

Chapter One

Himself

All over the world today we hear evidences of an absence of values, or what you might call a “values vacuum,” the lack of an inner compass that can guide people into a quality of life that is worth living. Family values seem to be collapsing as divorce rates reach epidemic proportions and millions of children lack the security and nurture children should find in the stable marriages of their parents.

According to the dictionary, a value is “That quality of any certain thing by which it is determined by us to be more or less important, useful, profitable, and therefore desirable.” Those who believe in God find in God the moral absolutes that define for them what is right and what is wrong. Do those who believe in God also find in God the absolute values that define for them a value system that guides them into the quality of life that God intended when He created them and His Son recreated them?

Jesus answered that question when He said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have life more abundantly (John 10:10). Jesus did not only come into this world to die for our sins. He came to show us how to live. One way He did that was to teach and exemplify an absolute set of values. As we follow the most important life ever lived through the four Gospels, we see Jesus continuously identify, exemplify, and declare absolute values. Once

MINI BIBLE COLLEGE

Study Booklet #16

The Values of Christ

(Part 1)

we observe those absolute values of Christ, we must confess those values.

In the New Testament, we are not only instructed to confess our sins. We are instructed to confess Jesus Christ (Matthew. 10:32; Romans. 10:9). The word “confess” is made up of two Greek words in the original language — “homo,” which means “sameness,” and “legeo,” which means, “to speak.” When we confess our sins, we are to speak sameness, or say the same things about our sins that Jesus says about our sins. When we confess Christ, we are to say the same thing He says, or agree with Him when He exemplifies, teaches, or declares a value. We are to live out the same values He lived.

To begin our confession of Christ’s values, a good place to start is with the value He placed on Himself. Who and what did Jesus Christ say He was, and how do we confess that value of Christ? We find the answer to the first question in the third chapter of the Gospel of John: “No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man... For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (13, 16)

Jesus called Himself the Son of God, but He was not the Son of God as we are the sons of God. We receive the authority to call ourselves sons of God once we place our faith in Jesus Christ (1:12), but Jesus is the “only begotten” Son of God. He is the Son of God in a way that nobody has ever been or ever will be the Son of God. Before His death He prayed, “Father, glorify Me together with

Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.” (17:5) Jesus is more than the historical Jesus who was born in a manger and died on a cross at thirty-three years of age. He was with God before the world ever existed.

But Jesus did more than call Himself the only begotten Son of God. The most dogmatic statement Jesus made on earth was His statement to the Rabbi Nicodemus. He claimed that He had to be “lifted up” (3:14), which means that He had to be crucified on a cross, “... just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.” Jesus told Nicodemus that He had to be lifted up because He was God’s only Son, God’s only Solution to the sin problem of this world, and God’s only Savior.

When Jesus Christ declared Himself to be the Savior of the world, He added the dogmatic claim that only those who believed in Him would be saved. And this was true not only for those who physically saw Him lifted up, but also for the whole world: “For God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.” (17)

In Numbers 21:6–9, we read that the people of Israel were dying from snakebites as a result of the way God felt about their continuous gripping. But God instructed Moses to raise up a bronze serpent that would bring healing to anyone who looked upon it in faith. Jesus claimed, that in the same way, He needed to be “lifted up... so that whoever believes in Him, as He is lifted up on His cross, will have eternal life.” (John 3:14, 15)

Chapter Two

Love

When Jesus made these claims, He was telling Nicodemus how a person could be born again. Nicodemus had asked Jesus how a person could be born again. Jesus gave two answers to this question. First, He told Nicodemus that God's part in the regeneration of a soul is incomprehensible, like the wind: "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (8) That is the way Jesus described God's part in the miracle of the new birth experience.

In a way, Jesus was saying we will never understand God's part in the new birth. But He also said that man plays a role in his new birth. It is his responsibility to believe: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (16) The experience of being born is apparently set in motion through our faith (our part) and the creative power of God (His part).

Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. He came to redeem the world from sin and to create life in those who believe the most dogmatic claims He made about Who He was and why He came into this world. Do you believe what He claimed about Himself? Do you confess the values He placed upon Himself? He is waiting for your response to His claims, for He longs to forgive your sins and begin the miracle of the new birth in your life.

When Jesus knew it was time for Him to be tried by the Roman civil authorities and the Jewish religious authorities and crucified, He spent His last night with twelve men He had commissioned to be His apostles, or "Sent Ones." John prefaced his account of what Jesus shared with these men that night by writing: "Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He now showed them the full extent of His love." (John 13:1) Being fully aware that His time in the world was at an end, Jesus met with these men to show them the full extent of His love for them."

The disciples knew Jesus loved them even before those final moments. Jesus had been loving these men for three years. John never seemed to get over the wonder that Jesus loved him. Throughout his Gospel, he refers to himself as, "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Sixty years later, he dedicated the last book of the New Testament to Jesus with these words, "... To Him Who loved us."

Anyone who had the blessed experience of looking into the face of Jesus knew that they were loved. How then did those last moments in the upper room differ from any other time they had spent with Him? In that room, Jesus did what a slave or a house servant would do. He took a basin of water and a towel and He washed their

feet! Such an act of humility baffled the disciples. The Gospel of Luke tells us that on the way to that upper room retreat, they were arguing over who was going to be the greatest in the kingdom Jesus was always talking about. How they must have been impacted by the way Jesus began His last hours with them (John 13:1-17).

When Jesus finished washing their feet, He asked them, “Do you know what I have done to you?” It would seem that the answer was obvious. He had washed their feet. But, the answer Jesus wanted to His question can be found in the opening verse of John’s record of this event: “Having loved His own who were in this world, He now showed them the full extent of His love.” When Jesus washed their feet He loved them.

Jesus had loved these men and, in their flawed ways they had returned His love. He had established a covenant with them: “Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.” (Matthew 4:19) They had been in covenant with Jesus for three years. During that time, they discovered that love was the driving force of that covenant. Jesus had loved them in ways they had never been loved, and He had made them more than they knew and more that they ever dreamed they could be. However, I believe the thought had never occurred to them that they should establish a covenant of love with each other.

At the heart of this last time with them, Jesus challenged them to establish a new covenant when He gave them a new commandment: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one

another.” (34) When Jesus gave this new commandment, He identified the quality of the love with which they were to love one another. They were to love one another even as, or in the same way, that He had loved them. They were to wash each others feet even as He had washed their feet.

I have often imagined the apostles looking at one another and realizing what it would mean for them to obey this New Commandment. One of the apostles was a publican who collected taxes for the Romans from his fellow Jews. Another was a zealot who was a guerrilla fighter who believed in continuing resistance to the Roman conquest of Palestine. I imagine their eyes meeting across the table and then thinking, “Me - love him?” Of course the answer was “Yes, you love him. You wash his feet. Because, when the world hears that a zealot is washing the feet of a publican, they will know that you are My disciples.”

The most effective way to teach love to our children is to love them, and let them see that their mother and father love each other. Jesus was telling the apostles that He had commissioned and trained them for three years to proclaim a Gospel of love to the whole world. When He gave them His New Commandment, in so many words, He was telling them that the best way to teach love to this whole world was to look across the table at each other. Then, make the commitment that you are going to love one another even as I have loved you.

Chapter Three

His Teaching

This New Commandment created a new community that will later be called the church. By loving one another as Christ loved them, Jesus told them they would be obviously set apart in the world: “By this, all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have (this kind of) love for one another” (35). That is exactly what happened. After Christ ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit came upon the believers and the church was born.

