whom he gives such magnificent possessions and glory! God wants for you, his beloved children, to likewise do well, to thrive, and to achieve worthy goals.

Food, clothes, shelter, money, and security are all necessary to survive in this earthly realm. Your Father knows you need them. He will give them to you *if* your hearts are set on the most important thing: *seeking first and above all God's Kingdom*. But if your hearts are anchored to the transient, uncertain, corruptible things of life—which are here today and tomorrow cast into the fire—then, sadly, you shall likewise perish.

The Valid Concerns of Life

Sure, when times are bad, we worry about physical possessions. How will we eat? Where will we sleep? Will our enemies overwhelm us? This is natural. It's part of our animal make-up. This deep concern about the necessary conditions of life is called our "survival instinct." It helps us avoid danger while doing the right things to keep on living. But even those blessed with a great abundance of physical possessions—even when everything's going along just fine—can still allow their "survival instinct" to overwhelm their thoughts.

Every moment of the day there are many people—whether rich or poor—who are deeply troubled and worried. They're afraid of not staying healthy, or being crushed by the rampaging forces of nature, or being captured and tortured by evil people. They are terrified of thieves who may break in and steal their valuables. They dread losing all their money. Or they have nightmares of undefined disasters happening to them or to their possessions. But which of you by obsessing on death can add even *one hour* to your life when your time is up? Since you cannot do this small thing regarding the seemingly highest priority of all, why then are you so concerned about lesser things?

Becoming obsessed, continually troubled, and overly anxious about the conditions and components of this earthly life will distract you from the *Kingdom of God*. It will cut you off from your heavenly Father. It will bring heartache and dissatisfaction in this present earthly existence, plus great loss in the next. Conversely, the *antidote* to these normal worries is the Kingdom of God!

For example, consider the case of a rich man who lived a life of great luxury...

The Rich Man and the Beggar

A man was very wealthy, dining on only the finest food. He wore the most expensive clothes. He traveled via the best and most secure transportation. He lived in a huge mansion, safely sequestered away from the “common” people.

This particular wealthy man lived each day as if life were a great party, with him as the main host. He ate from banquet tables heaped high with the most delicious food, guzzled fine wine, reveling with a stream of like-minded rich guests. But outside his estate, some homeless people came up to the gate. They carried the fevered body of a dying friend. They thought very highly of their sick friend, whose name was Lazarus. Having nothing to help him themselves, they hoped some wealthy visitor to the mansion would take pity on him.

Lazarus was a kind, loving, giving, and godly man. Through no fault of his own, though, he'd never been able to earn much money. He had a series of bad breaks, ending up with his other friends living on the street. Thus, he was chronically homeless. Poverty-stricken, he was reduced to begging for handouts. He had no medical care, caught a fever, and grew progressively weaker.

So, Lazarus' homeless friends laid him to the side of the mansion's gate, through which the rich owner regularly traveled. They hoped that the rich man or his wealthy friends would toss them a few coins to buy some food and medicine. Otherwise, Lazarus would surely soon be dead. Lazarus was, indeed, in terrible shape. He was covered with oozing sores, moaning. In addition to being ill, he was starving. He was so skinny he seemed just skin and bones. Lazarus would gladly have eaten from the rich man's garbage, if he'd had access. But the garbage containers were kept locked up inside the estate, behind the gates, to make sure they didn't attract hordes of undesirable “bums.”

The rich man, arriving home from another party at a friend's estate, noticed the sick man lying beside his gate. The rich man was disgusted and repelled. He considered calling the authorities to remove the filthy beggar. Instead, he did

something far worse: choosing to *totally ignore* the dying man's presence. The authorities might have done something to help Lazarus. But the only assistance that the sick man got at the rich man's mansion was from stray dogs licking his oozing sores. The warm saliva soothed his pain. Lazarus weakly stroked their heads in gratitude.

And so, not long after he'd been brought to the rich man's gate, the beggar died. Coincidentally, soon after Lazarus' death, the rich man suffered a heart attack. His blood vessels were clogged from his abundant intake of high-fat, high-cholesterol food. Attended to by the best physicians, the rich man breathed his last gasps. The beggar's body was hauled away and disposed of as if it was trash, unceremoniously dumped by the authorities into an unmarked pauper's grave. In marked contrast, the rich man's corpse was treated with great respect, put inside an expensive casket, given an elaborate funeral, and sealed into a dedicated, massive marble mausoleum.

It seemed that the wretched beggar's life finished much as it had transpired, unnoticed and of little worth to anyone. The rich man's legacy, however, was obvious to all that visited the cemetery. His carefully preserved corpse was nestled inside the largest and most impressive mausoleum of the cemetery. The monument was adorned with flowery odes to his life, porcelain pictures of his face, and guarded by seemingly hovering stone angels. The beggar's final resting place was marked by nothing but a rounded heap of dirt.

But the continuing reality for the rich man and Lazarus was far different than earthly perceptions. Heavenly beings transported the lowly beggar's soul to Paradise. There he was showered with respect and acclaim. He was even given a place of honor to sit beside the great Prophet Abraham. The rich man's soul, however, ended up in a far different and sinister place...

Having laughed at the concept of God and disregarded religious warnings all his life, the rich man was stunned to regain consciousness after having suddenly fallen deathly ill. In amazement, he discovered himself still existing, in a higher reality! But it was not a welcomed revelation. Instead of

discovering a serene place of spiritual renewal and beauty, the rich man realized he'd been cast down into a horrible HELL. He found himself adrift in a totally black, lonely, desolate, and terrifyingly empty space.

An *endless icy void* infiltrated his consciousness. It froze his soul, while simultaneously *burning* him hotter than any fire he'd ever touched. It was an excruciating, continuing AGONY. It was like he was spitted over a flaming pit. A spike skewered him, running through the middle of his conscious mind. The "spike" was his damning memories. He felt his "flesh" searing, blistering, and popping. He knew without a doubt he was there for all eternity. There was no possibility of escape. But it wasn't active torture. What actually tormented him was the complete *ABSENCE* of God. He now realized that on Earth, God was everywhere. He should have recognized God in each flower, bird, or rock! Here, however, there was only horrific *EMPTINESS*...

The rich man's spirit mentally *screamed out in pain*, pleading for help—even the slightest assistance—to somehow ease his immense suffering. But there was no answer. There was only silence in the vast *BLACK VOID*. But then the rich man's spirit perceived, at a great distance, another place. He saw afar a warm glow, a lush paradise. And there, sitting at a spiritual banquet table piled high with delicious nourishment and cool drink, was *the very same beggar* who'd lain at the gate of his earthly mansion! Beside the beggar, chatting with him, was the Prophet Abraham! Somehow, the rich man's earthly connection to the wretched beggar still lingered, even in the after-life. It allowed the rich man to recognize and communicate across a vast distance to yet another spiritual realm!

The rich man's desperate spirit recognized that his only hope for easing his unbearable suffering was to somehow appeal to Abraham, invoking his earthly connection to that worthless, pitiful beggar.

"Father Abraham!" the rich man screamed-out mentally. "Please! Father Abraham, won't you hear me? Can't you help me? Please!"

From far off came Abraham's faint reply: "I hear you, son. But I cannot help you. You are where you wanted to be. You

rejected God and now you reside in His utter absence, just as you wished. There is nothing I can do for you. You made your choice. Your condition is your own doing.”

“But Father Abraham!” the rich man cried again, straining to make his wishes resonate across the great distance. “Please have pity on me! I’m in agony! At least send that worthless beggar to soothe my pain. I’m being *burned alive* without relent. If he would just dip the tip of his finger in a glass of water there on your banquet table, then come place his finger on my tongue... that’s all I ask! Even that tiny relief would greatly ease my suffering. Surely that’s not too much to ask? Please!”

Abraham answered: “Even if I wanted to help you, I cannot. Between you and us the Lord has fixed a great chasm. None can cross from here to you, nor from you to me. You are *rejected* from the presence of the Lord. Lazarus lived a life of godliness. He loved and ever strove to draw closer to God. Now he is where he most wanted to be: drawn into the immediate presence of the Lord. It’s not my doing. Both you and Lazarus *chose* to live the lives you led, to be the people you are.”

“But it’s not fair!” the rich man screamed across the abyss. “I now see the error of my ways. I’m willing to change. Tell me what to do. I’ll do *anything* to escape this torture! Sure, I did some bad things before. I acknowledge my guilt. But it wasn’t entirely my fault! On Earth there was no irrefutable proof of God. I didn’t have the unquestionable, irrefutable evidence necessary for me to choose to follow God. It’s only *now* that I have the proof I needed. I agree to do whatever God demands of me!”

Abraham sadly replied: “*Of course* now that you are faced with irrefutable proof of God’s reality and your existence after physical death, you finally recognize the consequences of being rejected from God’s Presence. *Now* you agree to obey the Lord to escape your all-too-real punishment. But that’s not what God wanted from you in your life on Earth, nor your existence here. He deliberately put Himself at a little distance from mankind. He did this so that only those who *wanted* Him, who *loved* the concept of God, who *searched* for Him, and who were willing to take a *leap of Faith* to find Him would

receive salvation. He had no interest in people who reluctantly bent the knee when they were forced to do so. Only those rare people who loved Him and trusted Him even in the face of terrible hardships, trials, and tribulations, are worthy of the Lord of Reality. All the rest, who chose to see God as a mere myth, an embarrassment, an inconvenience, or only a means to get what *they* wanted... all those are adrift with you in the eternal black void: countless souls forever lost and alone.”

“But it’s still not fair!” the rich man screamed again, tortured by the icy, burning, totally dark, mind-tornado.

Abraham’s voice was even softer now, just barely audible to the rich man’s trembling spirit, the fragile connection fading: “Remember, my son, that on Earth you ignored those who were in desperate need, in order to heap riches upon yourself. You used physical possessions not as a means to do good, but to perpetuate your own selfish survival and wanton pleasures. You arrogantly rejected the teachings of Holy Scripture, your local religious groups, and the writings of spiritual leaders handed down to you through the ages. By your flagrant, bad example, you discouraged and prevented others from themselves reaching-out to God. You seduced and misled many by your bad example. You actually derived pleasure from inflicting pain on others! You smirked at the sight of Lazarus’ helpless, sore-covered body lying at your gate. And you received in your short years on Earth all the pleasures that you are ever due; while the godly but poverty-stricken Lazarus now receives *his* just reward. You are both in receipt of a *Cosmic Justice*: balancing the scales that your smug presumption insisted never even existed in the first place! For a brief splurge of selfish pleasure on Earth you’ve reaped your just and painful reward: an eternity separated from the Lord of Reality. In the Black Abyss your mind is convulsed, pierced, and seared by the absence of Essential Truth. You have only yourself to blame.”

Chastened at his awful fate, the rich man relented. Crying and sobbing, he gasped-out a final tortured request: “I... I see now... how stupid... how utterly foolish... how completely bereft of all redeeming value I lived my life on Earth... and how

I now deserve my terrible fate... along with all those who thought they were so smart as to conclude that the Lord of Reality was merely a childish fable. My soul is forever lost... BUT NOT YET MY FIVE BROTHERS!" he screamed.

"Dear Father Abraham!" he continued, for once in his existence totally sincere: "I plead with you! My five brothers are yet alive on Earth, merrily following my putrid example. Surely you could send back that righteous man Lazarus to them? They also saw him dying there at my gate. Since both of us died nearly at the same time, he's still fresh in their memories. If *he* were to *return from the dead*, surely that would give *them* the irrefutable proof they need to change their ways and not come to this place of torment? Please, Father Abraham, I beg you! Please send Lazarus to warn them!"

Abraham's reply was very faint now, his voice fading away into the utter darkness around the rich man... "Even were the *Son of God* Himself killed and raised from the dead, many people would still not believe. Why?—because they simply *don't want* to believe. Heavenly Wisdom is dismissed by them as, at its best, mere wise sayings. Godly lives are dismissed as misguided wastes of resources. The magnificent wonders of Nature are dismissed as random physical manifestations. Loving sacrifice is dismissed as self-serving delusion. Miracles from God are dismissed as unexplained freak-occurrences of nature. No, even if Lazarus rose from the grave to appear before your brothers, parroting your own words, they'd still call him a fake... and kill him yet again!"

Now Abraham's voice was so faint the rich man could barely hear it... "They have Holy Scripture, the example of the Faithful Few, the awesome Magnificence of Nature, and their own inward recognition of God's Truth. If they ignore all that, even Lazarus raised from the dead would make no difference to their behavior. They must, from their own free will, decide to *love* the concept of God. They must *want* God. They must *search* for God. They must be willing to take the *leap of Faith* to find Him. And, most of all, they must strive to *remake their own minds* into God's earthy palace. It's their choice, for which they have all the evidence they will ever need. If they find the fleeting pleasures of their earthly physical

possessions to be greater than their desire for God... they will surely, likewise, perish. God does not force His love upon those who choose to *not* love Him back. I'm sorry."

And so, the rich man sank back into his tortured, burning, icy misery. He realized the awful truth of Abraham's words. He desperately wished he could have a chance to do it all again. But he knew that in the same circumstances he'd make the same terrible choices.

His horrible fate, then, was not God's fault, it was his own. He'd loved the selfish pleasures of the world more than the Kingdom of God. Now he had to pay the price of his folly. There was no opportunity to make any more choices. For him, time was at its end. Only grim eternity beckoned...

I see that many of you are touched by the account of Lazarus and the rich man. Some of you may even feel pity for the rich man's terrible fate, as well you should. No truly godly person rejoices at the misfortune of others, even evil people well-deserving of their punishment.

Eternity is not a subject that we can easily grasp. But next to it a pot filled with selfishly hoarded gold is less than trivial... it counts for nothing! Even a *mountain* of gold would fade into insignificant next to Eternity. Indeed, many find the thought of Eternity so overwhelming and impossible to grasp that they hide in the immediate, tangible moment. Yes, "living in the moment" is important for honoring God's ever-present gifts and helping to make critical decisions as to how to exercise His Creativity. But it can still blind us to higher priorities. That old saying, "*Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die!*" is a common way to deal with the inevitability of death. Yes, that might be an appropriate response if we were just smart animals briefly sparked-up into an emergent consciousness that's soon to "blink-out." But the awesome reality of Eternity changes the situation completely.

If the true "us" is spirit, then *God* dictates the substance of Eternity, not our tiny little Earth-bound brains. Indeed, those that ignore God actually *hope* that the afterlife does *not* exist. If it does, then their fate may not be just a peaceful flickering-out into nothingness, following an earthly life of self-

indulgence. We can all learn from the dramatically different fates of the selfish rich man and the righteous beggar, for such is the Kingdom of God!

But I see that some of you are still not convinced to “seek first the Kingdom of God.” Though you may have some respect for God, you still *love the world more!*

Alright then. Let’s look deeper into *why* people love this uncertain, dangerous, evil place...

Justifying Loving the World

Sadly, I perceive that some of you in the audience are *spies*. You've come here *not* to listen, learn, and grow spiritually, but to *attack* me! You pretend to be "students of God" when your minds are already made up. You *hate* me and wish to *destroy* me! You are *pretending* to be my students...

Just like my first-century disciple Judas, you want to get rid of me. You want to silence me. Why? Is it because you don't want to hear my message? Do you hate me for NOT TELLING YOU WHAT YOU WANT TO HEAR? Do you reject me because *you don't want to re-evaluate* who and what you really are? Yet why *not* take stock of your life? What's so bad about periodically re-examining your own thinking? Is your reluctance to face yourselves because you don't want your possessions, power, or other earthly pleasures to be threatened? Have you become so enamored of your own comfortable beliefs that killing the real "Jesus" is a justifiable evil? Or do you betray me simply because you love the nice things of the world *more* than you love anything else, including God?

Tragically, you who are pretending to be my followers are losing much more than you gain. Your love for *yourselves* is what *blinds* you to the love of *God*. You reject the story of the Rich Man and the Beggar because in the Rich Man you recognize yourselves: hoarding wealth, control, dominance, and security. You are *worshipping* the critical factors necessary for survival in this physical world. Yet, conversely, I see you are *not* admiring the Rich Man. You may even be repelled by the Rich Man's overt cruelty and lack of a social conscience. While still persisting in his behavior, you insist you are not him because you don't go to his extremes.

How, then, is such thinking possible? How can you be part of one thing but not its entirety? Does a spring give out both salt water and fresh? Does a fig tree produce both figs and apples? Surely something is wrong here! Yes, outwardly you may appear to be religious. In you, others may even see an astute religious person well-versed in the scriptures. You may even speak flowery words of praise for me and God. But I see

you as you truly are: *duplicitous spies*, intent on protecting your own physical possessions at the expense of Godliness!

If you are the spy amongst my followers, you may even superficially reach out to the unfortunate of this world. Others may think of you as a generous and kind-hearted person. But if your *soul* does not align with your actions, then you are wasting your efforts pretending to be righteous. God is not fooled!

