

Behold the Lamb

**The Last
Hours of
Christ's Life**

David Wilson

© 2007 by David Wilson

Printed in the USA

The reader is encouraged to go to www.inspirationspeaks.com to download freely the PDF e-book and the companion MP3 audio series for *The Last Hours of Christ's Life*. Or you may purchase the series on CD in MP3 format.

World rights reserved. This book, or any portion thereof, may be freely copied, provided it is for teaching purposes only, and as long as the title and copyright pages are included, and the author is notified. Printing in excess of 50 copies or for resale is prohibited without written permission of the author. Contact ministry@bible-alive.org.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, *King James Version*. (Other versions used are for the purpose of commentary. The author does not endorse the overall accuracy of the translations quoted.)

Scripture quotations marked AMP are from the *Amplified® Bible*, Copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Scripture quotations marked TEV are taken from *The Good News Bible, Today's English Version*. Old Testament © American Bible Society 1976. New Testament © American Bible Society 1966, 1971, 1976. Used by permission.

Cover and text design by Greg Solie • AltamontGraphics.com

ISBN 10: 0-9786002-2-3

ISBN 13: 978-0-9786002-2-8

Table of Contents

1	The Pride Before the Fall— Peter's Self-confidence and Ours.	5
2	The Anguish of Gethsemane.	21
3	The Betrayal—Then and Now.	31
4	Christ Taken Captive and Arraigned Before Annas.	45
5	The Second Trial— Christ Arraigned Before Caiaphas.	57
6	Christ Before the Full Council	67
7	Christ Brought Before Pilate and Herod.	71
8	Christ's Final Arraignment and Condemnation.	81
9	Forsaken and Smitten of God.	91

Chapter One

The Pride Before the Fall Peter's Self-confidence and Ours

In this book we are going to look at the last few hours of Jesus' life. We will also consider the individuals who interacted with Christ during these hours and the lessons to be learned for today. We will also study the trials and anguish of soul that Christ went through for the salvation of men.

In our first lesson, as we look at the experience of Peter, perhaps you will see a glimpse of your own life. We will analyze Christ's treatment of Peter and see the great love of God for our wayward souls.

Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. (Matthew 26:31)

Jesus had been with the disciples for three and a half years. He knew His disciples well. He knew them as a man, and He knew them as the divine Son of God. He had just performed the foot washing with them, and had been involved intimately with them in His Last Supper, knowing that in just a few hours the agony of His trial would begin. Now Jesus said to them, "All ye shall be offended because of Me this night." Jesus knew the future of the disciples, not just because He was a discerning man, but because He was also the Son of God, for it is written:

Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones. (Zechariah 13:7)

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

This passage foretells how Jesus would be taken captive and be smitten for the sins of men and that His disciples, the sheep of His flock, would desert Him.

Jesus always used the Word of God as the basis of His authority. He quotes Old Testament Scriptures to establish the validity of the Word of God in the disciples' minds and ours. He goes on to say, "After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee" (Matthew 26:32).

We may wonder why the disciples did not believe these words of Jesus. But we need to ask ourselves the same question. Why do we so often doubt what God has said to us? How often do we neglect His voice speaking to us in the Bible or exercise carelessness in regard to it?

If the disciples had listened carefully to the words of Jesus, they would not have had doubts and perplexities and fears when He was arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to die on the cross. They would have been rejoicing and praising God, saying, "He told us He would die. But He is the Son of God and we have seen many of His miracles, so we know He is going to rise again exactly as He said." Imagine their expectation and the rejoicing that would have cheered their hearts. Instead of bringing heartache to Christ because of their unbelief, they would have been a source of encouragement to Him.

How many problems, perplexities, and doubts do we bring upon ourselves because we neglect or overlook what God has spoken in His Word?

Jesus continued, "After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee" (Matthew 26:32).

Then Peter said to Him, "Though all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended" (Matthew 26:33). Basically, Peter declared, "Though all the other disciples may deny you, Jesus, I am better than they are. I am more loyal to you."

Listen to Jesus' response to Peter. "Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow [in a few hours], thou shalt deny Me thrice" (Matthew 26:34).