Personal Application

Do you confess this value of Christ? Is love the force that drives your fellowship with other believers? Do you confess this value of Christ by loving the people your life intersects every day? When they look into your face, do they know they are being loved with the love of Christ? Jesus taught that we should love when we look up, when we look in, and when we look around (Matthew 22:36–40). Jesus taught that we should love God completely, love ourselves correctly, and love people unconditionally. Do you confess the value Jesus placed upon love?

As you follow Jesus through the Gospels, have you observed the value He placed upon the Word of God? Have you observed how much He had to say about His own teaching? Jesus placed great value upon the Scriptures. One of His favorite questions for the religious leaders, like the scribes and Pharisees was, “Have you never read the Scriptures?” (Matthew 21:42) When Jesus spoke of His own teaching, He was telling us what His teaching was, what His teaching could do, and how we should therefore approach His teaching. For example, He taught: “No one patches up an old coat with a piece of new cloth, because such a patch tears off from the coat, making an even bigger hole. Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.” (Matthew 9:16–17)

Jesus used this parable to help His listeners understand the value of His teaching. The word “parable” in the original language of the New Testament is composed of two words — “para,” which means “alongside of,” and “ballo,” which means, “to throw.” A parable (paraballo) is an illustration that is thrown alongside a truth Jesus is teaching.

In this passage, we find two parables with similar meanings. The first parable is an illustration that pertains to the mending of

garments. It says that a seamstress would never place a new patch on an old garment because two disasters would result: the new patch would pull against the old material of the garment and produce an even larger hole, and the new patch would be too obvious against the old material.

Through this parable, Jesus was teaching that His words were not intended to be like a new patch on the old garment of the religious authorities. His teachings were completely new. This follows the words He spoke in the Sermon on the Mount, where six times He began a lesson by saying, “You have heard . . . but I say to you.” Jesus’ teachings were different from those the people had been receiving from the scribes and Pharisees. And because they were new teachings, they could not be placed like a patch over the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees. The disparity between Jesus’ words and the words of the scribes and Pharisees would have been too obvious for them to blend together.

The main teaching of this parable was that His teaching was incompatible with the teaching of the religious leaders. He was putting the religious authorities on notice and He was preparing His disciples for a whole new approach to the Word of God.

Jesus followed that illustration with a second parable about wine and wineskins. During those days, the people kept wine in goatskins and let them ferment over several months. As the wine fermented, it expanded and put pressure against the wineskin. Because of this expansion process, they would never put new wine

(grape juice) in an old brittle wineskin, because the expanding pressure of the fermenting wine would cause the hardened and inflexible wineskin to burst. Instead, they would place new wine in a soft new wineskin so that the fermenting wine and the new wineskin could expand together.

Jesus was again showing the distinction between His teachings and the teachings of the religious leaders. His teachings were like new (unfermented) wine, and the teaching of the religious leaders was like an old wineskin. If He were to do His teaching in the context of the established religion, the pressure of Jesus’ “new-wine” teachings would explode the established religion. This was another way of saying that His teaching was incompatible with the teaching and the entire religious culture of the scribes and Pharisees.

Jesus was also placing a value upon what His teaching would do to those who approach His teaching correctly. He was warning His disciples that His teaching would put pressure on them. If they were old brittle wine skins, if they were not willing to yield to the changes the application of His teaching were designed to make in their lives, His teaching would cause their minds to explode, so to speak, just like an old wineskin.

Jesus’ teachings were revolutionary and came with a warning — we must be willing to let His teachings change our lives. His metaphor of the new wineskins relates to the miracle of new birth. When we are born again, we will be new wine skins that can live out the new wine of the teaching of Jesus.

Do you confess (say the same thing about) the teachings of Jesus that He said about His teachings? Are you willing to come to His teaching as a new wine skin and yield to the truth He wants to become incarnate in your life?

Chapter Four

Judgment

What is your concept of the judgment? We hear jokes about the judgment and many people do not really take the judgment very seriously. According to the Scriptures, judgment is no joke. Some believers give the impression that the judgment will be a final exam in theology. Consider the value Jesus placed upon judgment and consider His perspective on what the judgment will be like: “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

“Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to

drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’” (Matthew 25:31–40)

In this description of the judgment, we do not hear about theology but about compassion for hurting people. We hear the challenge to value those Christ valued during His life — the sick, the lonely, the hungry, the thirsty, the poor who do not have enough clothing, and those who are in prison - the hurting people of the world with whom Jesus spent so much of His time when He was here on earth.

Jesus refers to these people as His brothers. Who are these poor people? On one occasion, Jesus made the declaration that those who do the will of God are his mother, father, brother, and sister (Matthew 12:50). For the first three hundred years of church history, it was illegal to be a follower of Christ. The people of God have always been a suffering people. Could these people be the persecuted, suffering believers who have suffered in these ways

because they did the will of God? Whoever they are, we will meet them in the judgment, according to Jesus.

Do not misunderstand. We know that salvation is not based on social action or good deeds. The entire thrust of the letters of Paul, to the Romans and to the Galatians, emphasize the Gospel truth that it is our faith in what Christ did for us on His cross that is the basis of our salvation. All these Scriptures agree, however, that our social action and good works validate the faith that saves us.

This passage in Matthew 25 concerns the judgment, in the sense of evaluation, of the lives of believers. The three parables in this chapter teach that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ will be a judgment upon every empty vessel, every empty hand, and every empty heart. All those professing believers with empty vessels, hands, and hearts that invalidate their profession of faith will hear the Lord say: “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels... To the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me” (41, 45).

So the question must be placed before us: What value do we place on the hurting people of this world? Do we feed them, clothe them, give them something to drink, visit them, take them in, show them hospitality, and help to make them well? Is our heart filled with compassion for those in need of God’s love? The hurting people of this world are very much a part of Christ’s value system, for He came to “preach the gospel to the poor . . . to proclaim release

to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.” (Luke 4:18–19)

“Where is He?”

The New Testament begins with wise men asking the question, “Where is He?” If you want to discover where He is today, look where the love of the risen Christ is being channeled to the hurting people of this world.

Do you confess the value Jesus Christ placed on the hurting people of this world? Are you willing to ask the risen, living Christ to strategically place you between all the love He is, and all the pain they feel? Are you willing to be a conduit of all that He wants to be to the suffering people in this world? If you pray a prayer like this prayer I am proposing, you will discover where the risen Christ is today - and where you will want to spend the rest of your life.

Chapter Five

Freedom

During His time on earth, Jesus often enraged the religious authorities because His values were completely in conflict with their values. He taught contrary to the way they taught, He answered

questions in a way that confounded them, and He kept company with those on the lower scales of society. All that He did seemed to go against the Law they sought to uphold, and they often looked for ways to prove Him wrong. On one occasion, Jesus chose to heal a man on the Sabbath and then told the man to pick up his mat and carry it down the street right in front of the Temple (John 5:2–17). Since carrying a burden was considered working, when Jesus told him to carry his mat, this was against the words of the Law, which forbade men to work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:9–11; Jeremiah 17:21,22).

This healing was obviously a strategic way for Jesus to begin an extended hostile dialog He obviously wanted to have with the Pharisees and scribes. This dialog is recorded in four chapters of the Gospel of John (5-8). In this hostile dialog, Jesus makes many, many claims about Who He is and why He is in this world. Most of these Jews who heard Him despised His claims and desired to see Him arrested or stoned to death, but, at the conclusion of the dialog, some of them did believe. To these who believed He said, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (John 8:31–32) In this statement, Jesus asserted another great claim about the value of His teaching — that those who continue in His word will find spiritual freedom.