You who come to me as spies, please listen to what I'm saying. There is still hope for you. The decision to change your life is always available. You can decide for yourself that your past beliefs were wrong, then *change* your life! Yes, you may pay out of your excess wealth for a doctor to go tend to Lazarus' sores, thus soothing your conscience. But are you willing to *embrace Lazarus* as a fellow child of God, covering yourself in the puss of his sores? Are you willing to go out onto the streets *searching* for Lazarus, not just waiting for well-meaning people to bring him to your gate? Are you as concerned for his mental ills as for his physical problems? Are you willing to help him *sustainably*, not just in a one-time guilt-relieving spasm? And are you looking not just to lift him up to your level but *learn* from *him*, such that you can *together* advance forward, closer to God?

I, Jesus of Nazareth, *plead* with you not to deal with *your* "Lazarus" as a sop to your conscience, or as a disgusting duty, but as a new and grand adventure! In God there is tremendous energy to be tapped-into. Building the Kingdom of God is a continuing pleasure, enjoyably exercising your own God-given talents. In this effort you discover exhilarating pride accomplishing worthy goals. When you join with others you gain the best human connections. What I'm telling you is this: you're not giving up anything by placing your physical possessions in second-place to God. Instead, you're gaining a whole new, higher level of awareness, achievement, and enjoyment.

No, I'm not saying all my followers must become social workers tending to the needs of the poor. There are many different ways to synergize with your fellow humans, exercising your own particular God-given talents. Finding how you best embrace your Lazarus is one of the main Tests by which God

evaluates the worth of your spiritual character. Spiritual value comes not just from volunteering at a free clinic or a soup kitchen, but in figuring out *your own unique strategy* furthering the Kingdom of God.

Do you now see how Lazarus is a test for us all? And it's not just about helping the poor and destitute. It's about being willing to see Lazarus in *yourself*. This is a high spiritual barrier that only those worthy of God can pass. In other words, it's all *not* just about YOU. It's about taking other people *into* your mind, *making a place* for them to reside in your consciousness. The rich farmer was damned not for his lack of charity but for *separating* himself from the rest of his fellow men and women. *The Kingdom of God* is not just me, or my exclusive club, but an "infective" mindset which binds us all together.

I see that the spies amongst us now hate me even more. Hah! Holding up a mirror to the eyes of those who refuse to see their own true character is often deemed a crime worthy of death. But I *am* that mirror! I refuse to be clouded or misaligned. I help you to peer deeply into your own brains. I reveal to you the status of your own heart and soul. If it hurts, good! Pain can cause anger and denial... but also concern and improvement. Let your struggles produce the later.

Thankfully, many of you here *do* appreciate my help seeing yourselves more clearly: for higher validation and improvement. Some of you are shaken and shocked, not seeing what you expected. In spite of this, you are still considering what I'm saying. Bravo! You've kept an open mind that's receptive to building the Kingdom of God. Nicely done, my dear friends.

It's those that reject me out of hand, refusing to even look into the mirror reflecting their souls, who now wish to attack and kill me. In their hearts, they *don't* want improvements. For them, a mirror that reveals unwanted truth must be turned aside, smeared, or clouded... or, if all else fails, smashed into shards!

Don't be afraid. Help me help you look deep into the center of your soul, willing to push aside *stubborn barriers*...

Compartmentalization versus Duality

Attempting to crush me, spies back in the first century interrogated me on “compartmentalization.” They seemingly respectfully tried to get me to admit that there is a *spiritual* side versus a *physical* side...

Superficially, they were correct. Earning money does seem qualitatively different from, say, praying at the Temple. From this perspective, praying is a spiritual duty that can be *separated* from, say, working at your job. But that “compartmentalization” can also be a convenient excuse to focus on the physical side to the exclusion of the spiritual!

The truth is that *everything* we do as godly people reflects our spiritual nature—whether at home, at school, at work, at church, or in the synagogue. Compartmentalization is simultaneously both true *and* untrue. Confusing? Grasping this spiritual reality of “opposite duality” is yet another test that God uses to evaluate the quality of our spirits. We cannot go to work as a worldly person only to instantly change into a spiritual being when we walk into a synagogue or a church. And yet the physical world *is* indeed qualitatively different from the spiritual world. Eh?

Quickly embracing the topic of “working at a job,” the spies amongst us back in the first century jumped to the topic of *politics*. They “politely” asked me if we who consider ourselves godly should pay *taxes*. Hah! The game was afoot... In this pretense at respectful inquiry, they tried to find yet another way to get me thrown into prison or executed. Even today, to speak against the State or our political leaders is not just a diversion from the more important topic of the Kingdom of God—it can be suicidal. In many large countries even today, you still get thrown in prison or executed!

So, in response to the attempt by those insidious spies to entrap me, I replied: “Give to the Emperor what is the Emperor’s—and to God what is God’s!” Who graces the design of our coins and paper money? Is it God? No, it is the image of the Emperor or other past or present political leaders. The metals from which coins are made derive from this world. The

value which backs up paper money is likewise rooted in worldly goods. Money equals physical possessions, which mean *nothing* to God. God wants first of all *your heart*, not your pocketbook.

This is where many churches today, claiming to follow me, fall down. They equate godliness with donations. Though their words may claim differently, their actions speak louder. They aggressively “guilt” people into giving beyond their means. Preachers shamelessly harangue their audiences for money, to use in paying their own salaries and funding their own programs. They’re off base, focusing on the wrong things! Here’s the truth: if we give our hearts, then all else follows, including ALL our possessions. The obligations of our present physical existence—whether earning money, paying our bills, or paying our taxes—though important, are trivial next to our spiritual potential.

So, is this an excuse to not donate to one’s religious group? After all, is not money an earthly manifestation of little real lasting value? In this matter, the first-century religious leaders—many who denounced me or plotted against me—were unanimous that compartmentalization did *not* hold. But how could they have it both ways: trying to make me denounce taxes and yet support giving to the church as a godly duty? They cannot... Their hypocrisy is revealed.

Again, you see the *duality of opposites*: where it’s easy to get trapped and dragged down by those who insist we must separate ourselves into competing pieces. I am speaking to you honestly, from my heart. I’m not trying to trick you. I’m telling you the truth, just as I did in the first century, when it endangered my physical life. I’m not looking to get your money, to enslave you, or to become powerful at your expense. I’m looking to help you. I’m on your side!

Yes, I am your true MIRROR. Look into me and see your own true self. Are you a godly or a worldly person? There is no compartmentalization. There’s only the one truth, which holds all the time. It’s there for you to see. Sure, you still must work at your jobs, feed your families, pay your taxes, and honor your societal obligations—but your ultimate allegiance cannot be compromised. At all times, in all circumstances,

and in every way, if you are to be my true followers you *must* be citizens of God's Kingdom!

If you do this one thing above all else, then you will be *better* prepared to more-fully honor the prevailing political leadership of your government, work with pride at your jobs, use your physical possessions wisely, do good deeds, support your local churches or charities, find the best ways to connection to your fellow humans, respectfully exercise your own God-given talents, and grow your spirits ever closer to God.

But if you slice your life up into competing compartments you will destroy your own soul. A house divided against itself cannot stand. You cannot be one thing today and another the next. Just as with the rich man and the poor beggar, you are who you are. But "who you are now" is not an irrevocable fate. It is a *decision*. It is *your* decision. And it's one you can alter, if you wish, for the better. You can heal the cracks, reunifying your mind!

Look into me, your Mirror. Discover who you are! If you don't like what you see, then *change* yourself. You're not an animal ruled by your genetic programming. You don't have to tolerate hypocrisy cracking apart your mind. Our Heavenly Father has given you the incredible gift of intelligent choice. I cannot and will not take control of your life, changing your heart against your will. But I *can* help you to change yourself. You can be who you want to be. You can make your heart what you want it to be. You can go where you want to go. You can do what you want to do. And what you make of yourself RIGHT NOW will determine your place in Eternity.

Thus is the Kingdom of God...

Section 4:

ON ENTERING THE KINGDOM

(See *Mark 10:17-22*,
Matthew 22:1-14,
Matthew 21:28-32,
and *Mark 10:23-31*)

So how then can you become a full-fledged citizen of the Kingdom of God?

Many of you come to me earnestly desiring to be part of the Kingdom of God. In this, I applaud your intent. But you must follow me for the right reasons. If your heart is not right, all your earnest efforts to become a citizen of God's Kingdom will fail. It won't matter how many "magic" religious words you say, how many oaths you take in my name, or how many good works you accomplish. Sadly, I will have to turn you away...

Stop and think: Why do people respond to my teachings? Why do people come back after first hearing me, to hear yet more? Why do people decide to be my disciples? Why do some people give up much to follow in my footsteps? I will help you understand your *own* motivations, look into your *own* heart, and recognize the condition of your *own* souls.

It may be painful to see who you really are. But only then will you have the opportunity to improve your own spiritual character. Upon this exercise rests your place in Eternity. So, how shall I best help you understand your *own motivations* on wanting to enter the Kingdom of God?

Let us together consider the following four examples of others who wished to partake of God's heavenly feast:

- 1) a **rich young man** that came up to me on the street;
 - 2) **invited guests** to a wedding banquet;
 - 3) a father's two **disagreeable sons**; and last of all,
 - 4) my own **closest disciples**.
-

The Rich Young Man

One day I was traveling with my closest disciples when a young man came running up to us. He fell down at my feet and knelt before me. Head lowered, respectfully averting his eyes, he raised his hands up at me, begging me for my blessing. I immediately knew what he truly wanted: namely, that I would validate his religious devotions. But I determined to give him a chance to rise above that selfish concern.

Now this is what he said to me: "Master, you are the essence of perfect morality and absolute goodness. I have tried all my life to do what is best... and have not even come close to your pure stature. Please, tell me, how can I likewise perfect myself in God's sight?"

Looking down at the young man, I was impressed. This indeed was a rare individual, with an uncommon devotion to religious matters. Perhaps he might be able to rise above his own limitations? So, I paused with my disciples, willing to try to help him in the best way possible.

I answered him in this manner: "First of all, you must place your faith directly in God. No earthly person in this world, even me, can be the essence of pure goodness. This confession may shock you, but it's true. At times I also am confused and frightened, struggling with how to move forward through complex challenges. If life is often puzzling for me your "Master," then should it not also be for you? I react towards hypocrites with *scorn*. I *hate* evil. I get angry. How is my behavior the essence of pure goodness? Therefore, it should *not* be your intent to attain unto some theoretically perfect godliness. It *should* be your intent that *God use you as He wills*—and

thus fit your imperfect life into *His* perfection. Concentrating on an outward display of doing the right things in difficult situations, or inwardly believing the right things on confusing issues, is to misdirect your energies. You must first and above all TRANSFORM your *heart*,” I suddenly shouted at him, making him cringe.

Then, I continued more softly... “*That* inward reconfiguration will be evidenced by sincere beliefs and appropriately compelled outward actions. *Change your heart* and all else will follow. God looks at your heart, not just at your superficial morality or religiosity. Do you understand me?”

The young man was clearly confused. But he managed to answer me thusly: “Master, I am willing to do whatever is needed, to add whatever I lack. My greatest desire is to be certain of my place in God’s Kingdom. I know that only by being a worthy citizen of the *Lord’s Reality* can I hope to inherit heavenly treasure, the gift of eternal life.”

“Are you indeed willing to do whatever is needed?” I asked.

“Yes, Master, anything!” he insisted.

I narrowed my eyes, staring down at him. He looked uncertain, frowning.

“I know that you understand the teachings of our Jewish Religious Law. Do you keep Moses’ Ten Commandments?” I queried, continuing on without giving him time to answer: “Do you faithfully comply with *not killing, not committing adultery, not stealing, not lying* about others, *not being dishonest* to others, and always *honoring your parents*?”

The young man kneeling at my feet now proudly answered in the affirmative: “Yes, Master,” he said. “From early childhood I’ve been acutely aware of the teachings of the Law. I am always careful to observe all the Commandments. I go out of my way to not risk even slightly violating any of our religious rules or rites.”

I looked down at this young man who knelt so respectfully at my feet. I felt strong positive feelings towards him. Though he had the impetuosity of youth, he was a person of great sincerity, determined to be a Godly person and live a righteous life. He was indeed a young man after my own heart; one who might make a worthy close disciple. But he had to pass a final,

difficult test before he could truly call himself a citizen of the Kingdom.

“Do you love me?” I quietly asked.

“Yes, Master!” he instantly answered, his head bowed.

“Are you willing to *prove* your love?” I insisted, my voice stern.

“I’ll do whatever you tell me, Master,” he firmly replied.

I then bent down, took him by his shoulders, lifted him up to his feet, took his head in my hands, and looked him square in his eyes. There, shining back at me in his large brown eyes I saw true devotion, great personal resolve, and a splendid purity of spirit. This pleased me greatly. But I also saw something else in his eyes that made me very sad: an *immature perspective* that he might *not* be willing to surmount. It was, indeed, a deadly disease, afflicting many. However, he—like all others—would be given the opportunity to rise above his own animal limitations. I would offer him a hard, clear, and definitive *choice*.

“Then to acquire this treasure in heaven, which you say you seek,” I smiled gently at him, “you must do three things for me. First, you must sell all that you possess. Second, you must give all the money to the poor. And third, you must abandon all else to become one of my closest disciples. Together, you will walk this journey with us. You will follow in my actual footsteps.”

At my words, he slumped in my arms as if I’d struck him. Then he abruptly pulled away. His eyes stared down at the dirt of the road. Without saying another word, he turned and rapidly walked away from us.

There were tears in my eyes as I watched him leave.

I knew why he didn’t reply. I knew why he didn’t want to stay with me and my closest disciples. It was the very same reason that many refuse to hear or follow me even today. The rich young man loved his earthly wealth *more* than he loved me or God.

Yes, he had excuses. It turned out that he was a *very* wealthy person. He had many possessions, properties, and businesses. Consequently, he had many heavy responsibilities—both to his family and to his workers. He couldn’t just

“walk away” from all that... or, so he thought. But in reality, it was his personal *security*, his *pleasures*, and his *power* which held him back from following me.

Certainly, he was a good moral person. Yes, he had a real commitment to God and to his local religious group. But in the end, the actual reason that he wanted to be a citizen of the Kingdom of God was *not* for what *he* might do for God, but for what *God* could do for *him*. Sure, he wanted eternal life, but in return for a mere few brief years of religious devotion here on Earth. Quite a bargain, don't you think?!

But to truly enter the Kingdom of God, a person must be willing not just to follow commandments faithfully, but to countenance doing four *additional* things:

- 1) **lose everything** to gain more;
- 2) **love God** above all else, including money;
- 3) **trust God** in situations where one's gut instincts scream out denial; and
- 4) **radically change** one's own heart.

Is this becoming clearer to you? Do you see how that being in the Kingdom of God is not just conforming to superficial religiosity? Do you comprehend that the hardest test is not in following strict commandments, but in *changing* who *you* really are?

You may say: “But that's very difficult! Who can do this?”

Yes, I agree that none of what I just listed is easy or instantaneous. For many it will be extremely hard to accomplish those four points. To make significant progress down that path may require one's entire lifetime! But the *beginning of the process* is simply this: the sincere willingness to contemplate doing the four things I just described.

Is that really so hard? Is that out of the reach of anyone—to be willing to *try*? God does not expect you to do miracles. Your capabilities have been deliberately limited. Perfection is beyond humanity. So, don't despair when you see yourselves falling short, even if it happens repeatedly. But the *process of transformation* is something anyone can *start*. Where transformation will take you in this life depends upon your

particular mix of talents, resources, and the help you accept from the Lord. Again, as often said by many philosophers, it's not some defined Destination that's most important (such as getting to heaven): IT'S THE JOURNEY (the process of self-transformation). Again, pardon my shouting...

And, yes, God does not expect everyone to live up to the requirements I put in the path of the rich young man. Not everyone is required to abrogate their responsibilities, become voluntarily destitute, and to trudge dusty roads with me and my closest disciples. That is an honor given to only a select few. You don't have to take such a vow of poverty. And God certainly *does* expect you to do all that's necessary to not be a burden on others, to meet your own family obligations, *and* to earn *excess* money or goods, if possible, from which you can help others through a church or charity.

But if I were to call any of you to put all your earthly possessions aside to follow in my literal footsteps, you must be *willing* to do so without hesitation. You must truly be willing to do *any good and worthy thing* I request of you: proving your love for me! And you must *always* put God above all else, including your earthly wealth, no matter how great your possessions may be.

Everyone will not be put to the actual test. But each must be ready to do their best to pass the test. Only those with this *firm conviction* are qualified to enter into the Kingdom of God. All the religious obedience in the world means nothing if you are not first *transforming your own heart*.

The Wedding Banquet Guests

Another example of those having an opportunity to enter into the Kingdom of God but failing, is a great and sumptuous feast prepared by a King to celebrate the wedding of his Son. Let me tell you about it...

As you might imagine, this was an exclusive affair. Only the most privileged in society would normally be invited into the palace of the King to attend such a prestigious event. So, invitations were sent out to a very select group of people. They were told to be ready to attend once everything was in place.