You would think the disciples would have listened to Jesus. He wasn't a normal man. They had seen Jesus still the angry waves

and violent storm on the Sea of Galilee. They had seen Him take a small basket of food and feed thousands. They had seen Him confront and conquer demonic spirits. They saw demon-filled men restored to their right minds. Over and over they saw Jesus beat back the attacks of the Scribes and Pharisees. They had so much evidence of who Jesus was. Yet now, as Jesus spoke to them, it was as if they did not even hear Him.

Notice how Peter responded to Jesus’ warning: “He spake the more vehemently.” Peter was really worked up. Basically, he was saying, “No, Jesus, what You are saying is not true.” He said, “If I should die with Thee I will not deny Thee in any wise” (Mark 14:31). Peter was very emotional in his response, saying, “Lord, I am willing even to die with You.”

“That’s all well and good, Peter,” we might say, “but why aren’t you listening to Jesus’ warning?” Friend, what is God saying to you that you are not listening to? Peter’s experience may be our experience; we maybe doing the same thing.

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. (Luke 22:31–33)

“Peter,” we might say, “can’t you hear the voice of Jesus speaking to you, saying that you are about to be tested and tried and enter into a path of darkness?” Despite his Master’s warning, Peter says, “Lord, I am ready to go with You both into prison and to death.”

Self-sufficiency and pride are a great danger we need to be aware of. The Savior’s love for Peter was deep, yet Peter took Jesus’ warning in love as a rebuke and he was wounded. Peter responded as if Jesus didn’t believe him or had doubts about his loyalty.

It was friendship, love, and compassion that moved Jesus to give the warning to Peter, but the warning was resented in self-sufficiency. Peter declared confidently that he would never do what

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

Christ had said he would do. Peter should have cried out, "Lord, save me from such an act," but he didn't. His self-confidence soon proved the words of Christ true, bringing bitterness of soul to his heart.

Friends, we often do not know our own hearts. We might say today that we are going to serve the Lord, or that we would never do this or that, or we are going to do such and such ... and we may mean it. However, we need to understand that it is only by the grace of God that we can follow His will or resist temptation or serve Him in any way. With humbleness of heart we need to earnestly pray to the Lord that He will enable us to do right and be right. If we say, "I am going to do this or that," leaving God out of the question, trusting in our experience, our knowledge, our position in church, or the length of time we have served God, we will go down the same road Peter did and deny the Lord in one way or another. It is inevitable.

When Peter said he would follow his Lord to prison and to death, it was not merely a self-confident boast. He meant every word of it; it came from his heart. He really loved the Lord. All the disciples loved Christ. Yet sometimes in our human weakness, even though we have a profession of love for Christ and are having an experience with Him to some degree, we fail under trial and test. You see, human nature is terribly weak. We cannot trust ourselves until "this mortal shall have put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:54) and this controversy of sin and rebellion is over. Our confidence and hope must be in Christ alone, and we must give heed to His warnings.

We must confess, "Lord, I don't really know myself. Help me." God knows the inner man; He knows the heart. He knows us down to the nitty-gritty of things we don't even fully understand about ourselves. We are like an open book to God.

Peter didn't know himself either, for hidden in his heart were elements of evil that circumstances would soon bring out. The only way we can overcome is by the help of Christ's Spirit.

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit,

and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. (Galatians 5:16–17)

We need to stay under the Spirit’s control and guidance, yielding to the ways of God. There is within all of us, even the most righteous of us, the evil of human nature. No matter how much we love the Lord, no matter how obedient we are, no matter how sanctified we may be, there are elements within the human heart that have the potential to turn against the Lord if we are left to ourselves.

The Savior saw in Peter a self-love and assurance that would overcome even his love for Him. The spirit and the flesh are at war here. Peter’s love for Christ is the spiritual. His tendency toward self-love and self-assurance is the flesh. We also battle with the flesh in some form or another, and will, until this sinful human nature lays it aside for an eternal, glorified nature. That’s the battle of the Christian experience. Only in Christ can we be victorious over the flesh.

Christ’s solemn warning to Peter was a call to humility and heart searching. Christ’s words, recorded for us in Scripture, were not just speaking to Peter two thousand years ago. These things are recorded for our admonition. Christ is saying to you and me that we need to humble our hearts. We need to give heed to Jesus’ warning to Peter, for it is a warning to examine ourselves. The apostle Paul wrote that we are to “worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3). Our confidence is in Jesus Christ and His righteousness, not in ourselves.