Oftentimes people think that belief is all that matters to our faith, and that once we believe we can continue about our lives as

though nothing happened. But that is not what Jesus said to those who came to believe in the New Testament. When someone believed, Jesus brought into focus the importance of His teachings. He said that if they believed, they would continue in His word, become His true disciples, and then the truth they discover in His teaching would make them free.

A disciple is similar to an apprentice. An apprentice spends two weeks in a classroom and then two weeks in a shipyard. As he learns something, he practices what he is learning, and then he goes back to the classroom and learns some more. The definition of a disciple is: A learner who is doing what he is learning and learning what he is doing. The twelve apostles are great models of what it meant to be the disciples of Jesus. They were discipled (apprenticed) by Jesus for three years. He taught them, He showed them, and He coached them.

When Jesus promised that we will “know the truth, and the truth will make us free” (32), the word for “know” refers to knowing by relationship. If we continue in His Word and put it into practice, we will come into relationship with the One Who is the truth, and this relationship With Him will set us free.

According to Jesus, believing in Him and becoming one of His disciples comes in three dimensions. First, we believe that Jesus is God’s only Son, God’s only Solution to our sin problem, and God’s only Savior. Then we follow Him by continuing in His Word. As we follow Him, as His authentic disciples, we come to know

Him, not only His Word, but the risen Christ, Himself. When that happens, He makes us free. And when He makes us free, we are free, indeed!

Do you know the risen, living Christ in this way? Do you experience an intimate knowledge of Him through a relationship, and has this relationship set you free from the bondage to sin you once knew? If you want to confess this value of Jesus Christ, believe in Him, continue in His Word, become his authentic disciple, move beyond a sacred page, into a relationship with the living Word, and be made free, indeed!

Chapter Six

Forgiveness

Jesus identified a value, when a Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus to dine in his home (Luke 7:36–50). It was customary at that time for guests to be given a basin of water to wash their feet, oil to anoint their foreheads, and a kiss of hospitality. But when Jesus visited Simon’s home, He received none of these things. A woman in that city, who was known as a sinner, apparently heard that Jesus was having lunch with Simon. We can assume that this woman had already met Jesus and the salvation that assured her that her sins were forgiven. When she realized that Simon had not even

extended common hospitality to Jesus, she began to wet Jesus’ feet with her tears and dry them with her hair. Then she anointed His feet with precious, perfumed oil.

While Simon was observing this, he made a value judgment against Jesus, thinking in his heart, “If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner.” (39) Knowing Simon’s thoughts, Jesus told him a parable: “A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?” (41–42) Simon answered, “The one who had been forgiven the greater debt.” Jesus told him, “You have answered correctly.”

This parable of Jesus directly applied to what was happening between Jesus, this woman, and Simon. Jesus identified the value we place on the forgiveness of our sins when He made the application to His parable by saying: “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.” (44–47)

Chapter Seven

Salvation

Simon did not see his sin as a large debt that had been forgiven. He was like the man who had been forgiven fifty denarii. But the woman at Jesus' feet saw her forgiven sin as an enormous debt that had been canceled, and she fell at Jesus feet with love and adoration. Jesus identifies a value when He concludes this teaching with: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven because she loved much."

This does not mean that we are forgiven because we love much. Jesus told the woman she was saved because of her faith: "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (50) The woman's love for Jesus was a confirmation of her faith in her forgiveness and salvation, whereas Simon's attitude toward this sinful woman was a demonstration of his lack of faith. Jesus affirmed this woman when He accepted her loving worship and He forgave her sins because she highly valued her forgiveness.

Do you confess the value Jesus placed upon forgiveness? If you identify with this woman because you know you are a sinner and your guilt makes your sin seem like an enormous debt that you would love to have canceled, realize that Jesus came to die on a cross that your sin debt might be canceled. If your sins have been forgiven, by faith, value your forgiveness so highly that you will have nothing but compassion for people like this woman who loved much because her sins were forgiven. Never forget that Jesus taught us to pray every day, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

Jesus' public ministry began in a synagogue in Galilee, in His hometown of Nazareth, where He read a scroll of Isaiah before the people: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18–19)

After giving the sermon that began His public ministry, Jesus began to preach his simple message, which scholars call His "Nazareth Manifesto," meaning, His vision statement of His mission in this world. Jesus' Manifesto was to bring salvation to the spiritually and literally blind, bound, and broken people that intersected His life, expressing His compassion for them, and bringing all these dimensions of salvation into their lives.

But there was another group of people who intersected His life on a daily basis. This group was known as the Pharisees. The Pharisees were a religious order of devout Jews who were dedicated to the preservation of orthodox doctrines of Judaism. In some ways, they were very devout people. They were the fundamentalists of the Jewish religion.

The Pharisees did not view themselves as spiritually blind or needy, and they always seemed to be on the periphery of Jesus'

ministry, pointing their fingers and accusing Him of violating the Law of Moses. Jesus was often angry with the Pharisees for their hardened hearts and their sense of spiritual superiority. But He spent much time reaching out to them because He wanted them to know the spirit of the law they valued so very much.

Jesus addressed the lost people He valued and targeted in His ministry, and the Pharisees at the same time, when He taught His great Parable of the Lost Things (Luke 15). After preaching a dynamic sermon about the cost of being one of His disciples, sinners surrounded Jesus, desiring to be near to Him and to hear more of His teachings. The Pharisees and scribes withdrew from Jesus and formed an outer circle, grumbling about Jesus' association with that group of sinners.

The Pharisees did not consider themselves lost, and they had no compassion whatsoever on those who were. With these two circles of people surrounding Him, Jesus taught His parable. He actually addressed this parable to that outer circle, explaining to the Pharisees what was happening in that inner circle of publicans and sinners Who were experiencing salvation. He was actually inviting the Pharisees to come into the inner circle and participate with Him in His mission to seek and save the lost. His challenge to that outer circle was: "There is rejoicing in heaven when such lost people are found, so why are you not rejoicing?"

Essentially, Jesus was saying to that outer circle, "When you look at these people, you see publicans and sinners. Let Me tell you

what God sees. God sees lost sheep, and lost sons and daughters. The heart of His parable about these lost people is the story about a father who had two sons.

In the second half of the parable, we see the older son react to the return of his brother: "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.'" (25–32)

In many ways, the older brother was more lost than the prodigal son because his values were so far removed from his father's values. The older brother is a picture of the Pharisees, who stood on the periphery of the miracle of these lost ones being saved, and would not come in to that inner circle and rejoice over the

repentance of the sinners. Like the older brother, they were angry and would not come in and join in the celebration of the great miracle that these who were dead were finding life, and these who were lost were being found.

The father rejoiced at the return of his lost son, but the older brother was angry that his father would welcome the rebellious son back into his home. In the same way that the father came out from the celebration and asked the elder brother to come in and enjoy the celebration, Jesus was inviting the Pharisees to come into that inner circle and rejoice over the repentance of the sinners. Jesus was inviting the Pharisees to participate in His ministry with Him — to reach out to the spiritually poor He described in His Manifesto and highly valued in His three years of public ministry.

Do you confess the value Jesus placed on the lost people of this world? How do you feel when you encounter the sinners of this world? Has your church culture insulated you from the hard reality of what the day-to-day life of a sinner is really like? Are you in touch with the love and compassion the Christ Who lives in you has for the lost? If so, you might be in danger of becoming like the Pharisees, who could not comprehend loving such people.