Finally, then, it was time. The King sent out his servants to let the attendees know to come to the MARRIAGE FEAST. However, instead of jubilation, excitement, and eagerness... the servants encountered indifference, boredom, and reluctance! Say what? In fact, *all* of the honored invitees to the feast informed the King's servants that they would not be able to attend...

Well, the King upon hearing back from his servants was stunned! These highest-ranking members of society were making excuses, turning up their noses at his hospitality, shrugging off his generosity, and rejecting the great honor of acknowledging the royal marriage of his Son. But, giving them the benefit of the doubt, he sent his servants back with explicit instructions: make sure each of the invitees understood that the feast was now ready and they were *expected* to attend!

The King instructed his servants thusly: "Tell them that the banquet is all laid out. The meat is cooked and hot. Everything is ready. *Now* is the time. The King *requires* you to attend the wedding feast!"

As directed, the King's servants went back to each individual invitee and told them what the King had said. In addition, the servants added a personal plea: "Please come to the feast. Everything is prepared. It will be a wonderful, delicious, enjoyable celebration. The Prince and his radiant Bride are waiting to greet you. Nothing like this has happened before. It is a once-in-a-lifetime affair!"

Amazingly, the honored invitees took umbrage at the insistence of the King's servants. Some turned their backs on the King's messengers and went off to their homes. Others said they must work in their fields. Others just shrugged off the messengers, claiming they had to take care of business in the city. Others became so indignant at the insistence of the King's messengers that they turned on the servants. Incredibly, some of these honored invitees reacted by *beating up* the King's servants, *torturing* others, and finally *murdering* the most insistent servants!

Well, when the King heard this, he was *enraged!* He had invited those people to share in his royal glory, his vast generosity, and his deepest love... and they *rejected* him in the worst possible ways. So, he immediately sent soldiers to *execute* them, *destroy* their homes, and *burn* their neighborhoods to the ground!

Then the King said to his remaining servants: "The select few that I originally invited to the feast proved unworthy. They turned their back on me. Therefore, I command you to go out into the streets, inviting *everyone* to come to the Palace. Tell them not to worry if they're unprepared. I will provide them fine wedding clothes. But don't just make a big announcement in the city square. Go also into the alleyways, into the slums, and even to the far country roads. Invite everyone! Tell them that the Wedding is ready and the *King Himself* invites them to come to the Palace to share in the celebration."

This was incredible! The King was throwing opening the doors to the Palace. Even the dirtiest, most decrepit, and hungriest beggar was invited to wear fine wedding clothes and feast at the King's banquet table. The humblest, poorest person would be able to meet and shake hands with the King's Son. Those who were otherwise looked down upon or considered socially inferior, could dance with the beautiful Bride.

Even criminals, abusive people, and those who'd done terrible, evil things—who if trying to enter the Palace would normally be arrested by the King's guards and thrown into prison—were offered this complete pardon to enter the King's Palace as honored guests.

But even in the face of this unprecedented announcement there were still many people that refused to accept the invitation. Others, however, eagerly agreed. They were amazed at their good fortune, such that the servants of the King were able to bring back enough people to fill the Palace's main hall.

By the time the Wedding began, though, it was getting to be evening. The sun was going down. Outside, the city was getting dark and dangerous. Good citizens did not go out onto the streets at night. Predators, thieves, and murderers loved the darkness. Evil was afoot. But inside the Palace, everything was bright, cheerful, and safe. The invited guests were amazed at the beauty and magnificence of the Palace. They marveled at the free wedding robes the King gave them for putting on over their regular clothes. Hushed, they were ushered into the main hall. They smelled mouth-watering aromas from many delicious hot dishes laid out by the servants on long tables. After the wedding ceremony, the guests would sit and eat their fill.

The King was pleased at the assembled crowd of faithful subjects. So, he entered the hall and started shaking hands with them, personally greeting each of his guests. But as he walked among the crowd, he came upon a man that instead of wearing the bright, clean, beautiful wedding gown he'd provided for free... a person stood there clad only in his *dirty, ragged, smelly street clothes!*

Well, the King was once again stunned. He stopped in his tracks, looking down at the smaller man, amazed at what he saw. This was either an example of rank ignorance—not knowing the free clothes were available—or inability to clothe oneself, *or* an overt *insult* to the King's generosity and sovereignty!

Well, the King who already that day had summarily executed the ingrates that murdered his servants, showed remarkable composure and constraint. Who knew? Maybe this *was* a case of ignorance. Perhaps the man had not gotten the message that all the guests should cover their poverty, their diseased skin, and their pitiful appearance with free, beautiful wedding gowns? Or, perhaps the man *was* handicapped, lacking the physical or mental capability to put on such finery?

So, the King calmly asked the man: “Friend, why have you come into the main hall without putting on the provided wedding garments?”

Well, the man just stood there blinking, looking around in confusion. He didn’t have an answer. He looked like he wanted to run and hide. But everyone else was looking at him. There was no place to hide. And there was no way he could dispute the fact that everyone else had on the provided robes while he clearly *did not*. His comparative “nakedness” and overt rejection of the King’s generosity was indisputable... such that he stood speechless before the King.

Whatever the man’s warped thinking in rejecting the provided robe, having been directly confronted by the great King Himself—who’d brought him off the dangerous streets into the magnificent Palace—the man knew that his refusal to comply with the easy, beneficial wedding gown requirement was simply *inexcusable*.

And so, the King roared-out in a loud voice: “Attendants! Take this man and tie him up. Bind his hands and feet so that he’s completely helpless. Then throw him out into the *outer darkness*, back where he came from. And when he’s being torn to pieces by the evil people who love dark streets, everyone be quiet. I want you to hear his sobs and screams. This is how it will be for all those who think that they can treat my kindness with contempt! I’ve invited and summoned many... but few are chosen. Be *thankful* that you are one of the lucky few that are blessed with an abundance of my great gifts.”

So, what then does this example have to do with entering the Kingdom of God?

Well, first of all, God has already prepared a great spiritual feast in His own “house” for celebrating His Son’s marriage, to which *you* are today specifically and individually invited. Yes, the doctrine of me, Jesus of Nazareth, being the King’s Son who is married to his Church is correct. Spiritually, my union with you my followers confer upon you the lineage of God. Isn’t God’s generosity amazing? Not only do you *not* have to do something remarkable to gain His attention and gifts, He’s *already* noticed and invited *you*. It makes one feel special, honored, and privileged, doesn’t it?

But please *beware* that you *don't* start thinking thusly: “Hmmm. You know, I guess that *would* be kind of nice. It's certainly an honor. But... wow... it sure would be a lot of trouble. I'd have to get dressed up. It will cost me a lot of money to buy an appropriate present for the King's Son. It's going to take the whole day. I may have to miss work. I already have so many commitments I barely have any time to relax at home as it is. Also, I'm going to have to be on my best behavior since I'm to meet the King and his guests. It sounds like an awful lot of time, bother, and expense. Maybe I'll just find an excuse to not go...”

In order to enter into the Kingdom of God you must first acknowledge its importance. It is *far more important* than sitting comfortably in your house doing your own stuff. You must understand that it is *far more valuable* to you than earning money at your job. And you must know beyond a shadow of a doubt that *actively fighting against the Lord of Reality* is to earn yourself terrible and awful destruction!

If He has already prepared all of this allowing you to escape the evil of the streets, *how will you escape if you neglect such a great salvation?* To turn your back on God is to seal your fate. You are doomed! Everything you have or own, all that you think is so important it must come before God, will be *burned into crumbling ashes!*

And if you *do* accept the Great Invitation, you are still not automatically given everything for nothing. You cannot take entering the Kingdom of God casually. There are requirements that you must meet, even inside the Palace! But they are not difficult. In fact, they're quite easy and ultimately good for *you*.

You'd think that God would require of you some great quest, some tremendous feat, or some awesome sacrifice before He'd accept you into His Kingdom. But all He asks is that you move toward him, put on the beautiful “wedding garments” that he's already provided, interact politely with your fellow invitees, and deal with God respectfully. Is that so hard? Who would not do such things, say, to meet with the chief politician of your country? Would those requirements

be too much to ask in order for you to attend some great event in the central Palace of your earthly nation?

But the sad truth is that even though God offers His love and generosity to all people, only a small fraction of the population will even attempt a response. Yet the call is open to everybody! Even if a person has lived a life rejecting God and doing evil, God will provide a gown to cover up all those shortcomings. In one fell swoop God will make you in His sight as if you were perfect. Isn't that amazing? You have but to go to Him, accept the gown that's offered, and put it on. And what does He ask back from you? Is it too onerous? He merely asks your obedience, your respect, and your good behavior. Is that too much?

I think not. In fact, it is *nothing* in comparison to what you will receive back from God. And yet there are only a few who do that *little bit* in order to be accepted by God. Why? Because as simple and easy as these requirements are, they still are *TESTS*. What do they test? Obviously, they test the *character* of our spirits. Again, are we just smart animals carrying out programmed biological imperatives? Or are we something more? Are our lives ruled by physical possessions, money, pride, and power... or can we rise above those earthly concerns?

Actually, these tests are quite *easy*—there for our own benefit. But those who are willing to go beyond their “comfort zones,” putting the Great King above money and pride, are, sadly, few indeed.

Sometimes I wonder if *any* humans in this world will ever make it to the King's banquet table. Many are given the incredible invitation to enter God's Kingdom. Yet few actually choose to meet the King's easy requirements. Thankfully, though, some humans *do* rise above their animal instincts. These are the *enlightened* ones, who seek how in their own small way to please their Great King.

For all the rest, their comfort, money, and pride are in the end *more important* to them than truly loving God. Words are easy. But God demands *actual faith*: belief strong enough to compel confirmatory action.

Yes, all of humanity can be divided into four groups:

- 1) those that consciously **turn their backs** on God;
- 2) those that **try to fight** against God;
- 3) those that **superficially accept** his generosity; and
- 4) those that are **happy to do whatever** good thing God requires of them.

Thinking that they've "made it" by giving only the minimum to God, many fall short. Those self-deluded "believers" will be cast out into the outer darkness. Their fate will be an eternity of pain, loss, and anguish.

Again, it's a choice. God has given us the free will to reject or accept—and then to change our minds for the better or worst! How does this happen? Well, let's look at yet another Example of people having to make difficult decisions...

A Father's Two Disagreeable Sons

Over the centuries, many doctrines have been derived from my initial teachings. I'm rather amused that many of these man-made sets of rules and beliefs directly contradict each other. Rest assured that I've *not* returned on this brief inspection tour to give you yet another set of "authorized" doctrines. Neither am I here to indorse one Christian group over the others, nor to confirm the rejection of any so-called "heretics." Rather, I'm here to return you to the *core principles* of my first-century teachings, which you, my followers, have sometimes forgotten!

Let me make this point perfectly clear: entering the Kingdom of God is not just a matter of saying the right "magic" words... it's *putting the right words into action*. "Looking good" and "doing good" are *both* critically important. One without the other will *not* allow you to enter God's Kingdom. You must DO THE RIGHT THINGS FOR THE RIGHT REASONS. You are welcome to attempt wordsmithing to fit your contradictory doctrines into the last sentence, but fit it you must. I don't mean to yell at you, but some points deserve extra emphasis.

For Example, consider this story about a man and his two disagreeable sons...

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A wealthy gentleman owned a large farm. He had two sons, both of whom he loved very much. As with many young people, the farmer's sons were somewhat rebellious. They wanted to do whatever they fancied, have fun however they wished, or just sit around doing nothing at all.

Now the rich father could easily have indulged the wishes of his kids, giving them a life of ease, fun, and indulgence. But the father was wise, knowing that pampering his children would likely destroy their characters, preventing them from having future success. So, he gave both of them a regular list of chores in addition to their schoolwork.

Well, one Sunday morning he was informed that several of his hired hands were sick and could not harvest the grapes in one of his vineyards. If those grapes went unpicked any longer, they'd spoil. So, the father went to his sons who were relaxing in the living room and told them to go help bring in the harvest.

He got two very different responses...

His elder son said to him: "What? Are you kidding, Father? Today's my one day to finally get a little time to myself. All the rest of the week I'm working at chores, going to school, doing religious duties, or studying. This is totally unreasonable, Father! I do enough for you already. I *refuse* to spend today sweating alongside your hired hands. Forget it!"

The elder son stomped out of the living room, went to his bedroom, and slammed shut his door!

The younger son, on seeing the rude behavior of his elder brother, reacted quite differently: "Sir!" he crisply replied, standing up from the recliner where he'd been relaxing. "If you need me to help, I'm here for you. I really appreciate all the wonderful things you do for me and my brother. It's very little in return to go out and spend this Sunday helping bring in the harvest. After all, the crops from the farm allow us to live comfortably. I'm ready to do my part. I'll go right away. I'll ask the foreman what he needs me to do. I love you, Father. I always want to make you happy."

The Father was pleased at the respectful, thoughtful, and enthusiastic words of his younger son. But he was appalled and saddened at the disrespect, ignorance, and laziness of his elder son. They were both his beloved sons. But one was rebelling while the other was helping. What to do?

Well, he thanked his younger son and left to accomplish some necessary errands in town, pondering the matter. When he returned in the late evening, upon walking into the living room, he was amazed at what he saw. There sitting in the same recliner as in the morning was his younger son. He was reading a book, looking fresh and relaxed. But collapsed on a rug by the fire—exhausted, covered with dirt, leaf fragments, and purple stains—was his elder son.

“What’s going on here?” the father asked. “What have you two been doing today?”

The younger son jumped up, stammering: “Oh... Father! I... uh... well... you see... I sort of got caught up in this book and... uhm... well...”

The elder son wearily leveraged himself up from the floor and stumbled over, saying: “Dad, I’m sorry about what I said earlier. I don’t know what came over me. I guess I was just expecting to relax today. All the extra work you told me to do shocked me. After I calmed down and thought about it, though, I realized how stupid I was being. So, I went out to the vineyard and put in a full day’s work. Can you forgive me for my earlier disrespectful words?”

The father took his dirt-caked, disheveled son and hugged him closely: “Hey, I was a kid once too. I also made mistakes and said things I regretted to my own Dad. But I know you love me, just as I love you. Sure, I forgive you. You’ve done well. In fact, I’m proud of you for seeing the error of your ways and changing your mind. Keep this up and you will indeed inherit the entire farm when I eventually pass away.”

Then the father turned to the younger son, saying: “But you, Son, are a great disappointment. This morning you said all the right words. But then you failed to live up to those words. You should know by now that I don’t value pretty speeches! What impresses me most are people who in the end actually accomplish the tasks. I don’t care how many times you tell me you love me if you won’t do what I say. Keep this up and when I eventually pass away you will inherit *nothing*.”

So, my dear followers, let me ask you this: do you agree with the father’s assessment of the characters of his two disagreeable sons? Both sinned against him. The elder son disrespected his father with his words. The younger son disrespected his father with his actions. But which one had the *worst* sin?

The answer is obvious, isn’t it? When I asked this very same question recently to a gathered group of church leaders, they agreed as well. Surely the son that in the end did the father’s work—even though he initially disrespected his father with spiteful, ugly words—was the best son. The one that

failed to follow through after his initially proper speech was the worst. And yet, how many religious leaders today who claim to be my followers are indeed themselves following the example of the *youngest* son?

Let me tell you something, plain, simple and *loud*: IT'S EASY TO GIVE AN EXCELLENT-SOUNDING SPEECH! Why? Because it's just *hot air* moving out of a person's mouth. You open your mouth, sounds come out, and that's a speech. Likewise, giving a lecture in some religious class is also easy. Why? It's just talking about some words sitting on a sheet of paper. You read the words. You say some of your own words in response. Again, it's just hot air coming out of an opened mouth.

Arguing forcefully in favor of the right position on some issue is also easy. Again, it's just words. Sure, it's nice to say the right words—but *words without actions to back them up are still only hot air*. That's why I don't just stand up and preach at you. I *do* the things I say. In the first century, I invited my adversaries to judge me by my *actions*, not just my words. Instead of ordering you around I SHOW YOU WHAT I MEAN BY MY EXAMPLE. Should I speak louder? Did you hear what I just said? I don't just tell you to go and do something. Rather, I invite you to follow *me* as I do it first *myself*.

Likewise, we don't just sit down together having theoretical lectures, debates, and discussions. Allow me to shout at you yet again: I EMPOWER YOU, FACILITATING YOUR TAKING ACTION TO *LIVE OUT* THOSE GOOD TEACHINGS. Yes, those who don't have the interest or talent to give public talks may look at impressive, smart/articulate preachers, Bible class teachers, or church leaders and say: "Wow! He or she sure is holy. They're the very best of our local followers of God!" And, maybe he or she is indeed a great example to follow, beloved of God. But not necessarily...

Consider some religious leaders who think that they already know everything, think they are doing everything the best way possible, and think that they have no need to learn anything new. Sure, they spout flowery words of praise to me. Some of their speeches are correct and impressive. But are they dedicated to *learning, improving, and continually*

finding better ways to get better results for God in today's world and societies? God will judge them *not* by their impressive speeches... but by their sincere actions. Many who think they have a "one-way ticket" to enter into the Kingdom of God will be sadly disappointed. Yet others who think they don't have a prayer of a chance to get in, will find themselves welcomed with opened arms.