If we react as Peter did to Christ’s warning to us and say, “God, don’t You trust me? Don’t You have any confidence in me? You don’t know what kind of man I am. You don’t realize how long I have served You, how long I have been in the work. Lord, You don’t realize how many sermons I have preached, how well I know Your Word.” The Lord *does* know. He knows your heart and mine better than we know ourselves.

We need to give heed to that still small voice of conscience, the Word of God, and the counsel of His Spirit. Sometimes God speaks

to us through the Bible, other times through His messengers, and by His Spirit. At times His words are harsh words, as when Jesus says, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Revelation 3:19). We need to be willing to be rebuked and chastened by the Spirit of God, by God’s Word, or even through one of His messengers.

Let us not be like Peter and reject the warning of our Master. We need to give heed to the words of Christ no matter how they come, no matter where they come from. In the book of Revelation we learn of the Laodicean church, which represents the church at large in the last days. Their attitude is, “Lord, we are rich, we are increased with goods, we are in need of nothing, and we are doing very well, thank you.” (See Revelation 3:17.)

Jesus speaks to the church of our age, saying to us, “Knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17). “I am not in your church,” He is telling us. “I am on the outside, wanting in.” (See Revelation 3:20.)

Peter’s experience of self-confidence speaks of the self-confidence of the church in the last days. Tragically, the Bible reveals that the attitude of Peter will be the attitude of most churches and most Christians at the end of time. (See Revelation 3:14–20.)

The lesson of Peter’s self-confidence and eventual fall is to be a lesson to us, my friend, and we need to give heed to it. The book of Revelation reveals that the churches and individuals today are no more willing to listen to Christ than Peter was. And the end result is going to be tragic. We need to confess, “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing” (Romans 7:18). We must listen to, seek and follow the word of the Lord and never become self-confident in any matter regarding our spiritual condition, attainments, or knowledge.

Peter’s Denial and Ours

Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou

sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly. (Matthew 26:69–75)

After Jesus warned Peter about what was to befall him, and after the Last Supper, Jesus and His disciples made their way to the garden of Gethsemane, where Judas and the religious leaders and soldiers came to take Jesus captive. Under cover of night, while the city was asleep, the Son of man was betrayed into the hands of sinners. Jesus’ warnings to His disciples began to be fulfilled, for when they saw Him taken captive they scattered for safety, leaving Jesus alone.

Jesus was taken to the home of the former high priest for interrogation. A mockery of several trials took place that night and into the early morning hours. The Scriptures record that “Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest” (John 18:15).

This “other disciple,” John, secured permission for Peter to enter as well. “But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter” (John 18:16). John made no attempt to hide the fact that he was a disciple of Jesus, so he was kept from the trials and testing that were to come upon Peter.

“Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.” Notice how Peter reacts: “He denied before them all” (Matthew 26:69–70).

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

Oh, Peter how well your Master knew you! He warned you this would happen.

Jesus had been captured, was bound like a common criminal and roughly treated as He was led to the palace or residence of the ex-high priest, where He was falsely accused and mocked. All of this was for you and me and for Peter, who denied Him at this very moment.

And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. (Matthew 26:71)

Why was Peter recognized by these people? They had heard about Jesus; many had probably heard Him teach and seen Him heal. Peter and the rest of the disciples were always close to Jesus; therefore, these people would be familiar with who these men were. Further, Peter had entered into the palace of the high priest with John, who was known as Jesus' disciple, so it would be appropriate to assume that Peter was also with Jesus. All the people who were gathered at the palace that night either didn't know or didn't care what was transpiring with Jesus: that the counsel, filled with hatred, was trying to condemn Him.

When questioned Peter could have stood up and said, "Yes, I love the Lord. He is the Messiah." At an earlier time Jesus asked His disciples:

Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 16:13–17)

Peter knew who Jesus was. So why does he not speak up for his Lord now? Jesus had told him, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath

desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat” (Luke 22:31). Peter was walking in self-confidence, away from the Lord.

The devil, speaking through these individuals, said, “You were with Jesus.” The first time he brushed it off casually. “I know not what thou sayest” (Matthew 26:70).