We are the only vehicles the living Christ has through which He can recover lost people in this world and reclaim them for His kingdom. In the imagery of His Parable of the Lost Things, confess the value He placed on the lost things. Come into that inner circle and participate with Him in His mission of giving sight to the

spiritually blind, freedom to the bound, and healing to the broken and bruised lost people of this world.

Chapter Eight

The Final Authority

The creeds ask us, “What is the final authority for faith and practice?” What is the authority upon which we base our faith and our lives? What do we believe, and, in light of what we believe, how do we live? In the final analysis, our answer to that question is either God or man — we either base our lives on the revelation of God or the reason of man.

Jesus placed great value on the Scriptures. The first three words of Jesus in the first three Gospels are: “It is written.” Jesus often prefaced His answers to the questions of the Pharisees by asking, “Have you never read the Scriptures?” Pharisees memorized the first five books of the Bible. These Pharisees were scholars of the Scriptures. They were experts in the Word of God, and Jesus even acknowledged that point by saying, “You search the Scriptures.” (John 5:39) But He went on to say that their searching the Scriptures should have led them to the living, breathing Messiah standing before them:

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me, and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life” (39–40).

Though the Pharisees were Bible experts, they were obviously not basing their faith and practice on the authority of the Word of God. We find this to be true when Jesus asks them, “Have you never read? Have you not read the Scriptures?” If the Scriptures had been the final authority of the Pharisees, they would not have questioned Jesus in the way that they did. There were many practices of the Pharisees that clearly demonstrated the fact that they missed the true spirit of the Law of God.

For example, Jesus was walking through some grain fields with His disciples. His disciples were hungry and they were eating some of the wheat grains as they walked along with Jesus. It was the Sabbath and the Pharisees asked Jesus why His disciples were breaking the law? This is one of those times when Jesus responded, “Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone?” (3–4) Jesus cited the example of David going to the temple when he was hungry to ask for the showbread, which, according to the Law, was only lawful for priests to eat (1 Sam. 21:1–6). The purpose of that showbread was similar to the part of the Lord’s Prayer that reads, “Give us this day our daily

bread.” (Matthew 6:11) The showbread was a liturgical symbol that represented the promise that God will always meet our needs.

On another occasion, the Pharisees were discussing marriage with Jesus, hoping to trap Him into a contradiction with the law of Moses. They knew that He taught the indissolubility and permanence of marriage. They confronted Jesus with the argument that Moses had permitted a man to give his wife a certificate of divorce. If Jesus contradicted Moses, the Pharisees could discredit Him, but Jesus responded again, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? ... Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.” (4–5, 8)

Jesus consistently took them back to the Scriptures to show that Moses’ allowance of divorce was given only because men’s hearts were hardened toward their wives. The certificate of divorce entitled a woman to a settlement and some rights. Moses issued his decree of divorce because men had been deserting their wives without providing for them in any way. That is what Moses and Jesus meant by the hardness of men’s hearts.

When Jesus declared that He was going to change a jot or title of the law but fulfill the law of God and of Moses, He meant that the Word of God was the basis for everything He taught. Jesus demonstrated the fact that the Scriptures were His final authority for

faith and practice, and this question Jesus liked to ask the Pharisees confronted them with the fact that Scripture was not their final authority for their actions. Their practices, their values, and their teachings showed that their traditions were the final authority for their faith and practice. If they had believed and understood the Scriptures, they would not have challenged the teachings and actions of Jesus so forcefully.

Do you say the same thing Jesus said about the Scriptures? Do you show by your values, your words and your life that the Word of God is your final authority for faith and practice? We live in cultures today that have no moral compass, no moral absolutes with which to face our moral and ethical questions. Today, decisions are being made that have very serious moral and ethical consequences by people who have no absolute, authoritative standard to guide those decisions. There has never been a time when it was more important to confess the value Jesus placed on the Word of God. There is a great need to challenge those who make these choices today with the question of Jesus: “Have you never read the Scriptures?”

Chapter Nine

Obedience

Adversity is inevitable in this life. We cannot avoid it. It is part of our daily lives because we live in a fallen world. But though we cannot control whether we face adversity or not, we can control how we respond to adversity. The way we respond is determined by our belief system, just as Jesus taught in His conclusion to His Sermon on the Mount: “Everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who build his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell — and great was its fall.” (Matthew 7:24–27)

Here, Jesus profiles two men — one who built his house on the rock and one who built his house on the sand. Both men faced the same storm, where the rain and floods and wind beat down, but only the house built on the rock stood firm. We learn from this story that all men face adversity — all men experience storms — no matter what sort of houses they build. The question is, will the house they build enable them to survive their storms? The primary difference between these two men is how and where they built their house.

Jesus interprets this metaphor for us. Jesus said the wise man was the one who heard Jesus' teachings and acted on them (24), whereas the foolish man was the one who heard the same teachings and chose to do nothing about applying the teachings of Jesus to his life (26). Hearing the words of Jesus did not make the house strong because both men heard them. It was the life application of the words of Jesus that made the difference. The rock on which the wise man built his house (life) was not hearing, understanding, memorizing, quoting, or even teaching the words of Jesus to others. Wisdom is applied knowledge. This wise man understands that and so he applies the words of Jesus to his life. When the storms come, as they do come to all of us, his belief system is the application of what he heard Jesus teach. That is what makes it possible for him to weather his storms.

Soon after Jesus finished the Sermon on the Mount, He crossed the Sea of Galilee with His apostles. In the midst of that crossing they faced a great storm. The apostles were filled with panic, but they found Jesus sleeping: "And they came to Him and woke Him, saying, 'Save us, Lord; we are perishing!'" He said to them, 'Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?' In Mark's version of this storm story, Jesus asks, "Why are you so frightened? Do you not trust Me even yet?" Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and the great storm became a great calm." (Matthew 8:25–27; Mark 4:40)

In this story, we have a great storm, a great calm, and between these two extremes, we hear a great question from Jesus: "Where is your faith?" One translation puts Mark's version of the question of Jesus, "How is it that you have no faith?" In this storm story, the apostles were the foolish man who built his house on the sand. When the storm came to batter his home, it collapsed. When the storm came to batter their boat, their faith collapsed. They were foolish because they had heard the words of Jesus but had not put them into practice. They did not relate what they believed — that Jesus was Who He claimed to be and would never allow that boat to sink — with what they actually did. They panicked! They were faced with adversity and their belief system was not the solid rock foundation of the wise man but the sandy foundation of the foolish man in the metaphor of Jesus.

Jesus never promised that following Him would free us from adversity. Actually, He said it would often bring us greater adversity: "In the world you will have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) But Jesus did promise that those who heard His words and applied them in a great storm would see their great storm become a great calm. Jesus also promised that they would find their houses strong enough to withstand the storms of life. But the condition upon which that promise is based is that we need to let His words penetrate our lives and change the way we live. We must grow beyond simply hearing and understanding what Jesus taught, to making His teachings a vital part of our lives.

Chapter Ten

Hurting People

Jesus placed great value on people — especially those who were hurting and needed both physical and spiritual healing. We read of numerous instances where Jesus was moved with compassion to heal people that society had discarded — when He touched the eyes of two blind men who were calling out for healing, though the crowd told them to be quiet (Matthew 20:29–34), when He stretched out His hand to cleanse the leper who approached Him, though lepers were considered outcasts and unclean (Mark 1:40–42), when He restored the withered hand of a man in a temple on the Sabbath, though the Pharisees conspired against Him for doing so (Mark 3:1–6). These instances speak of how Jesus was moved with compassion for hurting people and was grieved at the hardness of the hearts of most men.