Is this a startling revelation?

Well, consider the Example of *John the Baptist*...

A Voice Crying in the Wilderness

John the Baptist was sent by God to prepare the world for me. He began his campaign before I started my ministry. He was a very holy man. He also led by his example. He taught people to look away from the everyday concerns of life and consider their life in God.

But I ask you: *how* did he do this? He did it initially by going out into the wilderness, all by himself, living on hardly anything, and communing directly with God. His EXAMPLE drew followers. He lived the life of a truly righteous man. He wasn't just some preacher in a safe, comfortable congregation pulling down a big salary, traveling in the latest, fanciest vehicles. No, he was scruffy, dirty, and living on the street. He looked like some crazy, bearded, long-haired bum. But by his extreme *actions* he COMMUNICATED with the common men and women around him.

He could talk to the people on the street because he was right there with them. That's why he did it! He went where they were and lived like them. He did this in order to *show* them that God had a better way *for them*. He didn't ask for them to come down to the synagogue, then shun them if a few of their ragged sort indeed showed up... rather HE WENT TO THEM AND LIVED AS THEY DID. Did I say that loudly enough? Do you hear what I'm saying?

So, what did John the Baptist accomplish? Well, from a traditional perspective, many of the religious leaders saw him merely as a fanatic looking to "rock the boat." He was a *threat* to the "status quo." So, they rejected him. In fact, when he was arrested by the police and subsequently executed on trumped-up charges, they were happy to be rid of him.

To the religious leaders of his time, John the Baptist was a pest. He was an irritant. He shamed their noble words by his uncompromising *actions*. He took a vow of poverty then lived up to it. He focused on getting closer to God rather than putting another coat of paint on an already comfortable church building. He went to the sinners instead of waiting for them

to come to him. He even lived with them out on the streets. How *dare* he do such glaringly Holy things!

But he had results. Maybe he sounded crazy and extreme to the so-called religious leaders. But the common people loved him. And he wasn't just some circus freak amusing them with incoherent ranting and ravings. No, he spoke unvarnished *truth*, which shocked the common people into looking deeper into their own lives. And their introspection, in turn, took them closer to God.

Many prostitutes doing what they thought they had to do for earning money, realized from John's action-based words that there was a better way open to them. Many thieves and robbers callously destroying the lives of innocent people, changed their own lives to following John's demonstrated righteousness. Many pimps and drug dealers, secure in their ill-gotten goods, saw that their supposedly luxurious lives were empty without the love of God.

This is what John the Baptist did—while those that condemned him sat comfortably listening to, or delivering, proper lectures and sermons in their safe synagogues. I tell you truthfully that many former pimps, whores, thieves, robbers, murderers, and drug-dealers will make it into the Kingdom of God, while some punctually attending Church people are turned away!

Do we all have to grow long beards, quit our jobs, go out into the desert, and survive by eating grasshoppers and wild honey? Of course not! But pay close attention to my loud "take-home message": WE MUST ALL FIND GOOD WAYS TO USE OUR OWN PARTICULAR GOD-GIVEN TALENTS PUTTING HOLY WORDS INTO MEANINGFUL ACTION! Again, sorry to shout. But I get excited... Otherwise, we will *not* enter into the Kingdom of God. It is that simple.

For Example, I *myself* was baptized by John the Baptist with his "baptism of repentance." What, then, is this "repentance"? It is being sincerely sorry for the bad things you've done before, then changing your direction. Right? You were going in one direction, now you deliberately choose to go in another. *I myself had no need of repentance.* I was already on the path that God chose for me when I was baptized by

John. But I still allowed him to baptize me. Why? I did it in order to **SHOW YOU BY MY OWN ACTIONS THAT EVEN THOSE WHO THINK THEY ARE ALREADY HOLY AND PERFECT CAN GET YET BETTER!** Again, I don't mean to shout. But these words deserve to be spoken loudly!

Who amongst you is my equal? I don't say this to brag. I *am* the Son of God. And yet even *I* was willing to humble myself, learn from John the Baptist, and take *action* to get *better* than I was before. So, if I—your Lord and Master—am willing to embrace REPENTANCE to be pleasing to God, should you not also do the same? Let me say it again, more softly. If I am willing to respect, learn from, and emulate John the Baptist's extreme example of Godly Righteousness, should you not be willing to do the same?

And yet, many religious leaders who were contemporary to John the Baptist were *not* willing to think that they were in any fashion less than perfect in pleasing God... or that there were things that they could do even better than they were already doing... or that the RESULTS which John the Baptist demonstrated by his actions were something from which they could learn and even participate. Yet those very same religious leaders honored God with their words. They said all the right things. Their sermons, lectures, and positions on issues were often "spot-on." But their lack of actions—as evidenced by absent or feeble results—let their Heavenly Father down. *The fruits of their vineyard were left rotting on the vines!*

Once again, I ask: what is your "AIM" in life? Is it to be comfortable? Or is it to—in your own little ways—do everything you can to *make God happy*? Open your eyes! Look at your results! Are you accomplishing what John the Baptist accomplished? If not, are you really doing the things I'm telling you to do in my teachings? In particular, I'm addressing you who consider yourselves to be religious leaders. Are you managing your local congregations like I gave you my Example in managing my own close group of disciples?

On Earth and in Heaven, the proof of your sincerity is "in the pudding." You may claim to be God's heavenly "Chef." But have you made any pudding? And if so, what does it taste like? When you see good results for God being produced by

people of other religious groups, are you curious to learn how they managed it? Do you look for those elements that might work for you at your location? Or do you simply persist in performing the same minimally effective rituals, over and over again, in the exact same way, hoping that, somehow, they'll magically start working? And most importantly: ARE YOU FOLLOWING ME, JESUS OF NAZARETH; OR ARE YOU FOLLOWING YOUR OWN COMFORTABLE TRADITIONS?

People of all religions love their traditional rituals, doctrines, and biases. Indeed, such has largely *buried* the original Principles I espoused. In many ways, you've become that which in the first century I railed against. Seeing grand, high Cathedrals dotting the Christian landscape today does *not* impress me. Finding elaborate hierarchies, titles, and ceremonies in my name does *not* impress me. *I DID NOT COME TO JUST ESTABLISH A NEW, FORMAL RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE!*

I was willing to be baptized with John's baptism of repentance. Are you? Consider this: *my* baptism is for the *remission of sins*. But it's not just a gift of my cleansing blood. It is not just me standing before God in your stead, taking your punishment upon myself. It's actually *also* the baptism of John. It incorporates and builds on John's baptism of REPENTANCE. It's a baptism for CHANGING YOUR LIFE—being “born again”—with the freedom to *go* in a completely new direction!

Plus, repentance is not a one-time occurrence. To go in a new direction takes *continual* repentance. It's not a “one-and-done” action. It's neither complacency nor coasting along from inertia. It's not settling into repetitive rituals. To the contrary, “repentance” is *constantly* evaluating how you are doing, being unhappy when you've not done your best, and always being open to *learning how to improve and do even better!*

That's the *mindset* God wants in His Kingdom. That's the type of *thinker* God wants in positions of leadership in His Kingdom. We are all, at one time or another, disagreeable children who disappoint our Heavenly Father. What makes

the difference between inheriting or losing His Blessings (being granted a glorious inheritance) is our willingness to recognize our own disrespectful words, apologize, and change our direction. We must repent from a comfortable life of indolence, to working diligently: reaping delicious, nutritious fruits in God's Kingdom!

What better Example than my own closest disciples, way back in the first century...?

My Own Closest Disciples

Finally, in regards to entering the Kingdom of God, consider my closest disciples.

Upon seeing the Rich Young Man refuse to join us because of his physical wealth, I commented to my disciples that gaining and keeping wealth made it very hard for a person to enter the Kingdom of God. My disciples were amazed, bewildered, and perplexed. Why were they so confused? It was because they'd been taught all their lives that physical possessions, positional authority, and earthly success were a sign that God was blessing a particular individual.

Sure, all good things originate from God. But just because a person is successful in this world does not mean that they have automatic access to God's Kingdom. In fact, it is often the exact opposite. The Rich Young Man putting his trust, ego, and self-esteem into his accumulated wealth, simultaneously—and sadly—*replaced* his genuine love for God.

You see, my friends, God cannot be put in second place! God is greater than all. To put something else above God—no matter how beautiful or useful or precious it might seem to us here on Earth—only reveals our own utter stupidity. And God has no use for voluntarily stupid people!

What's the lesson here? If you want to enter into God's Kingdom, *don't be stupid*. Nothing is greater than God. Putting your trust and faith in money, possessions, or worldly success is to reject God. It's that simple.

So, I said yet again to my closest disciples: "Children, grow up! You're behaving like infants, easily distracted by shiny toys. For God, the *entire Earth* is but one small jewel in his gem-studded crown. For us to be accepted into God's Kingdom is the greatest achievement and honor imaginable. Putting our little baubles above God is like babies clutching their toys while rejecting their parents. For the moment the baby might be delighted in its arrogance and prizes. But very soon—if indeed its parents abandoned it, leaving it to its own little pleasures—the child will reap a horrible ending. Truly I tell you, *it is more difficult for a camel to go through the eye*

of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God!"

When I said this to my disciples, they were even more astonished. Surely rich people have the greatest capacity of anyone to honor God on Earth? A rich person following God has great resources to do much good. And if it were impossible for *them* to enter the Kingdom, how could it be possible for less blessed common folks, with meager means and resources?

So, my disciples whispered amongst themselves thusly: "Is the Master saying that we are all doomed? Who, then, can be saved?"

I answered them thusly: "I know what you are whispering amongst yourselves, doubting what I am saying... and you are correct. *None* can be saved! You are *all* unworthy! You are all immature ingrates!"

This shocked them even further. Some thought I'd gone crazy. But I persisted...

"By your own selfish, hurtful, animalistic actions and evil thoughts you've *doomed* yourselves to an eternity of hell, no matter how physically poor or rich you may be."

I paused, letting them think about what I'd just said. Then I continued...

"God can have nothing to do with you sinful, foul creatures. You fight and devour each other. You do hideous evil deeds even against your closest friends. You look to your own immediate good. You disrespect God. You spoil the magnificent creation that God ordered you to preserve. You are exploiters rather than caretakers. You are pitiful and without excuse. There is no way that *any* of you deserve to come into the presence of the Almighty or to dwell in His Kingdom."

This confused and astonished my disciples even more. They looked hurt and afraid, rapidly losing their faith in me. But some clung to the hope that I was angry about the Rich Young Ruler turning his back on us. They hoped I was just taking out my disappointment on them. However, I wasn't finished speaking. I had more to tell them, which would mitigate the stark truth I'd just revealed to them. Indeed, having

told them the “bad news” I could now reveal the *balancing* Good News.

“But... don’t despair,” I continued. “Even though it is beyond the capacity of humans to be worthy of entering God’s Kingdom on their own—no matter if you attain all the wealth of the entire world—with God all things are possible.”

“So... how, then, can a rich person be saved?” my disciples John tentatively asked.

“What did I reply to the Rich Young Ruler?” I curtly responded.

“To sell all that he had and give it to the poor, then join us in following you,” John promptly answered.

“Yes. That’s the correct answer,” I congratulated him. “Either literally or mentally or spiritually, *all* of you who have *anything* that you hold dear must unburden your souls of those things. You must be like a camel who takes off its large load to get down on its knees in order to squeeze its naked body through a small gateway into a city.”

Having seen this happen at the gates of Jerusalem, my disciples nodded... greatly relieved. They saw I wasn’t spewing nonsense, gone mad by the pressures of my ministry, or beating them up unnecessarily!

“Or...” I continued, “you must be like a large rope made up of many threads that you can unravel to its one essential core. Then you *thread* your essence through the eye of the needle. As long as you cling to the security of physical possessions, they will *stop* you from entering the narrow gate that goes into the Kingdom of God. You must lay aside all those burdens and concerns! You must strip yourself down to your eternal soul.”

“Will we then be worthy?” another disciple, Peter, eagerly asked.

“Certainly not,” I replied. “Even your core, essential elements remain dirty, ugly, and dim. But God can *CHANGE* that foul essence into PURITY, BEAUTY, and LIGHT,” I barked at them. “Make *God* the most important thing of all in your life—manifesting your inner convictions with appropriate actions—and He will grant you admittance to where you otherwise could never have entered on the basis of your own merit.”

My outspoken disciple Peter then sought further assurance: “Master,” he gruffly said, “surely we, your disciples, are safe? We will be granted entrance into the Kingdom, won’t we? All of us here have left behind jobs, lands, possessions, and even our families in order to follow you. Are our actions sufficient?”

I smiled at him, ruefully.

“Peter,” I gently said, laying a hand on his broad shoulder. “You must leave behind the standard thinking of this world. I say again: you are *not* worthy! *None* of you can *ever* be, no matter how much you do for me and God. But through the power of God, *I* can make you worthy in God’s sight. So, do not fear, my dear friend. Though you sacrifice much for me and for God, you will be given far greater than you’ve lost. As my disciples, you will receive the equivalent of a hundred times greater whatever the value of the houses, lands, family, and wealth that you’ve left behind. This is what the Rich Young Man did not understand. By giving up all that he had in this world and following me, he’d have *gained* far more than he lost—both now and in the life to come. I wasn’t actually asking him to give up his wealth! I was giving him the opportunity to become far richer than he could have ever imagined. In God’s Kingdom we will have incredible blessings *right now*, worth *far more* than piles of shiny gold or heaps of glittering jewels... and after this physical existence ends, eternal life in the presence of God Himself.”

“Then... we will be the Princes of the Kingdom?” Peter laughed, throwing up his brawny arms in glee.

“Peter, you are still my beloved *child*,” I sternly cautioned him. “You have much to learn. Along with the blessings and gains come terrible persecution, torture, and even death. You personally will have to endure much hardship and suffering. But those obstacles are not there to hinder you from entering the Kingdom of God, rather to strengthen and mature you such that you can be *full citizens*... eventually. Many who think that they are ‘first’ now, will then find themselves *last*. Do you understand what I am saying?”

Cautioned and tentative, Peter nodded... but then shook his head in denial. “I’m sorry, Lord. I don’t understand.”

“You *will*, Peter,” I assured him. “Many whom the world now considers poorest, weakest, and least—in the Kingdom of God will become the most important citizens. So, there’s hope for everyone. From the poorest to the richest, the Almighty can help us all enter into His Kingdom. But to do so, we must *transform* our thinking and *manifest* it by our actions. It all starts with your HEART,” I again barked at him.

Startled, he drew back from me.

“Yes, Lord,” he obediently answered, still frowning.

“Don’t give up or despair,” I concluded to them all. “The path *is* difficult. But with God’s help it is not impossible. Be happy and rejoice for the treasures that await you. I will help you. Keep following me. I will lead you by the hand through that narrow gate that opens into the *Kingdom of God*.”

Now nodding thoughtfully, Peter smiled.

Section 5:

ON REMAINING IN THE KINGDOM

(See *Mark 25:31-46*)

Ok, then, we're back from our break... This is a critical section to *Lecture #1: THE KINGDOM OF GOD*. Here's the "take-home message" for Section #5: having entered into the Kingdom of God you are *not* guaranteed a permanent place at the King's table.

I'm sorry if this doesn't agree with some of the doctrines you've derived from my teachings or from writings of my early followers. While you cannot "earn" your place in God's Kingdom, you must *qualify* both to be accepted and retained. No, you don't have to fear being tossed to the side because you failed in this or that duty. You are not judged on a list of good deeds weighed against a list of your sins. What counts is the overall Godly quality of your heart. You've been given the great gift of *intelligent choice*. Upgrading one's heart, building the Kingdom of God within your mind, is a choice. Just as you choose to build something up, you also have the God-given right to tear it down.

I confess I like your doctrines which insist God is so good none would ever choose, having once been in His Kingdom, to depart. Wouldn't that be a wonderful assurance? "Once saved, always saved!" I love it! But for that to happen, it would mean we are mindless robots walking a predetermined path. That slogan is probably great for recruiting. But unfortunately, I never taught that doctrine. In fact, I taught the exact opposite...

You see, our Heavenly Father has allowed Satan to be very powerful. Satan doesn't care about the already damned. You

come under his scrutiny and vicious attack the moment you decide to start building the foundations of God's Kingdom in your mind. Great temptations and tragedies come to my followers *because* they follow me. When those attacks occurred back in the first century, many fell to the wayside and stopped following me. By this I demonstrated the power of Satan to those who remained. Even *I* was sorely tested. At various points in my ministry, I wanted to give up and quit. And I'm JESUS! Those with lesser strength and resolve than me could easily—and *were*—overcome by Satan's attacks and traps. As it happened to me, it surely can happen to you.