My friend, there’s no such thing as a casual denial or a little sin. If we think there is, we are going down the slippery slope to perdition and eternal loss unless we repent.

Notice the steps of Peter’s denial. When asked about his relation to Jesus, he declared, “I know not what thou sayest.” Then he went out to the porch, where another person came to him and told the others who were there, “This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth.” “And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man” (Matthew 26:70–72). Do you see the increased intensity of his denial?

The same thing can happen to us. We may sin a little bit here, compromise a little bit there, make a small denial. But unless it is repented of, does it stop? No. It leads to even greater denial, greater sin, greater compromise. And if we don’t repent and stop, what will happen next? The answer is seen in the experience of Peter.

And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilaean, and thy speech agreeth thereto. But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak. (Mark 14:70–71)

Have you ever said publicly, “I don’t know Christ” or “I have nothing to do with Christianity?” That is what Peter did.

And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly. (Matthew 26:74–75)

We often remember things clearly in hindsight; it's human nature. Even when it comes to God's truth and the things of God's kingdom, we often remember what God said *after* we fall. Is it really that we forgot? Or were we not listening and not making heart application?

Why did Peter so quickly forget the warning of his Master? Peter was so self-confident that he didn't really listen. He heard with his ears the words of Jesus, but those words never really penetrated his heart. They were never acted upon, they were not believed. But when Peter remembered the words of Jesus, he went out and wept bitterly.

Peter's denial of his Master degraded his own manhood, for he shamefully dishonored his Master, whom he claimed to love.

While the denial was fresh in Peter's mind, and the crowing of the rooster was ringing in his ears, the Savior turned from His accusers and looked with compassion upon his poor disciple. At the same time Peter turned and looked toward his Master. Was it coincidence that Jesus happened to turn away from His accusers to look upon Peter at that moment? No. The Holy Spirit was drawing Peter to look upon Jesus.

When we are spiritually naked, depressed, and guilty, we recognize our need. The Holy Spirit can get through to our minds when we recognize our shame before the Lord.

At this moment Peter heard Jesus more clearly than he had a few hours earlier. He saw in Christ, God's love for him. The compassion and forgiveness of Christ pierced his heart, and his conscience was aroused. Peter remembered his promise just a few hours before that he would go with his Lord to prison and death. Yet now he was unwilling to even say, "I know Him." He remembered his hurt feelings and impatience with Christ when the Savior told him that he would deny his Lord three times that same night.

Peter had been grieved because Jesus was telling him the truth. Jesus was saying, "Peter, you are too weak; let Me help you." If he would have said, "Lord, I know what You are saying is true. I am a weak man; help me," the humbling of his heart and pride before Jesus and the other disciples would have been nothing compared to the bitterness he was now experiencing.

The Pride Before the Fall—Peter’s Self-confidence and Ours

Peter had just declared that he didn’t know Jesus. But how well his Lord knew him! Does the Lord know us? He certainly does. He wants us to listen to His counsel so we do not have to pass through the bitterness that Peter passed through. That is why we must always have the attitude, “Lord, save me from myself. Reveal myself to me that I might not trust in my own strength.”

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. (Romans 7:18)

At some point in our lives we will fail Christ as bitterly and openly as Peter did, unless we keep ourselves in the love of God. Peter was intimately associated with the works of Jesus, but his heart was not fully surrendered. He was a zealous worker in the cause of Christ, yet this was not sufficient in his time of test. Self-confident assurance and a knowledge of the things of God will not keep us any more than it kept Peter. Our only hope is to fall upon the Rock, Christ Jesus, in humbleness of soul.

Have you denied Christ? You need to contemplate this question, my friend. You might say, “I would never do what Peter did. I would never do what the Jews did to Christ. I would never be as rebellious as the people described in Isaiah or Jeremiah.” Watch out! That is the attitude Peter had. We may not even recognize the ways in which we deny Him. Professed followers of Christ can deny Him by evil speaking and foolish talking, by speaking words that are untruthful or unkind. (See Ephesians 5:4.) Men deny Christ by the pursuit of sinful pleasure. We may deny Him by conforming to the world, or by the love of our own opinions. We can deny Christ by cherishing doubt and not having faith and thus dwelling in darkness.