Jesus not only had compassion for individuals who intersected His pathway, but also entire multitudes of people who followed Him: “Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.”

“Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the

workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.” (Matthew 9:35–38)

The Greek words in this text suggest that Jesus’ whole body shook with sobs when He looked upon the multitudes, so great was His compassion for them. But He was not only moved with compassion for these hurting people, he was also formulating a specific strategy for helping them in their need — a strategy that involved His disciples.

Every time Jesus saw the pain of the multitudes, He intensified His training of disciples. He told the apostles in the passage above, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.” At the conclusion of the fourth chapter of Matthew, we read that great multitudes were coming to Him from several countries. When a very large crowd had gathered, He invited several disciples to a mountaintop and held a retreat at which He recruited the twelve apostles. Every time He saw those multitudes, He intensified His training of those twelve men.

In Matthew 14 and 15, we find the accounts of Jesus feeding crowds of five thousand and four thousand. We read that “He felt compassion for them and healed their sick” (14:14) and that “He felt compassion for the people, because they (had) remained with (Him) for three days and (had) nothing to eat.” (15:32) On both of these occasions, Jesus instructed the disciples to feed the people with a few

fish and loaves of bread He multiplied until they fed thousands of hungry people.

These passages give us not only accounts of two of the great miracles of Jesus, but also His missionary vision. Jesus strategically placed His disciples between Himself and the multitudes and passed His provision to the multitudes through their hands. And that is exactly the way Christ wants to meet the needs of all the hurting people of this world — He wants to pass Himself, the Bread of Life, to the hurting people of the world through the hands of His church.

Are you like one of the hurting people in these crowds of thousands, earnestly wishing you could come close enough to Jesus to have Him pass the “Bread” that He is to you? Let it touch your heart to know that you are the purpose for which He came and for which He lives in and through His church today. He wants to touch the hearts of people just like you.

In return, are you willing to confess the value Jesus placed upon other hurting people in this world? Unlike the religious authorities, who could not comprehend feelings of love and compassion for those in need, Jesus was motivated to meet people precisely where they needed Him. And He challenges us, His disciples, to say the same thing He says about the value of feeding hungry and hurting people the Bread of Life. The next time your life intersects with a hungry, hurting person, remember the value Jesus placed upon them and ask the risen, living Christ to pass the love, the light, and the life that He is, to them, through you.

Chapter Eleven

“I Am He”

The Gospel of John is a biography of Christ that emphasizes what He had to say about Himself and His and His mission in this world. In this Gospel, we can consider these mission statements of Jesus and then answer a question Jesus asked His apostles: “Who do you say that I am?” Once we do that, if we say the same thing about Jesus that He said about Himself, we are truly confessing Jesus Christ.

We have already learned that in the third chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus called Himself the God’s only Son, God’s only Solution to the problem of sin, and God’s only Savior for the world in general, and you and me in particular. If we want Him to be our Savior, we must confess those values Jesus placed upon Himself.

In the next chapter of John’s Gospel, we read the record of Christ talking with a woman at Sychar’s well in Schechem, in the heart of Samaria. When she questioned Him, a Jewish man, for speaking to her, a Samaritan woman, He responded by saying, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.” (4:10)

The woman asks Jesus if He is greater than their father Jacob, who gave them the well, and He told her: “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will

give him shall never thirst.” (13–14) Guessing that His power to give such water made Him greater than a mere man, and given the fact that He rightly spoke of her having no husband and having had in fact five husbands, she called Him a prophet (19).

Jesus continued to intrigue her with His answers to her questions until she finally mentioned the Messiah: “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.” (25) Jesus answered her, “I who speak to you am He.” (26)

Later, both the woman and some Samaritan men the woman knew professed Jesus to be the Christ: “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world.” (42) They confessed (said the same thing about), the value Jesus claimed for Himself when He spoke with the Samaritan woman, confessing Him to be the Messiah, the Christ, the (only) Savior of the world.

What did it mean to that woman when she realized she was speaking to the Messiah? Our question is answered when we read that she left her water pot — the reason she had come to the well in the first place — and went into the city to tell the men about Him. In that culture, it was extraordinary that a woman would speak to men about anything. Even she marveled that Jesus would speak to her, a woman of Samaria. Could it be that she knew these men because she had a “professional” relationship with them? Jesus tells us that He

did not come into this world for saints, but for sinners (Matthew 9:13).

The response of the woman to her interview with Jesus challenges us to think about our own response to the claims of Jesus in the Gospel of John. Jesus told the woman, that if she had any idea of Who it was that was asking her for a drink of water, she would ask Him for a drink of living water. By application, this should challenge us every time we pray. When we pray, we are speaking to the almighty God Himself. If we believe that we are speaking to Almighty God, for what should we ask Him?

Jesus continues to tell us Who He is and why He came into this world throughout the Gospel of John. He even claims that He is equal with God when He claims that He can do anything God can do: “The Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.” (5:19) Such “things” include raising the dead and giving them life, which is something only God can do.

If a person makes claims of equality with God, the people around him will naturally ask, “Can you do what God can do?” Jesus answered, “Yes” to this question, and He proved His claim. Jesus did raise the dead and therefore proved His equality with God and His claim that He could do the things that only God could do. According to these religious leaders, Jesus did claim to be equal with God (John 5:18).

When this dialog that John begins to record in the fifth chapter of his Gospel, reaches its high point, toward the end of the eighth chapter of John's Gospel, John tells us the contention between Jesus and the Religious Authorities became openly hostile. They actually picked up stones to stone Jesus when He spoke of Abraham as if He knew Abraham. This moved the religious leaders to ask Jesus, "You are not yet fifty years old and you speak as if you knew Abraham?" Jesus responded, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am." (John 8:58)

There was no doubt in the minds of these religious leaders about who and what Jesus claimed to be. The religious leaders of our time seriously question these claims of Jesus. Someone has said, "I believe that He is, while they are not even sure that He was. And while they are not even sure that He did, I know that He still does." Listen to a few of these claims of Jesus, read the Gospel of John, and then decide for yourself what you believe about these claims of Jesus in the Gospel of John: In 10:30, He claimed, "I and the Father are one." In chapter 14, He responded to Philip's request to see the Father by saying, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ... Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me." (9, 11) When He prays the great prayer that John records in the seventeenth chapter of his Gospel, Jesus says: "And now, Oh Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world

was." Throughout the Gospels, and especially John's Gospel, we find Jesus claiming His deity and placing Himself on the same level with the Father.

This man only lived to be thirty-three years of age. He made such an impact on this world, that for two millennia, human history has been divided into two periods: before he lived, and after he lived.

C. S. Lewis, a devout English author who ministered so well to skeptics, and was a great defender of faith, told us essentially, that when we consider these claims of Jesus, we are faced with only three choices: we must either agree with Jesus and call Jesus who and what He claimed to be, or we must call Him a liar and a lunatic. When you have carefully considered all these claims of Jesus, it is not intellectually honest to say that Jesus was not who He claimed to be, but He was a great man and a great teacher.

Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, equal with the Father, and the only One through Whom we can receive salvation and eternal life. If you do not confess the value Jesus placed upon Himself, you must decide that He was a fraud and the worst impostor this world has ever known. Or, you can be kind and say that He was a lunatic. But who do you say that He is? Do you agree that He was who He said He was? Will you confess the value Jesus Christ placed upon Himself and call Him your Lord today?