Yes, you can rationalize the evidence from my first-century followers with the assertion that those who fell away didn't really commit to me in the first place. If they were my "true" followers they'd have hung in there no matter what. Ok, fine. If that allows you to not have to give up a beloved doctrine, more power to you. But that's like saying a fervent prayer is not answered because one's faith wasn't strong enough. From this doctrinal viewpoint, any good things that results from prayer is our Heavenly Father answering us; while no help resulting is *our* fault for not praying hard enough, or not doing so with enough conviction (faith). We'll get to how my followers should properly pray, which resolves that point. But for now, please don't beat yourself up. Trust in God and keep on forging ahead.

Just know that it's not about you having enough faith. External to you, God allows Satan to be a sneaky, powerful, adversary... against whom you must always be on your guard! In regard to yourself, it's about you having the courage to start building within your heart the Kingdom of God. But let down your guard, divert your efforts, quit improving your spirit, lose your focus on my teachings, and Satan will inevitably win.

True, God does not withdraw from you in hard times. But you *do* have the God-given right of *free choice*, including giving-in to temptations. Yes, God has limited Satan to not tempt you more than you are able to resist. But that fact just makes it all the more shameful and tragic when you *do* give-in, shattering the fragile foundations of God's Kingdom that you are building in your mind, allowing Satan to win. Yes, *you* could

have won. But you *chose* to love the immediate pleasures of Earth more than God.

So, if you wish, you *can* always leave God's Kingdom. Or, if necessary, the King can eject you from His Kingdom! Indeed, that could happen to you right now. Or it could happen at the *end of time* when all of humanity will be judged...

Final Judgment at the End of Time

Yes, there will come a point when all of humanity will be called to stand before God. Upon a great Throne will sit the appointed Judge. He will scrutinize each person's heart. Those individuals with hearts that are TRANSFORMED will enter into the presence of God. Those that have *untransformed* hearts will be discarded. This will be a spectacle unlike anything you've ever imagined!

The entire population of all human souls across all the history of mankind—from the first God-and-self-aware human to the very last survivors—will be gathered together in one place. Spiritual Beings from a higher reality will attend, directing the movement of this vast sea of souls.

The “Throne” will be a high place of pure glory, bathing everything else in its blazing white LIGHT. Nothing can hide from it. All will be made known. Every word, thought, and action ever spoken, conceived, or done will stand in stark relief, multi-dimensionally. All pretense and hypocrisy will be stripped away. Each of you will stand naked and helpless before the Almighty, your HEART revealed for all to see.

Then the VOICE OF GOD will ring out, piercing and filling the minds of all the gathered souls: *“My little children from Earth, the end of your short existence has arrived. I made you, loved you, and offered you great blessings. I gave you clear choices. I allowed you to come to your own conclusions, based upon whatever evidence you decided to accept. Now is the time for your examination. The ONE I sent to you, made in your own likeness, will evaluate the quality of each of your hearts. He walked with you on Earth. He directly participated in your human condition, your limitations, and your potential. You know that He knows all about you. You know that he will judge you fairly and rightly. He it is that will pronounce upon each of you your final Judgments: to ascend upward to a higher level, or to be cast down, forever lost from my Presence. This is my beloved Son, in whom I*

am well pleased. I give to him full authority to preside over you as your King in my Heavenly Realm. Hear him now!"

Then the SON OF GOD will appear upon the Throne, shining like the sun—warming all in his golden glow. On Earth he taught you about the Father, did the will of the Almighty, was made the Cosmic Sacrifice for each person's evil deeds, and became the Path to God which all could choose to travel if they wished. He offered mankind a way to transcend its own animal nature. He showed you how to overcome your engrained selfish character. Indeed, He showed humanity how to transform their hearts!

Now, the day of Final Examination arrives. Let us experience it now, in advance, together as a collective Vision. The Son will wave his hand and the gathered ocean of souls will split, erupting-out in *broiling explosions* of abrupt movement. Heavenly Beings will swoop amongst the billions, plucking out single souls to move them to the right or to the left of the Judge. The separation will take but an instant, yet its ramifications will be final and eternal.

From that initially single ethereal sea, *two great masses* will result: one on either side of the Son of God. A great swirling mass of chaotic, fearful souls will hang suspended to the King's left. A much smaller, slowly spinning sphere of sparkling souls will hang to his right.

Then the Judge will gently address the souls on his right: *"You few are my beloved sheep. You were wondering, alone and frightened, searching for something better and higher, lost in a rugged wilderness. You heard my voice and gratefully followed me. I saved you. And as your Good Shepherd, I lovingly cared for you during your existence on Earth. I give you nourishing food, clean water, safe shelter, enriching companionship, productive fellowship, medical care, defense from predators, rescue if you wandered off, and fulfilling-happiness manifested in transcendent achievements. I even washed you in my own blood to change you from your animal state into something purer. I lifted you higher than anything you could ever have attained on your own. And you*

appreciated what I did for you! In your own little ways, you loved me back. Here is what you did for me... When I was hungry you gave me food. When I was thirsty you gave me a glass of water to drink. When I was a weary traveler, you took me into your home and gave me hospitality. When I had only tattered rags to wear, you gave me warm, clean clothes. When I was sick, you ministered to me. When I was thrown in prison, you came and visited, doing all you could to help me. Truly, you proved your love to me by your actions. You eagerly allowed me to help you transform your own animal hearts. I welcome you now as the true children of God—into a wonderful, higher existence. Your treasure is to inherit the full glory and power of the Kingdom of God!”

Great joy and exhilaration will then erupt amongst the souls to the right of the King who sits upon the Throne. But that collective delight will be tinged with confusion, even embarrassment...

Then the King will smile, nodding his head:

“Ah, but you don’t think you deserve it? Most of you never accomplished anything dramatic or world-changing? You feel that you barely existed before you were snatched from the Earth, having hardly any time to do anything of any great merit? I synthesize your group-concerns now, allowing you to articulate them. Speak freely!”

In reply, a common voice from the many souls on his right will erupt: “Master! Thank you! Thank you so much! Our joy is overwhelming! But we’re not worthy, Lord. We didn’t do the things you said. When was it that we saw you hungry, thirsty, poorly clothed, sick, lost, or in prison?”

The warm Light from the King will flash like a supernova, approvingly bathing those to his right in a rainbow of pulsating, soothing colors!

And the Judge upon the Throne will approvingly reply:

“Ah, you are truly the children of God. You know that whatever you’ve done on Earth can in no way compare to the

unimaginably exciting adventures which await you, given directly from the hand of the Almighty. Yes, you've not earned that great reward. But you've qualified yourselves to receive the free gift by allowing me to lift you up just a bit above your highest animal potential. The quality of your spirits, even though fundamentally flawed, is sufficient for God to allow its further advancement. Your conscious choice and effort at rising above your 'base-line' programmed-potential pleases the Almighty. Do you understand?"

The gleaming sphere of souls swirled faster in response.

"Some of us knew you in the flesh on Earth," those on the right will collectively answer. "It was our greatest honor and privilege to directly walk and talk with you. But many of us did not. We had only your teachings from the writings of your early disciples. Surely that was sufficient, inspiring us to reach higher. But you were gone from the Earth in person. How then did those who never knew you in person see you, tending to your needs?"

The King will then reply, his vibrant voice calming their concerns:

"Ah, my dear friends, when you sent money to feed starving children in a foreign land, you gave me food. When your enemies were thirsty and you voluntarily handed them glasses of water you gave it to me. When visitors to your congregation had no place to stay and you took them into your home, you gave me hospitality. When you gathered up good clothes for homeless people, you gave to me those warm, clean garments. When you went as missionary doctors to treat the sick, or supported such, you ministered to me. When a criminal was deservedly thrown into prison yet you were concerned enough for that person's soul to reach out to try and reach him, you also ministered to me."

"Now we understand," those on the right will sigh in relief. "We are all connected. We are all God's children. When we see and fan the Spark of God inside of everyone, we do it unto you, the Son of God."

Smiling, the Judge will answer:

“Yes, in overriding your own selfish concerns, in seeing both yourself and God inside that other person, that indeed is a critical sign that you are rising above your own limitations. As such, you are qualified to rise even higher, more than you’ve ever dreamed possible. You are truly my disciples. I’m proud of you. Congratulations!”

But then the King will turn to the much larger, chaotically swirling, lightning-flashing, roiling sphere on his left.

The Judge will intone loudly, his voice now grim and growling:

“But you, the many, are forever condemned. Why? Because when I was hungry you did NOT give me food. When I was thirsty you did NOT give me a glass of water. When I was a lost traveler, you did NOT take me into your home nor give me hospitality. When I had only tattered rags to wear you did NOT give warm, clean, fresh clothes. When I was sick, you ministered NOT to me. When I was thrown in prison, you did NOTHING to help me. Do you understand?”

From the left will sound a great, collective groan: “But Master, surely you’ve made some mistake! Assuming that you speak to us as you did to those on your left, many of us *did* help the poor and downtrodden. Some of us were not religious, that’s true. However, we donated to just causes. We started foundations! We volunteered for many worthy causes. And if we’d known that you were personally inside some of our fellow humans, we’d have done even more. But few of those in tough conditions *deserved* our help. Most of them were in dire straits because of their own actions. Please, Lord. Have mercy on us. We did our best!”

But the Judge will sadly shake his head in denial, replying:

“No, you did not. It wasn’t a matter of degree or intent, or who deserved what. It was a matter of your HEARTS. Your hearts were not open to God. Your hearts were not softened

by my touch. Your hearts looked to their own substance for enlightenment. Your hearts sought to advance your own animal states, NOT reaching up to God. You did what you did for rewards. You sought to soothe your collective guilt by giving from your bounty to those less fortunate. You used benevolence as a tool for your own politics. Even when you were touched by genuine concern, you still helped others in order to advance your own agendas. But charity is not the question here. The question is the state of your hearts. Do you understand?"

Then another, *different* collective voice will arise from that swirling cloud of billions of frantic souls: "Lord! What you say is absolutely true. But *we're* not like the ones you describe! Yes, many here are exactly what you said—calculating, selfish, and even evil. But *we* felt your spirit on Earth! We were moved to true compassion for our fellow men and women. Lots of us actually belonged to respected religious groups. We attended regularly. We donated liberally. We did many good works in your name. Please, Lord! Can we not join the other group?"

But the Judge will coldly reply:

"Yes, you did all that you claim. But you did it as a component of your staying comfortable. You did it out of your easy abundance. You did it as another requirement to qualify for salvation. You did it reluctantly and grudgingly. You did it superficially. You did it briefly. You did all those things NOT from a transformed heart, but from enlightened self-preservation. While these others..." the King will motion regally to his right... *"They did it because they loved God and saw in their fellow man and woman ME. Because they allowed me to help them in transforming their hearts, everything that they saw was different than that which you saw. They saw ME and you saw only yourself. Do you understand?"*

At this, all the billions of souls on the King's left will be struck silent. They will stand condemned by their own past actions and exposed hearts. They will have no answer.

The Judge will then loudly and solemnly conclude his judgment of humanity:

“You on my left are GOATS versus my SHEEP on my right. Where they happily followed me, you had to be driven. They were eager to please me. You kicked, bit, negotiated, and held back. Their entire purpose was providing me the product of their growth. You dreamed of running off into the mountains to escape my fold. So be gone from me, now, forever! You are irrevocably cast out from the presence of God, into a VOID so vast and empty that you will each be isolated and alone, lost in eternal darkness. It is a terrible place drained of all vitality—where God has withdrawn His light, His life, and His favor. This is your second death. Your overwhelming loss will burn like the core of your Earth’s sun, the hottest fire imaginable. It will be as if you were trapped in an excruciatingly painful, all-consuming inferno. This is the terrible punishment that you brought upon yourself when you chose in your heart to reject God and cling instead to yourselves. But these others, who eagerly hunted for God, who loved my appearance, and who gladly changed their own hearts to conform to mine... they are welcomed into the eternal presence of God.”

What then does it mean to transform your own hearts, such that you will remain in the Kingdom of God even at the final judgment of all humanity?

I would not have you ignorant. It’s time to leave behind vague generalities and “lay it on the line.” Next, then, are the *details* of what you must do...

Section 6:
RESOLVING CONFLICTING
PRIORITIES

(See Matthew 16:1-12

Matthew 13:1-23

Matthew 9:14-17)

Sadly, all human brains are hypocrites. Yes, you have noble, high ideals—but in moments of stress you revert to doing what’s “necessary.” Your animal *survival instinct* takes over. The priorities of the world eclipse the priorities of the Kingdom of God. How, then, can you resolve this clash of priorities? Well, there are 7 specific MINDSETS which you need to recognize in your brain, then avoid! Here are some vivid Examples...

The Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees

The first specific thing you must do in seeking to transform your hearts is to *beware of the “doctrinal” mindset.*

Let me give you yet another Example...

My disciples and I were on the East side of the Sea of Galilee, teaching the people, when a band of Pharisees and Sadducees came up to us. This was surprising, as the Pharisees and Sadducees were Jewish sects who were bitterly opposed to each other. However, they’d united in a common cause: namely, to DESTROY me!

You see, the Pharisees had a very “conservative” mindset. They put great weight in strictly carrying out the teachings of the Law. They insisted that they, plus all others Jews, should

exactly execute the established religious traditions. The Sadducees, on the other hand, had an opposing “liberal” mindset. Their main theme was denying the existence of spirits, an afterlife, or a resurrection. Their exclusive focus was on the “here-and-now.”

In a number of ways, then, these two major first-century sects of the Jewish people believed the exact *opposite* of each other. Since I strongly urged people to think beyond the moment to an eternity with God, plus putting that as top consideration over ritualistic, blind obedience to rules and traditions—*both* the Pharisees and Sadducees likewise hated me.

If they could, they’d have murdered me on the spot. But the crowds of “common” folks who welcomed my edifying, empowering, and reasonable Godly teachings prevented anyone from physically attacking me. So, these two bitter enemies, the Pharisees and Sadducees, thought that if they united in their hatred of me, they’d be powerful enough to at least publicly diminish me. Since both sects were certain they were the smartest people on the planet, they had no doubt they could taunt me into doing something questionable. They wanted to credibly accuse me of either being in league with Satan or failing to meet their “authoritative” challenge. They “win” and I lose!

On this occasion, though, they took pains to be polite and deferential. Indeed, they made a good pretense of seeking knowledge, edification, and enlightenment. But it was just a sham...

Here’s what they said to me: “Master! We’ve seen the miracles you’ve done for people. You *appear* to instantaneously heal the sick, convert one substance into another, feed thousands with just a tiny amount of food, walk on water, command storms, and raise the dead. However, some of your *critics* claim that these, somehow, are just clever tricks. Surely, since you are from God, you could give us a confirming sign that none could deny. A *heavenly sign* would be best, seen by all! So, please call down thunder from above, or make the moon stand still in the sky, or turn off the sun, or rain down Manna from above as did the great Prophet Moses for the

starving Israelites. In this way, all will see what you can do. None will dare question *your* divine authority!”

Their juvenile taunt didn’t affect me. But I could see their clever challenge was resonating with the crowd. Sure, they’d all like to see some Cosmic Cataclysm happen at my command. It would be a spectacular show! And logically it made some sense. Surely if I were from God, I could command the skies such that everyone in all nations would see and be awed. But the Almighty is not some circus animal to do tricks at a detractor’s whim.

So, I replied to them thusly: “An evil and unfaithful generation seeks a sign from heaven. But the only one it will get is the sign of the prophet Jonah. He was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish. Then the Lord commanded the fish to vomit him up upon the dry land, allowing him the honor of going onward to preach to the evil city of Nineveh. Jonah saved that city from the righteous wrath of God. He convinced those sinners to repent and turn to the Lord. Likewise, the self-obsessed people of this generation may be saved if they pay attention to the signs that God has *already* given them.”

“But Master,” they insisted, “Perhaps the signs are too subtle? A great miraculous event in the sky—undeniably present for everyone to see—would surely help the people follow you!”

I shook my head in the negative: “And how many people can already predict tomorrow’s weather by looking at the sky, yet they know not the path upon which they are walking? Is it not a common saying that ‘a red sky in the evening says there’ll be good weather the next day,’ or ‘red sky in the morning means bad weather’? And yet the very same people that interpret the sky with ease, are oblivious to the looming consequences of their own evil deeds. They refuse to see the hand of God all around them. They allow themselves to be deluded, seduced by the temporary satisfaction of acquiring and keeping personal power. They turn a blind eye to God’s messengers. Even if I were to *extinguish* the sun and *destroy* the moon, they would still not believe in me. No, God has wrought sufficient signs, such that all who *want* to believe *already* have all the evidence they need!”

At that, I turned my back on them and walked away, cutting short the discussion. Their purpose was not to better learn God's will, but to trap me. If I'd responded to their challenge by doing some wondrous sign in the heavens, they'd just claim that I was in league with Satan, using demonic powers. Or they'd claim it was just a huge "magic" trick. Or, should I not produce exactly what they demanded of me, they'd likewise claim I wasn't from God.

They had no intention of believing in me, no matter what happened. They were simply looking for a means to attack me, to denounce me to the crowds. Indeed, the miracles God empowered me to accomplish were *not* showy spectacles. Rather, they were mainly me touching the individual lives of hurting people. This is the supernatural connection I offer the whole world, not some cosmic fire in the sky!