In all these ways and many more, we declare that Christ is not in us. We must acknowledge daily, “Lord, I am too weak to follow You. I want to follow You and serve you, but in myself I am too weak I need Your help to love You, to serve You, even to read Your Word and follow it.” Do you do that? Or do you get into a comfort zone of your Christian experience, where you begin to trust in your length of service, the work you do for Christ, or the fact that

you read the Bible and go to church? These are privileges and gifts of God; they don't merit anything for us. We need to recognize day by day that our hope is built on Jesus Christ and His righteousness. If we don't, we will deny Christ in one way or another.

Peter's Lesson and Ours

We need to understand Peter's fall and its relationship to ourselves in order to make practical application of these events for today.

Peter's fall was not instantaneous, but gradual. There were small compromises, areas where he was trusting himself instead of Christ. Self-confidence led him to the belief that he was safe, and step after step was taken in the downward path.

We can have confidence and assurance of our salvation, but never should we adopt the attitude that "From this day and henceforth I am saved, so it matters not what I do." We are saved by the grace and mercy of God, but only he who "endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 10:22).

We don't need go through life worrying, "Am I really saved?" or wonder if the Lord is going to accept us. We can have the assurance in Christ. But our trust must be in Him. That relationship of trust "yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Hebrews 12:11).

Unfortunately, when we start thinking that our eternal security is assured, that can lead to carelessness, compromise, even denying Christ.

Peter's fall was not a sudden event. Remember, this was someone who walked with the Lord. He fellowshiped with the Lord daily. He saw with his eyes and heard with his ears the teachings and miracles of Christ. He was involved intimately in the evangelistic work with Christ. But he still took unrecognized steps downward.

We can never put confidence in ourselves or feel that we are secure against temptation. Our security is not in ourselves; it is in Christ. Even though we have given ourselves to Christ and believe that He accepts us, we are not immune from temptation. We are

admonished, “Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Our only safety is in constant distrust of self. We want to have confidence in ourselves because that is the way of the natural heart. However, our only safety is in constant dependence on Christ.

As we look at the fall of Peter, we see parallels in our own lives. Self-confidence caused Peter’s failure, and this same evil is at work in human hearts today.

Self-confidence is deadly and dangerous to our Christian experience. It may be our intent to be right and to do right, but there is only one path of safety: constantly humbling ourselves before the Lord and following His Word. Righteousness by faith is God humbling man in the dust so that He can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We will never outgrow our need for laying our glory in the dust and placing our confidence in Jesus alone.

Peter fell through self-sufficiency. But through repentance and humiliation his faith was re-established. Praise God for His mercy and love, for there is forgiveness in Christ.

I confess to you, my friend, that I have denied Christ. I suspect you have, too, in one way or another. But in Christ there is forgiveness and restoration. Let us not cast off small compromises and sins, saying that these little things are not of great consequence. These “little things,” if they are allowed and not repented of, can lead us into a great fall.

It is Satan’s job to lead us into sin, and then to fill us with feelings of helplessness, fearing to seek God for pardon. Satan loves to get us into compromised situations where we feel so bad, we wonder if it is any good to seek God’s forgiveness. “I should have known better,” we say to ourselves. Even in that attitude, we are putting confidence in ourselves. The Bible says Jesus ever liveth to make intercession for us. (See Hebrews 7:25.) He came to save sinners. Will you acknowledge, as the apostle Paul did, “Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15). When we understand and acknowledge our sinfulness, there can be restoration and victory.

Christ’s love for Peter caused his restoration. Satan can do nothing against the all-powerful intercession of Christ. The prayer

that Christ offered for Peter He offers on behalf of us, too, if we are humble and contrite in heart, and we can be made such by yielding to His Spirit.

As Jesus looked with compassion upon Peter, so He looks with compassion upon you. He wants to save you, my friend. You need to trust that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. (See Philippians 1:6.) It is His work, but we must surrender, “for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

Our assurance can never be in ourselves, for when we start looking at ourselves, we will come to one of two conclusions. Either we will lower the standard of God and come to believe that we can be saved in sin and compromise and worldly, feel-good Christianity—a road that millions are going down—or we will look to ourselves and say, “It’s no use. I might as well give up. I’m tired of falling and repenting and falling and repenting. I don’t seem to be getting anywhere. I should just drop this whole Christian thing.” Many are going down that road as well.