Chapter Twelve

Fellowship with the Father

Jesus was in constant communion with God the Father. He often rose early and spent time in solitude praying to the Father. He often spoke of doing only what the Father told Him to do. His communion with the Father was continuous and intimate. The most intense point of His suffering on the cross was when this communion with His Father was broken because He literally became sin for us and His Father apparently could not fellowship with Him (Mark 15:34; II Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 53:5,6).

In Christ's final prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, we read that the purpose of His coming to earth and dying for our sins in the first place was so that we, too, could have fellowship with the Father: "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." (John 17:3)

To identify the value of this fellowship with the Father, at one point in His ministry, Jesus told a parable: "A man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.' Another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me

excused.' Another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.'

"And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' And the slave said, 'Master, what you commanded has been done, and there is still room.' And the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.'" (Luke 14:16–24)

In those days, and in that culture, eating symbolized fellowship. There was no greater fellowship than the fellowship that was experienced when you were invited to break bread in the home of a friend, relative, or someone who invited you to their table. In the beautiful metaphor in the last book of the Bible, Jesus tells us He is standing at the door of our lives, patiently knocking, because He wants us to open the door, and invite Him to dine with Him (Revelation 3:20).

This parable represents the value Jesus placed upon fellowship with God. It tells the story of the master of a household — God — who desires to open wide the doors of his home for a banquet. His invitations are all rejected by those He has invited to his dinner party. Their excuses are that they have bought some property and they must go see it. (It seems odd that they would buy

property they have not seen.) This probably means that they want to go see this property now that they own it. The essence of this excuse could be that the things of this world are more important to me than fellowship with God.

Another excuse is that they have purchased five yoke (pairs) of oxen and they must prove them. Five teams of oxen would represent farming on a large scale. Since oxen symbolized work, this excuse seems to be that I cannot come because of my work.

A third excuse is that I have recently been married and I cannot come. The Phillips translation then adds, “I have recently got married and I am sure you will understand I cannot come.” (Luke 14:20) In response to having all his dinner invitations rejected, the master of this house is angry and he tells his servant to go out into the city and invite all those who are sick and maimed to join him in the feast — people who would have never been able to repay the favor and would who would otherwise never have been invited to such an event.

For God to issue this invitation to His banqueting table, He needed to send His only begotten Son into the world to die for our sins. The Tent of Worship and the Temple of Solomon represented the inspired instructions God gave Moses showing how sinful people could approach a Holy God. The presence of God dwelt in an inner compartment and the structure of that worship liturgy was really all about approaching the presence of God. There was a thick veil that blocked entrance to this Holy Place where God dwelt. Sinners did not

even approach that Holy Place. Once a year, with all the people gathered around the worship tent, the high priest entered the presence of God for the people of God.

The Temple of Solomon was built on this same pattern of approach to God. In that Temple, the veil was like a large theater curtain. When Jesus died on the cross, that curtain tore from top to bottom, symbolizing the great miracle that the people of God no longer have to approach God the way God mandated in Old Testament times. You would think there would be a stampede of people into the presence of God when that Good News was made known. But, the parable of Jesus shows us that such is not the case.

These excuses are a satirical way of stating an obvious lack of priority focus on the part of God’s people. When these people say they cannot come, their excuses do not really mean that they cannot come. Their weak and poor excuses mean that they choose not to come because they value the things of this world, their work, and their human relationships more than they value fellowship with God.

Do you appreciate the incredible value of fellowship with God? Do you appreciate what it cost God to open the way to fellowship with Himself? Do you appreciate what it cost Jesus Christ to be able to say to the whole world, “I am the way ... and no man can come to the Father but by Me.” Will you confess (say the same thing) with Jesus about the value of fellowship with God?

What we really believe, we do. All the rest is only religious talk. Based upon how you spend your time, your money, and your

affection, do you confess the value Jesus identified when He taught this profound parable?

Chapter Thirteen

The Man at the Pool

We have already learned much about the value Jesus placed on the hurting and sick people of this world, and how He came to heal their sicknesses and bring them spiritual restoration. I have already made reference to the strategic healing described in the fifth chapter of the Gospel of John, where Jesus healed a man to facilitate a dialog with the religious leaders. If we take a closer look at this healing, we will identify another value of Christ that shows up when the love of Christ is restoring the health of one of those hurting people Jesus valued so much. Here is John's description of that healing: "After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, waiting for the moving of the waters; for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.

"A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, "Do you wish to get well?" The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk." Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk." (John 5:1-9)

The original language refers to this multitude of people lying beside the pool as being "without power." One translation describes them as "A great multitude of weak people." They waited beside the pool each day because believed in what was probably a superstition. When the waters of this rule pool rippled, as they sometimes did, they believed this meant that an angel had entered the pool, and the first sick person to enter the pool would be healed.

But one man lying by the pool had been there for thirty-eight years. Out of that great multitude of weak people, Jesus focused His full attention on this one man and asks him, "Do you want to be made well?" The setting of this miracle raises some questions. Out of this great multitude of weak people, why did Jesus choose to heal only this one man? Why did Jesus not heal all those people sitting beside this pool? And why did Jesus ask a man who had been sitting beside this pool for thirty-eight years if he wanted to be made well?

Experienced health professionals will tell you that this question is not as out of place as it may sound. Some people are

hypochondriacs and they do not really want to be made well. Observe that the question was not, “Do you want to be well?” The question was, “Do you want to be made well? There is more to healing than the desire to be well. We must recognize the stark reality that only the power of Christ can do for us what only the power of Christ can do for us.

The man answered that he had lost all hope of being made well: “Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me.” (7)

This one man had lost all hope in the power of the pool to heal him. He had realized that he was never on his own, going to reach the pool before another man, and that the pool would therefore never be able to heal him. Having given up on the pool, he was looking elsewhere for his healing. He may very well have been praying to God to heal him directly, without and beyond the powerless superstition of the pool of Bethesda. And that is where Jesus found him — waiting for a miracle, which he found in Jesus.

Many people look outside the box of God’s power for healing. They have many “Pools of Bethesda” that cannot give them the holistic healing they need and are seeking. They turn to materialism or self-gratification. They look to a variety of “healers,” that come in all shapes and sizes, but they do not look to God. Like this man at the pool, it is only when we look beyond our “Pools of Bethesda” and place our faith in the power of Christ alone that we

can begin to be healed from the inside out in the way that only Christ can heal us.

The application for this story is twofold. First, we must ask ourselves if we want to be made well in the first place, and then whether we believe Christ alone is able to make us well. Second, we must ask ourselves if we value all the other hurting and powerless people in this world, like Jesus did.

A few verses before this passage, we find Jesus challenging His disciples to put into action their love for hurting people like the Samaritan woman who was ready for the living water: “Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest.” (4:35) People all over the world are ready to receive the healing of salvation — they are like ripe fields, ready for harvest. Jesus challenges us to work in those fields, bringing His salvation and spiritual healing to people like the woman at the well and the man beside the pool. Do you confess the value Jesus placed upon the hurting people who are looking beyond their wells and their pools for the healing that only Christ can bring into their lives.

Chapter Fourteen

Understanding the Scriptures

We have already learned that Jesus highly valued the Scriptures. When He referred to the Scriptures, He was referring to the Old Testament, since the New Testament had not yet been written. His first words were, “It is written,” and His favorite question was, “Have you never read what is written in the Scriptures?”