Just as Jonah was taught by God to recognize in a city of wicked infidels many precious souls worth saving, so also the Almighty offers, through me, the miracle of "saving grace." Sick souls are healed, starved spirits find nourishment, and lost lives are resurrected to fresh beginnings. Those are all valid miracles from God.

My close disciples and I then took a boat across the Sea of Galilee to the other side, intent on starting a long walk to our next destination. But they'd forgotten to bring sufficient food for the trip. Indeed, all they had amongst themselves was just one small loaf of bread.

I saw they were embarrassed at their forgetfulness. It didn't bother me, of course, because I could make that one loaf feed all of us plus thousands more. But I saw in their confusion a chance to teach them a powerful lesson about the situation we'd just experienced with the Pharisees and Sadducees. Indeed, I could see that they were secretly disappointed that I'd not initiated some spectacular lightshow in the sky, nor struck-down my detractors with heavenly lightning!

So, I said to them, quite sternly: "*Beware the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees!*"

This statement got them puzzling and whispering amongst their selves. I knew what they were thinking, so they didn't

need to hide their conversations. But I enjoyed prompting their own discovery of truth.

This is what they were whispering to each other: “Is he mad at us for not bringing enough food? Or, is he telling us that when we do have a chance to purchase food, not to buy bread that’s made by Pharisees or Sadducees? Certainly, we know not to purchase unclean bread made by infidels. But does that somehow also extend to our fellow Jewish brethren?”

So, after letting them muddle-about, to the point that they would never forget this particular discussion, I emphasized the situation even more, feigning to be angry with them: “*Why are you talking about bread?*” I snapped at them. “*Where is your faith?*” Then I continued, more gently: “Do you not recall just recently when we fed five thousand people from a few loafs of bread and fish? Do you not remember that there were BASKETS of leftovers? How many loaves of bread did we start off with?” I demanded.

They meekly replied... “Five loaves, Master.”

“Or, on the other occasion when we fed a hungry audience of four thousand people,” I relentlessly continued, “again taking up many large baskets of scraps afterwards? *How many loaves did we start with on that occasion?*”

They answered: “Seven, Master.”

“Do you not think, then,” I continued, more softly, “that I could not feed our little group with one loaf?”

They had no answer.

“It is *not* bread made by Pharisees and Sadducees of which you must beware,” I explained, “but their ‘*leaven*.’ Do you understand? Do you know what leaven is, what it does?”

“Yes, Master,” one of my disciples replied. “It spreads silently and unseen throughout the flour. Then, when the bread is cooking, it dramatically changes the very nature of the bread from flat and hard to large and fluffy—filling the substance with many small air bubbles.”

“So, then... the ‘leaven’ of the Pharisees and Sadducees is *what?*” I prodded him.

“Their teachings?” another answered.

“Not just their different doctrines,” I answered, “but also—and in particular—their *mindsets*.”

“Ah! You are talking about their *priorities*,” that disciple replied.

“Now you begin to understand,” I nodded approvingly. Smiling, I allowed them to see I was not really mad at them. “They have a rigid ‘doctrinal mindset,’ in which their religious framework becomes *more* important than the *purpose* of the teachings they espouse.”

“Master?” Peter queried, again looking confused.

“They have been seduced by their own presumptions,” I told them, no longer smiling. “They think they’ve solved all of God’s riddles. They think they’re so smart they can stand in the place of God, passing judgment on all those around. They worship their own ‘conservatism’ or ‘liberalism’ *more* than they honor God Himself. They’ve forgotten the purpose of their own religious teachings. They violate the very intent of the words coming out of their own mouths. They do not hesitate to do great damage to others with their words. They refuse to hear the correct points they make in their *own* sermons! Yet they seek and teach ‘truth’ at any cost. It matters not to them that their doctrines or methods might drive people away from God, only that they win an argument. To them, believing the ‘right’ doctrine is more important than bringing people to God. In fact, their hatred of all those who don’t believe exactly the same as them is so great that they would happily murder the ‘disbelievers’—even me! Do you understand what I am saying?”

Another of my disciples ventured a hesitant reply: “Together with the right teachings there must be... the right purpose?”

“Exactly!” I applauded her. “And from where, then, comes the right ‘purpose’?”

They all excitedly began offering answers: “From humility... From bowing down to God... From asking what God wants from us... From loving other people... From wanting to do whatever pleases the Lord of Reality... From...”

“Yes, you are all correct and all *wrong!*” I abruptly cut them off.

They were again struck silent.

“*Purpose*, my dear friends,” I softly replied, waving a hand in the air before “thumping” it down in the middle of my chest, “comes from a transformed heart. Get your *heart* right—and everything else follows!”

Another of my disciples tentatively raised a hand. “Yes?” I smiled, nodding for him to continue.

“But Master, surely one’s doctrine and teachings matter?”

“Of course,” I answered, “but which is *most* important? What is of highest priority—being a ‘conservative’ or being a ‘liberal’ or being beloved by the present religious leaders... *or* moving yourself and others closer to God?”

“Moving closer to God,” they all answered in unison.

“Yes,” I nodded. “Now you understand. When believing the right things on the right issues becomes more important than making our Heavenly Father happy, that’s when even intensely religious people depart from the Kingdom of God. I tell you again: beware of the leaven of *both* the Pharisees *and* the Sadducees.”

The Sower and the Soil

To remain in the Kingdom of God, then, one must actively *root out of one's heart* those things that could easily cause a person to veer off course and inadvertently exit from the Kingdom.

What sort of things? Well, after transcending the “doctrinal mindset” you must be also be acutely aware of “*rocks*” and “*thorns*” scattered throughout your own hearts. What do I mean by “rocks and thorns”? Well, a good explanation and illustration of this critical truth occurred another time when I was preaching by the Sea of Galilee...

I was sitting by the sea, teaching, when so many people came from so many directions that they all could no longer see or hear me. So, I climbed into a fishing boat and sat on its prow as it moved off a short distance from the shore.

The crowds of people spread out along the shoreline, so all easily saw and heard me. I'd done all I could to make sure that my message was accessible to each and every person.

I started telling them stories, one after the other. However, unlike on previous occasions during my earlier ministry—I did *not* explain the stories. Instead, I let my audience muse on them, discussing my provocative questions, and figuring out the meanings on their own.

These stories are called “parables”: illustrating heavenly principles in ways that anyone can easily relate to, understand, and remember. Preaching in this way is far more effective than just talking in vague generalities.

Anyway, a particularly effective parable I used on that occasion for what one must do to remain in the Kingdom of God, was about a farmer sowing his fields for eventual harvest. Since most of my audience were in one way or another involved in farming—and within eyesight of us were many planted fields—this story powerfully grabbed their attention.

Standing up, gesturing with my arms, I loudly projected my voice thusly: “A farmer left his house in town and went to his fields. It was time to sow seeds that would hopefully

produce a rich and bountiful harvest. He carried the precious kernels in a bag slung over his shoulders. Those dry, tiny, seemingly dead little nodules were the source of continued life and prosperity. Upon them depended the survival of him, his family, and his entire village—but *only if they could take root, grow, survive, and bear fruit!*”

My audience was totally silent, captivated by my dramatic presentation of the story.

“So, the Sower began to walk over his fields in a careful grid, tossing out handfuls of the precious seeds onto the ground. Just by chance, some of the seeds fell onto the hard-trodden paths which cut through and across the fields. Other seeds fell on less fertile ground, close to the paths and surrounding hills. In these spots, rocks underlay only a thin coating of soil. Other seeds fell beside patches of weeds and shrubs which previously had ejected their own thorny seeds onto the soil. But most of the Sower’s seeds fell on rich, thick soil that contained few rocks or thorns. What do you think was the result of the farmer’s efforts?”

I let the huge crowd talk loudly amongst themselves before cutting them off with a wave of my hand.

I then answered my own question: “Sadly, many of the precious seeds were *wasted!* Birds ate up the seeds that fell on the hard paths. Where the seeds fell on thin soil they sprouted—indeed faster than at the other sites since they were so close to the surface—but without deep roots they soon dried up in the blazing sun. And those close to patches of weeds had to compete with fast-growing thorns, which quickly chocked off the slower-sprouting crop seeds. Only the seeds that fell on the fertile ground grew up sufficiently to produce a harvest.”

I saw many of the crowd nodding in agreement, from their own experience in working on farms.

“But even then,” I continued, “success varied. In some patches of good ground, when the final harvest came in, the seeds sown there yielded 30 times as many seeds. Other patches gave 60. And still other patches produced 100 times as much seed as was sown.”

I told this story to the gathered crowds. But I did not explain it. I went on directly from there to yet other parables, until finally I was finished and the people departed.

My disciples were perplexed. They said to me: “Master! Those were intriguing stories. But why did you not explain to the people what they meant, as you’ve done in the past? Why do you now speak entirely in parables to the crowds, letting them come to their own conclusions?”

I looked at them sadly. “I wish I could explain everything in full detail to those who come to hear me speak, but that’s no longer possible. Our enemies draw closer, looking for any pretense to destroy us. If I were to clearly spell out everything to the gathered crowds, our time for teaching would prematurely end. So, I speak the truths of God in a way that only those with the *right hearts* will understand. Those who come to me with twisted agendas will hear only excellent advice on proper farming, or how to take care of one’s flock of sheep, or how to be a better carpenter.”

“What then is a ‘right heart’?” one of my disciples asked. “Do *we* have such, Lord?”

“You are learning to have such,” I answered, smiling.

“But surely the character of an individual is fixed?” another disciple queried. “How can we change the way our minds are constructed? Some are smarter than others. Some are born with a lesser reasoning-ability, remaining so their entire lives?”

“Good question,” I answered appreciatively. “God does not expect you to do more than you are capable. Also, you are correct that few rise even to the level of their own potential. However, there *is* a lot each of you can do to modify your own hearts. In order to do such, you must each take a *knife* to your own brains!”

“But surely we would just kill ourselves?” came back the shocked reply.

I laughed, enjoying this lively conversation with my good friends.

“Not if you allow the Lord Almighty to help you,” I replied, now speaking slowly and seriously. “God does not force you to think properly or clearly. If you wish, you can just evaluate

things on the basis of what your untransformed minds 'like' or don't like. You can blindly allow your emotions or societal conditioning to rule your life. Sure, you are creatures of your own limitations. But remember that if you are willing to try to better-understand your own selves, then God will help you transcend the boundaries of your own animal instincts."

"Lord, what must a person do to improve one's own thinking?" they asked me.

"This is not an easy thing to do," I answered. "It is definitely hard for a person to understand his or her own motivations. But an honest person can take a hard look at the *basis* upon which he or she makes decisions. Is it after fully evaluating all the available evidence? Is it based on how it will affect people around oneself? Or is it solely based on how it will affect one's own selfish concerns and interests? If so, then there are obvious changes that a person can make in how he or she handles good information."

"Lord, do you speak again of the state of one's heart?" another of my disciples asked, clearly struggled to understand.

"Of course!" I happily replied to her. "Consider the parable of the *Sower and the Seeds*, which I just now taught to the people. Under what conditions did the seeds *not* produce a bountiful harvest?"

"Well... first of all when the seeds landed on a path where the soil was packed solid," one answered.

"Yes," I nodded. "The packed soil of the path is a person that already has his mind made up on all things, who sees no need for further instruction! That person's heart is self-sufficient. Extraneous, new concepts just lay exposed on its surface. Godly teachings are perceived, but not given any weight. They don't penetrate at all. In fact, they are actively excluded. Consequently, opposing evil teachings have no trouble in swooping down and destroying the precious teachings from the Almighty. God's words are given no chance to even start to flourish. They are snatched away immediately."

"What about the rocky soil?" another asked.

"The rocky soil fared better than the impenetrable heart," I nodded in affirmation. "Here at least the seed had a chance to begin growing. Enough fertile soil was present such that

the seeds could get some nourishment and put out some roots. Indeed, being so close to the surface they *apparently* got a *spurt* of growth. But when the blazing sun fully shown down on them, the good sprouts quickly wilted, dried up, and blew away in the wind. Do you see what sort of heart this represents?”

“Those that only superficially will accept your teachings?” John answered.

“Yes, but even more than that,” I replied. “These are the hearts that *do* accept my teachings—but only for the emotional aspects. They are excited over my soaring themes of transformation, redemption, edification, connection, and transcendence. They delight in the good fellowship, worship, and worthy deeds that we together accomplish. They may even seem to be my most ardent and dedicated followers. But when tough times come, they fall away. Their interest in true godliness is only superficial. Do you know why?”

“Because they are not rooted deeply into your words!” another disciple confidently exclaimed.

“And why is that?” I asked again.

“Well... the ‘soil’ of their hearts is filled with rocks?” the same disciple hesitantly replied.

“And what *are* those ‘rocks’?” I insisted, my tone now grim.

They were silent, thinking, their eyebrows furled.

“Come on, now!” I insisted. “You are close to a real revelation here, a deeper understanding of how your own minds normally function.”

“Well...” one tentatively ventured, frowning, “there are... *hard* places... that... your words do not penetrate?”

“Yes,” I nodded. “That’s obvious, isn’t it? Under the receptive exterior the ‘rocky’ individuals have hidden from outside view, perhaps even from their own conscious awareness, extensive areas in their minds where Godly teachings are *not allowed in*. It’s very similar to that of the totally unreceptive heart, but not as completely impenetrable. So, what then are *these* ‘unreceptive areas’?”

“I know!” another of my disciples eagerly answered, waving a hand in the air in excitement!

“Yes?” I politely acknowledged her.

“It’s where we ‘wall off’ selected beliefs, behaviors, or possessions from transformation!” she excitedly exclaimed. “We like those particular things the way they already are, having no desire or intent to change, no matter what.”

“Well said,” I congratulated her. “That’s exactly correct. You *are* learning. The ‘stony’ heart is the one that will accept those Godly teachings of mine that *it* likes. That heart has not opened itself up to God at all. It has *not* said to God: ‘Take me and use me as You wish!’ It is open only to that which the person finds comforting, enjoyable, and pleasant... all the rest is rejected. As such, it only accepts the easy, fun, and agreeable aspects of my teaching. So, when that heart is tested by trials, persecution, or hard demands, then my words are all, likewise, cast aside. There are no deep roots at all. The many hard mental rocks prevent the Word of God from transforming the soil.”

“So... *we* initially choose to allow the Words of God to take root in our hearts,” a disciple frowned, narrowing his eyes. “But then those spreading, penetrating, softening roots start changing our hearts on their own and...?”

“Yes!” I agreed. “Not only do the righteous roots spread throughout a heart, but they *change the substance* of the heart into its own form. The nutrients from the soil move up the roots to be food for the plants which are growing upward. In essence, the soil—the heart—BECOMES the sprouting, blossoming, fruiting plants growing up out of it.”

“...truly a wondrous transformation!” the disciple that’d been frowning laughed, clapping his hands together.

“But Master,” another queried. “What of the weeds?”

“Ah, yes,” I sighed, “the weeds—useless, ugly, and pervasive. *Their* seeds are crafted into painful, piercing thorns. Weed sprouts grow fast, draining the soil of its nutrients, and erupting from the soil to choke off the farmer’s precious crop sprouts. The weeds prevent the harvest from occurring. In a person’s heart, what would they be?”

“Evil... Satan... Sin... Selfishness...” they guessed.

“No,” I answered. “The Evil One was the *birds*, snatching away the Word. Sin and selfishness were the *hard rocks*. The

thorns—those clinging, piercing, ever-present nuisances—are far more insidious and difficult to detect, let alone remove from one’s heart, because they inflict us all.”

I paused dramatically, letting what I said sink in.

“How then can we remove them from our hearts, Lord?” they asked me.

“We cannot remove all of them,” I replied. “But we *can* prevent them from growing and usurping our hearts. The ‘soil’ of our hearts is *not* passive. Our hearts are the essence of us. Yes, we are born with a certain character. But we have the power from God not to be limited by our birth characteristics. In many ways, we can *improve* our characters. And one of those ways is to *take control* of the everyday matters that try to swamp-out and destroy God’s Words.”

“What are those things, Lord?” they asked, intensively interested. “Just what *are* these thorny weed-seeds?”

“Hear me carefully, my friends,” I answered, speaking slowly and distinctly. “All the daily *responsibilities, concerns, demands, and problems* that we face are one type of ‘weed-seed.’ Until the day we die, we will be faced with those challenges, without end. Another type of thorn inside our minds is *our constant search to be happy*. Although our pleasure-response is indeed a critical part of our Survival Instinct—of equal value to our pain-response—giving it too much importance can subvert that which for the moment seems less pleasurable, such as my teachings. And the *third* type of thorns that can destroy struggling higher-order concepts is the *love of riches*. Again, this derives from your animal compulsion to survive at all costs. Those that have access to wealth can build stronger houses to hide in, hire guards to protect one’s property, and guarantee good food even in times of famine. All together, these weeds produce little long-term value to one’s soul. Yet they quickly sprout from wind-blown thorns lodged in all our hearts. Then the sprouting weeds tangle together, building a thicket where even if Godly concepts were to drop in, they’d be quickly starved, throttled, and killed.”