Be sure to make the observation as you read the Gospels, that Jesus intensely valued understanding the Scriptures. In his Sermon on the Mount, He valued the Old Testament Scriptures when He taught that He was not changing one “dotted I” or “crossed T” of the Old Testament, but He was fulfilling the spirit and the meaning of the Scripture. The burden of His heart when He spoke these words was that those who joined Him on that mountaintop would understand the Scriptures (Matthew 5:17-20).

When Jesus was in a hostile dialog with the religious leaders, as John records that dialog, one of the first issues raised by Jesus was the understanding of the Scriptures (John 5:39,40). Jesus commended the Pharisees for being Bible experts. He essentially said to them, “You search and examine and dissect the Scriptures, but you do not understand the Scriptures. All the Scriptures testify of Me, and you will not come to Me that you might have the eternal life.”

Jesus was telling these Pharisees (and you and me), that the Scripture is not a textbook on origins, or a history of civilization. The Scripture is a textbook on salvation and the Scriptures present the historical context in which that salvation and that Savior came into this world. We learn from this encounter that Jesus said these Bible scholars would never understand the Scriptures unless or until they understood that the Scriptures were all about Him. According to Jesus, the Scriptures are the holy words of God concerning the history of redemption and the Redeemer through whom that redemption came. The Old Testament Scriptures testify to Christ and how He came to save men from sin and reconcile them to God.

Oswald Chambers, another devout English author, called verse 39 of the fifth chapter of the Gospel of John the key verse of the Bible because it opens our understanding of the entire Bible. This truth Jesus shared with the religious leaders shows the same burden He expressed in the Sermon on the Mount - that people would understand the Scriptures.

The last words of Jesus also spoke to the value He placed upon Scripture. After His resurrection, and before His ascension, He told the apostles and those gathered with Him:

“And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. ... These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then He opened their

minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.’” (Luke 24:25-27; 44–47)

Jesus began His ministry expressing His burden that the Scriptures should be understood, and He ended His ministry expressing that same burden. His teachings and dialogs with those who opposed Him and those who were His most dedicated followers, showed His passion to lead people into the understanding of the Scriptures. He began His ministry proclaiming, “It is written,” and asking people, “Have you ever read what is written in the Scriptures?” He ended His ministry challenging the apostles and His disciples to understand the key that can open their understanding of the Scriptures: That everything written in the Law of God by Moses, in the Psalms and the prophets is all about Him.

Does it not verify the value Jesus placed upon the Scriptures to know that, from beginning to end, His life and ministry thrust was about the value of the Scriptures being understood and applied in the lives of men?

Of course, the challenge for us becomes the question: do we confess the value Jesus placed upon the Scriptures — both the Old and New Testaments — in our own lives? Do we believe they testify to the redemption of all men through the Son of God, Jesus Christ? Do we believe they answer the questions we have about living life

and living it well? And are we able to respond to all the storms and circumstances of our lives in the spirit of first words of Christ: “It is written?”

Chapter Fifteen

Jesus Loves Me

Have you ever wondered what it would have been like to look into the face of Jesus Christ and have a conversation with Him? That would be a life-changing experience for many reasons, but perhaps the most dynamic of those reasons is the love that you would have seen in His face. Those who did walk and talk with Jesus were convinced of His love for them, and their assurance of this love is demonstrated throughout the four Gospels.

In the eleventh chapter of John, we see an encounter between Jesus, and two sisters named Mary and Martha, that radiates with the love Jesus had for them in their brother, Lazarus. Lazarus was sick, and the two women frantically sent word to Jesus: “Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.” (3) the word for “sick” they used in their message to Jesus indicated that their brother was dying.

Lazarus is described as one whom Jesus loved, and we are told that Jesus stayed where He was because he loved Lazarus and his sisters. We can imagine how well these three people knew that

Jesus loved them. Later, after Lazarus had died and Jesus came to his tomb, we read that “Jesus wept”. (35) The original language implies that Jesus’ body shook with sobs because of His grief, and those who saw Him weeping said, “See how He loved him!” (36) It was obvious not only to Mary and Martha that Jesus loved Lazarus, but also to those Jews who had come to mourn with Mary and Martha.

In the tenth chapter of the Gospel of Mark, we read about a young man we call “the rich young ruler.” This man approached Jesus to find out what he needed to do to have eternal life. Mark’s Gospel reads: “Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him.” (21) The original language implies that this was an intense look, like a steady gaze that communicated a steadfast love for the young man. This rich young ruler did not do what Jesus told him to do if he wanted to find eternal life. Some think this young man was the author of the Gospel of Mark, because Mark is the only Gospel writer who records this intriguing detail about the steady gaze of love from Jesus before this young man walked away from his opportunity to have eternal life. One thing we can say for certain about this young man is that he knew he was loved by Jesus when Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him.

Jesus loved all those who intersected with Him during His life, even the publicans and sinners. We know this from the way He chose to spend His time, dining at their tables and walking with them in the cities. He desired to spend time with them and communicate

the eternal life that was available not only to the spiritually privileged, but also to sinners like them. Those who were on the receiving end of His love responded with gratitude and an overwhelming awe, like that woman who fell at His feet and anointed them with precious oil and her own tears (Luke 7:36–38).

Jesus’ disciples also felt His love. The Gospel of John bears witness to the love of Christ. John called himself “the disciple whom Jesus loved” on numerous occasions in that Gospel (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). John was acutely aware of the fact that Jesus loved him. Sixty years after he walked with Jesus as one of the apostles, John dedicated the final book of the Bible, the Revelation, to Jesus Christ with these words: “To Him who loved us and released us from our sins by His blood — and has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father — to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever.” (1:5–6) Jesus had said to John’s partners that if they would follow Him, He would make them fishers of men. Sixty years later John says, “He made us a kingdom of priests.” But, primarily, John remembers that, “He loved us!”

Jesus loved all those who intersected His three years of public ministry — the sinners and the publicans, the rich and poor, His friends, His apostles and disciples — and all of them knew they were loved. Are you aware of the glorious reality that He has that same quality of love for you? Years ago a famous theologian was asked to state the most profound truth he had ever heard. After some deep thought, he answered, “Jesus loves me; this I know. For the Bible

tells me so.” Do you confess the value Jesus placed upon love? Do the people who intersect your life know that they are loved with a love that is coming through you, but not from you?

My life was changed forever when I began to ask the risen, living Christ to strategically place me between all the love that He is, and all the pain and hurt of the hurting people who cross my path on any given day. I recommend that you asked the loving Christ to do the same for you. When you do, you will discover where He is, and where you want to spend the rest of your life.

Chapter Sixteen

Lost Sheep

According to the four Gospels, Jesus identified a value when He agreed with Isaiah that we are like lost sheep and that God is like a great and loving Shepherd Who loves to seek out and recover His lost sheep: “What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for have found my sheep which was lost!’ I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one

sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” (Luke 15: 4–7)

Jesus came into the world to save lost people (Luke 19:10). He came to bring spiritual healing to those who were sick, hurting, and in need of a physician. But, as we have seen on numerous occasions, the self-righteous religious leaders were uncomfortable with the sinners Jesus loved. They criticized Jesus because He spent time with sinners. They were especially offended when Jesus invited them to share His compassion for these lost and hurting people.

They seemed to be incapable of seeing the blind, bound, and broken-hearted people Isaiah profiled in his great prophecy that Jesus adopted for His Manifesto. When they saw those sinners who were so often surrounding Jesus, all they could see what was to them “the great unwashed” of sinners and publicans. Jesus challenged the Pharisees and scribes to see these people the way God saw them.