“Then taking care of daily responsibilities, deriving pleasure from doing good things, and earning money is bad?” Peter asked, perplexed.

“Of course not,” I replied. “To survive in this world, all those things must be given their just due. It’s when our hearts allow them to run rampant, to take control, to grow without boundaries—*that’s* when there’s *no* hope for God’s teachings to flourish. Do you understand?”

They all nodded.

“Lord,” another replied, his eyes glistening with emotion. “These are powerful and amazing concepts! Why do you not explain them to the crowds? Surely, that would transform their thinking, just as it has for us?”

I sighed, shaking my head in the negative: “No, they won’t. Did you not hear what I just told you? *God has allowed people the freedom* to live with the heart that they desire. If they want to make up their minds in advance on all topics, be content with their own little understanding of the world... then I could explain my parables to them from now until the end of time and it would mean *nothing* to them. It would only be an irritating noise, to be brushed away as one would swat a buzzing fly. Similarly, if people decide there are subjects on which they know the full truth, or actions they won’t give up, or other things that they simply won’t alter under any circumstance—then *anything to the contrary is automatically rejected*, without any consideration as to its merits. Sure, they may gladly welcome the parts of my message that they like... but that heart is simply not open to Godly transformation. And finally, though some open and receptive hearts may gladly receive all my words—to give *equal weight* to the cares of life, pursuit of pleasure, and gaining wealth likewise stops my story-explanations from doing any good.”

“So...” Mary mused, “we must each understand and work on the state of our own hearts?”

Matthew quietly mused: “This is *much* harder than just accepting the rules and dictates of the Temple.”

“Yes, it’s just as the Master told us!” another excitedly exclaimed: “We must be willing to ‘take a knife’ to our own brains!”

“And if we make our minds receptive and hospitable to God’s words,” another continued, “then those words themselves will help transform our minds into tangible outcomes that are glorious, productive, and beautiful.”

I smiled, stroking my beard thoughtfully. “Indeed, I chose you, my closest disciples, well. Most humans live in a daze struggling to make it through the present day into the next. You are learning to see beyond your animal instincts to something higher and better. You realize that people don’t have to be just smart animals, when the same effort could elevate them to become the true Children of God! Truthfully, those who are willing to take the *first small steps* in the direction of God will be strengthened. But to those who balk at even making the effort, what little strength they have will be drained away.”

“We are truly blessed to walk with you and know these incredible insights, Lord,” John humbly acknowledged, bowing.

The others followed suit, all bowing their heads to me.

“Thank you for that kind show of respect, my friends,” I acknowledged them. “Truly you *are* blessed to hear, see, and understand the events we together experience. Many prophets, other righteous people of God, and Holy Teachers in the past desired to see this day, but did not. To you it is given to understand the hidden things of God’s Kingdom, the mysteries that to-date have not yet been fully revealed. Few others, even those that throng to hear my lessons, are granted that privilege. They hear but do not understand, see but do not perceive, consider but do not comprehend.”

“Why, Lord, are the people today so unworthy?” one queried, sadly.

“They are no different from the people of any other age, past or future,” I shrugged. “It is the same situation that Elijah the prophet wrote about in the Holy Scriptures many years ago.”

I stood and raised my voice, quoting from the Scriptures: “YOU WILL STRAIN TO HEAR BUT FAIL TO UNDERSTAND. YOU WILL LOOK TO ALL SIDES BUT MISS WHAT YOU SEEK. FOR THIS NATION’S *HEART* HAS GROWN SLUGGISH AND THICK. THEIR EARS ARE FILLED WITH

WAX, SHUTTING OFF THE SOUNDS OF REALITY. THEY'VE DELIBERATELY CLOSED THEIR MINDS, LEAST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART, THEN TURN TO ME THAT I SHOULD HEAL THEM!"

I paused, letting those powerful words echo around us. Then I continued...

"My friends," I said, "Elijah was talking not only of the people in his own time, but of *ours*—and likewise on into the distant future. Again and again, my friends, it's a problem of the *heart!*"

"God desires them that desire God..." a disciple nodded.

"Yes," I agreed. "And those who *don't want* to see, hear, or know God... they are *granted* their wish by that very same God. To them, my teachings are only comical noise spouted by a raving fanatic—a momentary amusement to pass the time, an interesting intellectual puzzle of no real importance, nothing more."

"But still, there is the *good soil!*" another exclaimed. "All is not lost?"

"Indeed," I smiled. "Amongst the many who gathered to hear me today there are a few who *did* understand what I was saying. I presented myself and my words as clearly and powerfully as I could for every single individual to hear who were gathered along the shoreline. Every person had the same opportunity to hear the same words from me, to see the *true* me, and feel the power of God flowing around us. Yet only a handful went away with true insight."

"Then is most of our huge effort wasted?" another disciple asked, seemingly weary of the long campaign.

"Ah... that's not the case at all," I consoled her. "Remember the harvest! In the right soil, God's words, the seeds, *can* multiply dramatically. The fruit, produced in abundance from just one tiny seed, can spread nourishment, lasting pleasure, and health to many. Furthermore, that fruit is—or carries with it—many *additional* seeds that can, in turn, be sown to new fields, resulting in yet more and greater harvests. Do not despair, my dear friends. Though it may seem we make few dedicated converts today, in the end your efforts will reap a

mighty harvest for our Heavenly Father. Indeed, the teachings that now reach only a handful will, one day, spread across the entire world!”

My disciples were greatly encouraged.

“And Master, what then are we to make of the ‘various degrees of harvest’ in your proverb?” another asked, curious. “Are some hearts more capable or fertile than others?”

“Yes,” I replied in the affirmative. “Fertility of soil varies greatly. So also does the capacity of individual hearts to support growth of God’s Words. Different people are blessed by God with different types and levels of talents. Different amounts of enabling resources are available to different people. Yet hearts that will actively open themselves up to new ideas, that will lay all their thoughts and actions bare before the overwhelming Will of God, that will consciously limit the influence of daily cares, riches, and pleasure... *all* of those hearts will produce a good harvest of fruit from the Word. Some harvests will be lesser or greater. But *all* of the resulting many fruits are precious!”

“Lord,” another asked, “what, then, is the ‘fruit’?”

“Tell me, my friends, what is ‘fruit’ in regard to physical harvests?” I answered, further stimulating their thoughts.

They all had different ideas, including: “A thick, protective skin... Delicious, nutritious, tasty insides... Carrying yet more seed... The means to perpetuate the seed of the plant itself... The tasty ‘good stuff’ inside which attracts animals that eat it and then spread the seeds in their dung yet further... If falling on the ground, the energy-packed fruit gets the seeds off to a strong start by its own fertilizing power as it dissolves into the soil... A beautiful and attractive unit that draws many other creatures to the plant... And...”

I cut them off. “Then you understand crop ‘fruit’ very well, do you not?” I asked, smiling. “So, tell me in this: in regards to human hearts having grown seeds of God’s Word in their lives, from which has come yet further ripe fruit—what, then, is the ‘skin’ of the fruit? Remember, as you said, ‘the skin protects as it also simultaneously holds everything together.’”

They answered thusly: “Love... Faith... Devotion... Duty... Honor... Respect?”

“Good ideas,” I answered. “And what of the ‘good stuff’ that’s so delicious and tasty inside, that draws in others that eat it for energy and nourishment, while also furthering the spread of more seeds—or falls upon new hearts where it stimulates and ‘jump-starts’ the growth of the seeds?”

They answered again all together, enthusiastically: “Good deeds... Sacrifice... Fellowship... Benevolence... Helping others... Expressing your own Godly talents... Evangelism... Connection to others?”

“Hmmm,” I answered. “Good ideas! And what of ‘fruit’ being an attractive, appealing, desirable, total package?”

My disciples had a harder time on this, mulling it over, only tentatively replying as I patiently waited for their answers: “...uh... maybe the legacy we leave behind when we die? ...or how about the real evidence of our spirituality that others will believe? ...or perhaps a true follower of God proving his or her Faith? ...or maybe that spark of Godliness that changes vague generalities and abstract concepts into reality? ...or concrete actions that carry with them God’s teachings? ...or the monument of tangible efforts that sum up our lives which we carry with us into the next?”

“That’s enough,” I cut them off. “Clearly, you have much to consider when evaluating your own lives. It’s one thing to be receptive to Godly teachings. It’s something else entirely to have them take root, grow, produce many thriving plants, and of those to harvest a bountiful crop of beautiful fruit... isn’t it?”

They all nodded in agreement.

“Such is the Kingdom of God,” I concluded. “It’s not a terrible, onerous struggle—rather the glorious, exciting venture of a *farmer sowing seeds*: who lovingly offers the precious ‘pearls’ to all the ground, prayerfully preparing and tilling the soil, watering and weeding, then finally reaping a magnificent harvest. What a grand and marvelous adventure God has privileged us to undertake!”

They all burst out in applause, whooping and laughing, clapping each other on their backs.

I was greatly pleased.

The Cloth, the Wineskins, and Fasting

So, to this point in *Lecture #1*, you've seen that in regards to staying in the Kingdom of God, you must prune your HEART.

In particular, you must remove the following conflicting-priorities from your heart:

- 1) a **doctrinal mindset**;
- 2) any **subject or action that's placed off-limit** to the Will of God;
- 3) a **consuming-concern for the problems** and demands of everyday life;
- 4) having the **#1 goal of being happy**; and
- 5) **loving wealth**.

Those are all very powerful detractors that can skew your AIM. They can cause you to miss out on fulfilling your Vision: making *God* happy with you! However, that's not all you must remove from your hearts. There are still *two other lethal killers* that will absolutely KNOCK YOU OUT OF the Kingdom of God if you do not first eliminate them.

Again, I yell because I'm concerned for your soul...

Yes, you may manage to do the following difficult tasks: 1) open yourselves up to God's complete and full Will; 2) *don't* get trapped into putting doctrines over purposes; 3) control the influence of the responsibilities and problems of everyday life; 4) appreciate wealth as only a means to achieve good ends; and 5) aren't obsessed by feeling "happy." BUT YOU ARE *STILL* IN DANGER OF YOUR OWN INTERNAL MIND-SET FORCING YOU TO *EXIT* GOD'S KINGDOM! There are yet *two more things* that lurk in every person's mind which you must recognize, confront, and then control or eject.

I discussed these two last things with my disciples on yet another occasion, when some of *John the Baptist's disciples* came to visit us. Our guests stood in a tight group a few steps away from us, inexplicably defiant and angry. John's disciples had not come to us for enlightenment or fellowship (though they claimed such). It turned out they'd been riled up by the

Pharisees, who hoped that we'd all get into a big, self-destructive brawl.

Here's what John the Baptist's closest disciples said to me: "Master, we observe that you and your disciples do not fast. Instead of often abstaining from food and drink as an essential religious duty—in the manner that we and the Pharisees regularly observe—you and your disciples eat and drink with gusto! Why is this?"

Ah, trying to trip me up again. Satan is indeed devious. He uses anything to set us against ourselves, even food!

I calmly replied to them: "My friends, I know that your Master, John the Baptist, taught you to live a simple and austere life. In addition, I know that most of you came out of religious schools where you learned rigorous traditions as a matter of your daily routine. I respect your devotion and discipline. Indeed, the Pharisees who make such a big deal of fasting do so not only on occasional sacred days, but as often as *twice per week!* Yes, they also recognize your devotion—in fact, encouraging you to confront us on this point. They want you to accuse us of being loose and undisciplined. Is that not so?"

At my direct confrontation of their complicit attack on me, John's disciples seemed confused and a bit defensive, answering: "Well... the Pharisees did support our meeting with you on this topic. But we are not accusing you of anything. We're simply puzzled as to why you would ignore the devotions that other great Teachers hold to be crucial for spiritual advancement?"

"Do you think that I and my disciples never fast?" I smiled, admiring their candor while also challenging their grasp of the situation.

"Well..." they hesitated, looking at each other. "We do not see evidence of such..." they meekly concluded.

"First of all," I continued, forcefully, "I've instructed my disciples that when *they* fast it is *not* to be a public display. Whenever they religiously go without food, they are to wash their faces and walk briskly, not making a big deal of being weak and hungry. I'm not accusing you of doing such, but it's a common practice amongst your 'friends' the Pharisees. They

will actually *sit out on the street corner* for all to see: thin and sallow, by agonized, starving *glares* accusing all who walk past of not doing the same! By their public fasting they accuse everyone else of being weak, arrogant, or ungodly. For many of the Pharisees, regular fasting is thus *not* spiritual exercise, but blatant ‘evidence’ supposedly proving that they are *better* than all those around them!”

Yes, I realized even then that I made too many “exclamatory” statements. But I wasn’t there to give a calm, academic lecture. My speeches were for INSPIRING people!

“Master,” John’s disciples answered, chagrined by the intensity of my answers, “that is not at all why *we* are fasting and...”

“I know,” I cut them off, now consoling them. “I know that you presently fast out of your true, heart-felt *grief*. Your great Teacher, John the Baptist, is languishing in prison. He’s been taken from you by evil people. You deeply feel his pain. By fasting, you share in his suffering. I respect your close connection to your Master.”

“Thank you,” they answered, clearly moved by my acknowledging their pain. “So, you...?”

“But *my* disciples are not yet in your situation,” I kindly but firmly cut them off again. “*Their* Master is yet with them. As you see, I am still here. Consequently, they are now *rejoicing* in my presence. It’s as if they’ve gone to a wedding celebration where the bridegroom prepares to marry his beloved bride. That is not a time for fasting. It is a time for *feasting*. Yes, the time will come when I too will be taken from them, when they will fast from grief and pain, not merely as a religious ritual. But that time is not yet here. Do *you* understand?”

Most of John’s disciples nodded their heads. But a few frowned, obviously not convinced. They held tightly onto their traditions, not just as helpful exercises, but as *required* rites of Godliness. It was their beloved doctrine, which they had trouble seeing as arbitrary.

“Let me explain another way,” I continued. “Let’s suppose that you have a precious garment to wear at formal occasions. It’s been handed down in the family for many years. You take

good care of it, but it's grown old. It's fragile. You only occasionally wear it at high ceremonies. But unfortunately, by accident, you happen to tear a hole in it. What do you do?"

"Uh..." they considered, startled by this seemingly change of topic, "I suppose we'd not want to throw it out, being a family heirloom and all. Perhaps we'd try to sew it up?"

"Would you?" I answered. "But what if the hole was too big to sew up? What would you do then?"

"Well..." one of John's disciples replied slowly. "Maybe I'd try to sew a patch onto the hole."

"Yes!" I laughed, clapping my hands together. "You'd sew a patch on the hole. But what *sort* of cloth would you use for the patch?"

"What sort?" they repeated. "You mean the type of fabric or pattern... similar to the old one, I suppose?"

"And in what *other* ways would the patch be similar?" I replied to them with yet another confusing question. "Would you go to the fabric store to find a nice length of the same type of new cloth?"

"Master!" one of John's disciples objected. "*Not* a new cloth. It'd be far better to find another old garment of lesser value and cut a patch from it."

"Why?" I innocently replied.

"Because the new cloth is not yet shrunk," another answered enthusiastically. "And when it *did* shrink as it was washed sometime in the future, it would tear a hole even larger than the original?"

"Yes!" I agreed with them. "It would! And so would it be for my new disciples. They've not been through years of rigorous religious training at strict schools. They've not taken up the most-demanding rites and traditions of our Jewish Religious Law. And they follow a Master promoting a lifestyle not as extreme as yours. As you see, my disciples here are mostly workers who've left their occupations to directly and immediately support my mission. To demand regular fasting of them at this time would destroy their faith, push them away, and keep them from being part of the Kingdom of God. Do you see this? Do you want this to happen? Must everyone else do *exactly the same as you* or automatically be wrong? And if that's

so, how are you any different than the Pharisees? If that's the case, then shouldn't you disavow your allegiance to John the Baptist—formally declaring yourselves to be faithful, honorary Pharisees?"

"We are *John's* disciples!" they indignantly exclaimed. "We will never go back to the status quo. We have learned too much to go backward!"

"And rightly so," I smiled, nodding my appreciation of their devotion. "But remember that not everyone is at your level of understanding, talent, and capability. To require of others what you require of yourself is to put yourself in the place of God. It is a colossal arrogance to insist that *you* know all the truth, while everyone else is stupid, ignorant, or evil. *God does not require all of us to believe and do exactly the same.* If He wanted that, he would have made us all identical puppets. But He's not done so! Do you know why?"

This time, John's outspoken, "in-your-face" disciples were struck silent.

So, I turned to my own disciples, who'd been listening intently: "And what do you, my own closest followers, my dear disciples, have to say to this question? Why do you think I've never tried to impose on you 'the' Answers... but instead encouraged *you* to come to your own good conclusions?"

"Well..." they tentatively replied, "perhaps you have done that out of love for us... You respect our thinking... You know that the best learning comes from people arriving at their own conclusions?"

"Yes, to all of that," I agreed, folding my hands together thoughtfully, the tips of my fingers just touching my beard. "But those are neither my main reason nor our Heavenly Father's for not making us identically thinking puppets only moved by external strings."

"Master!" one of John's disciples exclaimed. "I think I know the answer?"

"Yes?" I replied, raising an eyebrow at the eager fellow.

"To make us all puppets would rob us of our free will!" he exclaimed, running his fingers through his own wild, long hair in excitement.

“You’re getting closer, but still not quite there,” I softly replied, laying a hand on his shoulder to calm him. “Can anyone else take us all the way to discover my and God’s main motivation for *not* making us into identical puppets?”

“Ah...” one of my female disciples sighed suddenly, smiling widely. “I see!”

“Do you?” I encouraged her. “Then please explain.”

“You don’t care so much about people all doing exactly what you want...” she said slowly and carefully, pausing dramatically. “What you actually want from us... is our *hearts*.”

“Do I?” I whispered, so soft the others had to strain to hear me. “And what would be *evidence* of my truly owning your hearts?”

The fervently speaking disciple of John the Baptist suddenly relaxed, slipping my grip on his shoulder to sit down on a rock, looking up at me with a newfound appreciation.

“The *evidence* would be if we—who have the full range of options before us—each individually *CHOSE* to follow you,” he abruptly barked, seeing his own world-paradigm suddenly shift. “God wants those that want *Him!* If we were all puppets, our obedience would mean nothing... Yes, nothing at all,” he trailed off, staring into the distance.

“But we *must* do the Will of God!” another of John’s disciples objected, a tall thin man, moving to stand right in front of me, hands placed angrily on his hips. Truthfully, he was so skinny he looked like a living skeleton, the poor fellow. “Our Fasting is part of God’s Will! It isn’t for us to accept or reject, merely to obey!”

“Tell me this, then,” I shot back at him. “Is your devotion to fasting something you’ve received from God or man?”

“It is from God!” he confidently asserted.

“Yes, there is *some* fasting mandated in our Jewish Law,” I agreed. “But where does it say in Holy Scripture that you, or your new-found friends the Pharisees, must fast as often as twice per week? Is that a command from God... or a *choice* that some Godly individuals make for themselves? Furthermore, is fasting something to be done as a public work, or in private between only you and God?”

John's defiant disciple was struck silent, his mouth still hanging open, a puzzled expression on his face.

"Let me put it yet another way," I smiled kindly, showing him that I was not angry with him. "Why do you think God made man? Why do you think humanity was formed? Was God's purpose in exercising His incredible Creativity and Power... that individual humans should regularly deny themselves food? Is God's greatest wish for his children that they starve themselves skinny in His Name, to be as you are? Is that the point of getting to know the Lord God Almighty? Is that what pleases our Heavenly Father most, to see us weak and staggering-about from hunger?"

"But..." the man protested, clearly confused. "John tells us that self-denial prepares us for Godliness. Conquering our fleshy desires opens our minds to the Spirit of God. By our voluntary physical suffering we show our love to the Lord, our willingness to put Him first, above all, even food. Fasting is our path to the Heavenly Father!"

"And, yes, for many people you are absolutely correct," I agreed. "But is it necessary for *all* people? Can a person still be Godly without walking the strict path of self-denial which you've chosen for yourself?"

"I... I thought it *was* God's w-will... that everybody should d-do as we do..." the man stammered, uncertain.

"Do you not agree that I am from God?" I demanded. "And yet my enemies accuse me of doing exactly that which you denounce in others. They say that 'he arrives eating and drinking.' They accuse me and my disciples of dishonoring God by enjoying the good pleasures that *God* has given to us. Could that not also be an *equally valid* path to God? Did He not give us daily, wonderful, small miracles intending us to savor and appreciate them? Is that not *also* following God—glorying in His exhilarating Joy—a path to Godliness as valid as doing painful chores?"

Still the man did not look convinced.

"My friend," I consoled him. "John the Baptist and I together are leading you into something brand-new. Yes, it is a different way of thinking. John brought you out of the lusts of the flesh through denial of fleshy desires. He's done well!

Your devotion is commendable, as I've said before. I know that your extreme fasting is done not as an affectation or affront to others, as do the Pharisees, but as a personally held solemn duty to God... and it is remarkable what you achieve! However, you need not stay at that level anymore. If you wish, it is equally valid for you to move onward, to yet higher levels. Do *not* think that you must cling to the old ways no matter what. Consider the *PURPOSE* of what you're doing. And if something else—even if radically different—might further your goals even *better* than what you do now, then seriously consider *improving* on your present life and devotion to God.”

They were silent, not sure what to say in response.

“Master?” Peter interjected.

“Yes, my friend?” I answered.

“I understand where our colleagues are coming from,” he grunted, his deep voice gravelly and intense. “It was also difficult for me, at first, to comprehend where you were leading us. You are very different from what we used to think of as a religious leader. I had trouble accepting what you were teaching. It was so new! I was used to believing that there was a certain way of doing things that was ‘proper.’ It was hard to accept that things *could* be done differently... and even better. The old traditions, rituals, and doctrines are well known, accepted by all. They are comfortable and reassuring. But you often make us *uncomfortable*. Hah!”

“Indeed,” I agreed, sitting down on a nearby boulder to rest. “John the Baptist and I *are* different from the traditionally driven religious instructors. Yet we're not saying you must abdicate your roots. You can *grow above them* to a higher place. Your old way of thinking can be a *stepping stone*.”

I abruptly stood up again, thrusting my hands to the sky.

“DON'T BE STUCK IN THE PAST!” I yelled at both John and my disciples. “Instead, look to the future. Likewise, don't be limited by your upbringing. Instead, *transcend* your traditions to rise to more-magnificent peaks of spirituality!”

“But how can we do this, Lord?” the doubter amongst John's disciples queried, now seemingly eager to learn more.

“Tell me this,” I answered, slowly settling back onto my boulder. “Do you know *why* new wine is not put into old wineskins?” I challenged them all with this apparent change of topic. “Here’s a hint... remember what we talked about considering the torn, old garment, then think *oppositely*.”

“Master!” another of John’s disciples exclaimed. “The old wineskin—a hide of a goat or another animal—grows brittle and rigid with age. It would *burst* when the new wine fermented. That old wineskin would split and be ruined, spilling the new wine onto the ground, wasting it!”

“Of course,” I answered. “This is well known to all of us. And yet how does God’s Will for us compare to this situation? Would God do such to *us*? And, even more concerning, are *you* trying to do such to God?”

“Lord... we do not understand,” John’s disciples answered, now looking greatly confused.

“Yes, your Master, John the Baptist, has brought you to a *new* way of thinking!” I exclaimed, again dramatically jumping up and spreading my arms wide. “He’s *opened* your eyes, which previously were blind. He’s *unstopped* your ears, that before were deaf. He’s *livened* your tongues, that once were dumb. *Now*... what are you going to do with those revelations from God?”

“Uh, ‘do’ with them, Lord?” they replied.

“Are you going to stick them into your same old hearts?” I demanded, now choosing to again shout loudly at them. “ARE YOU JUST GOING TO LAYER THEM ON TOP OF YOUR OLD DOCTRINES? Will you make them merely an additional devotion amongst many others? Are they just a new coat of paint on top of many old coats of paint? Or do they deserve a *radical transformation* of your hearts... making *yourselves* into something new and different?”

“Master!” Peter exclaimed. “I want to be totally new! I don’t want to just repent, but to be *born again*. I want to be changed into a *new creature*. Kill this old man of sin and turn me into an innocent, newborn infant. Take me and make me over, completely changed!”

Ah, my dear disciple Peter. He was a man of great passions and eagerness. Sometimes his enthusiasm was misguided. However, at the moment he was “spot-on.”

I smiled. He got it. And I could see that John the Baptist’s disciples “got it” also.

“Yes, my friends,” I spoke calmly and quietly, lowering my voice, predicting the future. “John indeed baptized for repentance. That is a necessary and vital step in transformation. We must all acknowledge evil in our lives in order to rid ourselves of it. I, however—as Peter so aptly described—baptize for the *forgiveness of sins!* This is God responding to your sincere faith, cleaning and invigorating your souls. By this means, those who’ve acknowledged their guilt can be granted by God a new beginning. In essence, they can *start their lives over* from the beginning. They *wash away* the dirty old man of sin, to build in its place a whole new person.”

At that, John’s disciples spontaneously began hugging and shaking hands with my own disciples. It was a marvelous unification, not at all the mutually destructive fight that the Pharisees hoped to see happen. Indeed, when John the Baptist was later, sadly, executed in prison... those good-hearted learners who’d questioned our apparent lack of religious fastidiousness would join my full-fledged followers. My mission would pick up speed as we all joined together, in continued, jubilant celebration.

So then, what *are* the last two insidious killers that even devoutly religious people must rigidly control or remove from their hearts, so as not to drift out of the Kingdom of God?

The final insidious killers of true Godly Righteousness are:

- 1) **defining true religion only in the simplest way:** merely as keeping rituals, rites, and traditions; and
- 2) **looking for only an old ‘patch’ rather than complete transformation**—wanting just a superficial spiritual “upgrade” rather than buying-into a whole, new transformation!

Everyone is subject to those two detractors. Why? Because they are the *easy way out*. If true religion is just doing

the right things, then let's all make a required "check-list" and check them off. If following God is just adding a superficial small change on top of the way we already are, then sign up. You get to stay exactly the same as you are now, with just a few patches sewn on here and there. No big disruption or rips needed!

Is it any wonder that so many people love their religious rituals and traditions? And, conversely, is it any wonder that so few people have any interest in hearing, seeing, or understanding my teachings?

Yes, it's fine to patch ourselves up when we're "torn." Indeed, we should try to continually improve everything that we are and do. But true Godliness is not just tweaking our characters or actions. God does not want for us to just "get our act together" or just "get a bit better." Rather, He demands a *complete renovation* of our entire life. This is not just throwing out a few bad things from our hearts while adding in a few other good things. This is *opening up* our whole hearts, minds, and souls to *radical* change. To do this we must reevaluate everything... and be willing to make ourselves over into something brand-new. Yes, I'm talking about **TRANSFORMING** your hearts.

And it all starts with "preparing" our hearts by removing or severely controlling all SEVEN insidious killers:

- 1) a **doctrinal mindset**;
- 2) any subject or action that's put **off-limits to the Will of God**;
- 3) a **consuming concern for the problems** and demands of everyday life;
- 4) having the **#1 goal of being happy**;
- 5) **loving wealth**;
- 6) **defining religion as rituals and traditions**; and
- 7) just **looking for old patches** rather than a whole new thing.

So, in true religion you must be open to what is called "innovation": in which you *throw away everything* that came before and *replace* it with something entirely different and

better. In your modern business terms, this is not just “process improvement” but also “process replacement.” Only those willing to give over to God their *entire hearts*—the center and essence of who they truly are—will remain in His Kingdom.

Section 6:

***SUMMATION* to Lecture #1**

We've covered a lot of subjects. Some are quite difficult. Before we go onward to many more profound topics, let's *summarize*:

I am Jesus of Nazareth. Many of you, my followers in this present era, have the wrong idea about me. You think I came to Earth in order to lead you to a place of comfort and safety: THE KINGDOM OF GOD. But though I will happily lead you there, it is neither a destination nor an institution. It is not a "place." Rather it is a *state of being*—one that transforms your entire heart!

Even more disturbing to some, whereas you might reasonably be seeking the Kingdom in order to be safe, comfortable, and free from pain... the Kingdom provides the opposite. It is not a place to retire to blissful relaxation. Rather, it is a *rallying call* to struggle harder, face deadly dangers, and have great adventures. You should seek the *Kingdom of God* only if you are *not* afraid of discomfort, hard work, new challenges, and disquieting introspection. To gain the Kingdom of God you must be willing to give up everything else!

Why then should you pursue the Kingdom of God if it requires such dedication and sacrifice? Well, people will gladly give up everything they possess if by doing so, they will become the richest people in the world. Indeed, citizens of the Kingdom gain things that are worth far more than all the physical wealth of the entire world. Also, the Kingdom is the most beautiful thing you can imagine. It changes you from being merely another smart animal into actually becoming God's Temple. When you are in the Kingdom, God is in you. Your whole life is enhanced and endowed with indestructible and incalculable value.

All the riches in the world will not stop your body from ageing and dying. All the money in the world cannot dissuade

God from condemning you to an eternal hell. Only a *transformed heart* will save you from being rejected by the Almighty. A transformed heart is one that is fully open to the reality and power of God. Compartmentalization of your heart will doom you. In the blink of an eye, your physical body will shatter and be ground into dust. Then, where will you discover your soul residing? Trust in the physical world and you will surely die. Trust completely in God and even though your body is buried, its bones crumbling, the true “you” lives on!

Is God merely there to do things for you? Is church a “great insurance policy” just in case that after death there really is a Heaven and a Hell? God will give you nothing unless you first give Him *everything*. Holding anything back will cause God to turn away from you. God does not need you. It is *you* who needs God. Change your heart and everything else follows.

You must love God enough to *prove* it by giving Him everything. The “price” for entering into God’s Kingdom is to give Him *all* that you possess, including yourself. Anything less falls short. There are many in the world today that outwardly appear to be God’s greatest ambassadors, while inwardly treat God with contempt. But God is not fooled. Those who actually enter the Kingdom are often the humblest, poorest, and most insignificant—because God looks not at our outward trappings, but at our heart.

Belief alone is not enough. Belief is only an initial basis for advancing further. *Actions* alone are also insufficient. Despite man’s best efforts he is still doomed, falling far short. Belief alone is dead. Works alone are empty. “Doing the right things for the right reasons” is the essence of what you rightly designate as “saving faith.” This is much more than just saying the right words alone, or doing the right things. Only when a person *transforms* his or her heart into something better, where belief is *automatically* manifested in actions, is there a chance for ultimate salvation.

Having entered successfully into the Kingdom of God, however, does not guarantee you a permanent place therein. You yourself can choose to leave, enticed by wordily concerns

or pleasures. Or, you may tire and fail to continue the difficult journey. Having once said the right words and begun the right actions you have no “guaranteed ticket” to Heaven. If you allow pesky birds, rocks, and thorns to gain the upper hand, your heart will fester and shrink. That’s because the Kingdom of God is not a destination that once having reached, you are forever safe. Rather, it is an *enabling reality* you can use to continue advancing forward, step-by-step... or, failing that, to fall back and be left behind.

The Kingdom of God is *not* a place to dominate, control, or dictate how OTHERS should behave. Stop obsessing on judging others! It is a place to explore your OWN God-given potential. It is a place to build marvelous, beautiful, new structures. How? Well, I’m happy to continue telling you the details. But unfortunately, we’ve run out of time in Lecture #1. Sorry, I get really enthusiastic when I give lectures. Like any good preacher I tend to talk too much and too loudly! We’ll continue in LECTURE #2: “*The Heart’s Permeability.*”

See you then!



Conclusion by the Author:

Dear reader,

I hope you enjoyed reading *The Jesus Lectures-1: The Kingdom of God*. Once again, I remind you it is a fictional account of what I feel Jesus would say to his present-day followers, should He return for a short inspection tour. Consequently, feel free to take from it what's useful to you while discarding the rest.

But this book is not just my random thoughts about Jesus. The accounts and dialogues derive from in-depth study of authoritative Bible commentaries, different Bible translations, and history. Hopefully this format provides a feeling of reality: where you sit listening to Jesus give an in-person lecture. I hope you found my fictional depiction exceptional, interesting, and thought-provoking. For me, writing this series of ten books on Jesus was a true religious adventure, which *continues* challenging my own worldviews!

Finally, ***I need to ask you for a big favor***. If you enjoyed this book and would like to help others do so as well, **a review written by you** on the Amazon page for this book would be greatly appreciated. It's hard to get reviews nowadays and your support will be very important both for me and other readers. If you'd like to do this, I sincerely thank you in advance for your time and effort. It can be as long or short as you wish.

Thanks again for reading my unique books and going on this wild, exhilarating ride with me!

Sincerely,

Dan Lyle

REFERENCE MATERIALS:

Some of the concepts and events contained in this book are based on commentary and historical information contained in the following reference materials:

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Daniel Lyle holds a Ph.D. in Biology, is a lifelong amateur herpetologist, taught medical immunology and microbiology at a University, completed a career in cell biology medical & regulatory research, and has a strong interest in all aspects of cosmology and physics. From a small kid he was fascinated with dinosaurs. As such, he has always lived with exotic creatures, including harmless snakes, all housed in his own homemade beautiful habitats. Some of his tame pet pythons and anacondas ranged up to twelve feet in length. He is the author of over thirty books. They deal with diverse topics such as quality management, religion, science fiction, and graphics art. His writings go beyond the ordinary, exposing deeper aspects of life. His books are meant to be fun, conversational, practical, and helpful. His various works are available at LylePublishing.com, Creative-Theology.com. and Amazon.com.