One of the ways Jesus shared that vision with the religious leaders was to say that God saw these sinners as lost sheep. After all, the Prince of the Prophets, Isaiah, preached that every one of us is a lost sheep until we are found by the great Shepherd (Isaiah 53:6).

If you feel as helpless as a lost sheep, you are highly valued by God, and Jesus Christ came into this world for people just like you. He came to die for you. If Jesus were passing through your town today, He would probably choose to spend the whole day with you, like He spent the whole day with a sinner named “Zacchaeus.” (Luke 19:1-10) He is standing at the door of your life today,

patiently knocking, because He wants you to open the door of your life, respond to His love and forgiveness, and acknowledge Him as your Shepherd (Revelation 3:20).

When you have become one of those lost sheep the Good Shepherd came to find, will you confess the value of Christ for the other lost sheep He came to seek and to save? As Jesus revealed Who God is and the value system of God, He taught that God places tremendous value on lost people. The risen, living Christ wants us to confess His values and join with Him in His great mission of bringing salvation to the lost and hurting people of this world.

Chapter Seventeen

Lost Coins

“The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10) That verse is the key verse of the Gospel of Luke and the mission statement of Jesus Christ. In the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, we have already considered the value Jesus placed on the “lost things” of this world. His “Parable of the Lost Things” represents the redemption Christ came to bring to all the lost people of the world. We considered this parable in an earlier study. If you remember, the setting in which Jesus gave this great parable was two concentric circles of people surrounding Jesus —

those who were lost and eagerly desired to find forgiveness for their sins had formed a tight inner circle around Jesus, and those who were self-righteous Pharisees and desired to keep themselves far from all the transgressors of the Law had taken many steps back and formed a larger circle around the inner circle where sinners were being saved.

His parable was directed to the outer circle because in His parable, He was trying to explain to the outer circle what was taking place in the inner circle. He was also inviting the outer circle to participate with Him in the miracle that was taking place in the inner circle. To accomplish that mission objective, He told a few parables about “lost things.” Through these parables, the sinners would realize their great worth in the sight of God, and the Pharisees would understand how the loving heart of God overflows with love for all men, and rejoices when lost and shattered lives are reclaimed through repentance and salvation.

One of these parables in Luke 15 concerns a valuable lost coin, which a woman lost and searched diligently to find: “What woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!’ In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (8–10)

Some scholars believe this lost coin referred to one of the ten coins a married woman wore on her forehead to signify fidelity to her

husband in the culture of that day. If she were unfaithful to him, she would remove one of the coins. But if a woman had not been unfaithful but had merely lost one of the coins, you can imagine how frantically she would search for that coin! And you can imagine how greatly she would rejoice once she found it.

If that is the cultural context in which this teaching was given, and the cultural grid through which we should interpret the parable, we understand that Jesus was telling that outer circle that some of those lost people around Him were merely lost because they could not find the spiritual dynamic to experience holiness or sanctification. They were not lost in the sense that they should be despised and rejected by the people of God. They needed help with their quest to keep the ten coins in place in their relationship with God.

This story is also a picture of redemption. When we speak of redemption, we mean that something that once belonged to someone was lost and then reclaimed, usually through the paying of a price. In this sense, the thing reclaimed was bought twice — the first time the person took possession of it, and then again once it was reclaimed with a price. In the same way, we first belonged to God because He made us. But because sin separated us from God, we were lost to Him, and in order to reclaim us, or redeem us, God had to purchase us back again — which He did, through the atoning sacrifice of His perfect Son, Jesus.

A small boy built a little model sailboat with his father. They liked to place the little boat in the waters of the ocean near where they lived. One day they were floating the little boat in the ocean when the under current took the little boat away from them and out to sea. Weeks later they discovered the little boat in the window of a beachfront store window. They were disappointed to discover that the owner insisted they must buy the boat back. After they purchased the boat, as the little boy was leaving the store, he said to his little boat, “You are twice mine. You are mine because I made you, and you are mine because I bought you back.”

Those words this child spoke to his boat are a good definition of the biblical word, “redemption.” He had redeemed his boat. Just as he had made his boat and bought his boat back, God made us and He bought us back. The price He paid was the life of His only begotten Son. This concept of redemption is illustrated by this coin that is lost and then reclaimed.

Speaking to those outside the inner circle, Jesus was telling the Pharisees that the sinners surrounding Him were more than mere sinners. They were people who had been formed by God, were lost, and had been reclaimed. And in the same way that the woman rejoiced at finding and reclaiming her lost coin, the angels in heaven rejoiced to recover these lost sinners back into God’s family. Jesus was challenging the Pharisees to change their mindset toward the sinners in that inner circle who were like lost coins that needed to be reclaimed, and place the same value on them that He did.

Are you a lost coin? If you are one of the lost coins in this world, realize that Jesus Christ places great value on you. He is diligently seeking to recover you and reclaim you as His own, and all the angels in heaven will shout for joy when that happens. If you have already been found and redeemed like that little boy's boat, do you have compassion for the other lost coins of this world? Do you confess the value Jesus placed upon the lost coins (lives) that need to be reclaimed and restored to their God?

Chapter Eighteen

Lost Sons

After Jesus taught the outer circle about the value of the lost coins, He went on to give The Parable of the Prodigal Son: "A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living.

"Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would have gladly

filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him.

"But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.' So he got up and came to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate." (Luke 15:11–24)

We have seen that the context of this teaching falls within a conversation Jesus was simultaneously carrying with the sinners and Pharisees. While the Pharisees were disturbed by Jesus' interaction with these sinners, Jesus responded to their anger with a challenge. It was as if Jesus was saying to them, "All you see here are sinners and publicans, but God sees lost sons. Some of these sinners are sons of God that exercised their free will to throw away their lives in the world. But God has used the consequences of their foolish choices to

turn these sons back to their Father's house. And that is what matters in heaven — all the angels are rejoicing. Why are you not rejoicing?"

The father in this parable was permissive enough to allow his son to exercise his free will, and that is the way God responds to us. He permits us to make our foolish choices, even if they run contrary to His directive will. He permits the consequences of our foolish choices that bring us to our senses, and turn us, with resolve, back to our Father's will for our lives.

If you are like the prodigal son, if you have been in the far country, wasting your life in "loose living," so that the result of your sinful living is like a "banquet of consequences," a meal made of bitter herbs, realize that your heavenly Father loves you. Even though He is permissive enough to allow you to make your wrong choices, it pains Him to see you waste so many years of your life. But, the Good News is that He is ready to come running down the road to warmly embrace you when you come to your senses and start for home. When He sees you still "a long way off," He will run to you and take you into His arms.

Do you confess the value of Christ for prodigal sons? If you are not a prodigal son and have never been a prodigal in your entire lifetime, do you have the love of Christ in your heart for those who are? And are you overjoyed when they return? The religious authorities did not confess the love of Christ for the prodigal children of God. They not only stepped back from the celebration when

prodigals returned. They were unhappy about the celebration. They could only see publicans and sinners in that tight inner circle surrounding Jesus.

If we are in touch with the love of the Christ, Who lives in our hearts today, we will discover that He is challenging us to welcome and affirm lost sons when they come home. Like the angels in heaven, let us rejoice when the prodigal children of God repent and come home. Like the Father, Himself, let us embrace them, brush aside their denials of being part of the family of God, put the ring and the robe on them, and have a great celebration! Sons and daughters of God who were lost have been found. They were dead, but now they are alive again!