We must never look to ourselves; we must look to Christ. All that Jesus went through was for you. He wants to save you, even if you denied Him before you picked up this book. Christ is a compassionate Savior. He says to us “Look upon Me, trust Me, believe in Me, surrender to Me day by day, and your salvation will be assured.” Your salvation is not in what you can do, in church membership or knowledge or work. Your salvation is assured because He will hold you in the palm of His hand, and no one can pluck you out unless you choose to exercise a wayward, unbelieving heart.

Oh, my friend, let not Peter’s denial and unbelief be your experience. If it has been, may the Spirit of Christ so touch your heart that you may see the love of Christ for you, and that you will repent as Peter did. In Peter’s experience we have revealed to us Christ, “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). His word is sure, and He has declared that He will take away our sins. We need to believe what Scripture says. It will keep us from much grief and sorrow and perplexity and doubt and trouble. Believe His word. Don’t just hear it; act upon it, surrender to it,

The Pride Before the Fall—Peter’s Self-confidence and Ours

because, “This is life eternal, ... [to] know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

What will it be, my friend? Victory or defeat? The answer to that question lies with you and what you will do with Jesus. Will you trust Him? Will you surrender to Him? Will you give your heart to Him? Or will you go down that road of self-confidence? The decision you make will determine your daily victory or defeat.

May you see the love of Jesus for you personally in this experience of Peter, this is my hope and prayer. Amen!

Chapter Two

The Anguish of Gethsemane

After Jesus left the upper room He made His way with the disciples to the garden of Gethsemane, a familiar site where He had prayed many times in the past. In the garden Jesus spent a short time with God in a prayer more intense than any previous time of prayer and communion with His Father.

We all look to Calvary, and rightly so, but we should also consider the events that transpired in Gethsemane. Many Christians do not have a view of Calvary as clear and distinct as they would have if they understood Gethsemane.

As Jesus approached the garden, the disciples noticed a change had come over their Master. There was something different in His countenance and attitude. He seemed sad and silent.

Matthew records, “Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy.” This word *heavy* means “distress of mind”¹ “Then saith He unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with Me” (Matthew 26:36–38).

Something was taking place in the very being of Christ that caused Him to comment, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death.” We all know the sorrow that comes when our loved ones die. Jesus’ sadness was greater than that. His soul was distressed because of a burden being placed upon Him that would bring Him face to face with eternal death.

And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.
(Matthew 26:39)

The cup Jesus speaks of represents an experience He was being asked to pass through. This cup was filled with wrath, sorrow, guilt, and condemnation. And the cup wasn't His own to drink; it was filled with the sins and guilt and condemnation of all mankind.

By accepting this mysterious cup, Jesus would be brought to a point where He would experience what it means to stand before God without any intercessor, without any mercy, with only guilt and condemnation.

Jesus felt that separation from His Father. That's why He was prostrate on the ground. He was in the process of being made sin for you and me. The reality of the separation was so intense that His whole nature shuddered before it.

If mankind was to be saved, Christ could not use His divine power to escape. As the Son of man, He had to experience the wrath of God against transgression. Jesus was beginning to drink of the cup, to partake of the experience of the wicked who will stand before a holy God without any intercessor, without any shield of grace.

Jesus had declared, "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30). Now, however, Christ felt the separation of heart and mind, love and purpose that He had always known with the Father. Jesus feared that in His human nature He would be unable to endure the coming conflict with the powers of darkness and the grief He would experience when God "shalt make His soul an offering for sin" (Isaiah 53:10). Christ's soul was filled with the horror of separation from God.

In the midst of this sorrow and affliction, the forces of darkness were all around Him, tempting Him, saying, "Jesus, what You are doing is useless. Give up! Why subject Yourself to such grief for sinful man?"

And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? (Matthew 26:40)

The Anguish of Gethsemane

This word *watch* means “to be awake, to keep guard” or “to be attentive; vigilant in preparation for an event or trial, the time of whose arrival is uncertain.”² Jesus is saying, “Do you not understand the hour of darkness that is before you? There is a trial coming upon you very soon, and you must watch and pray.”

Jesus longed for the human sympathy that all men desire in the midst of sorrow and suffering. Have you ever been in a situation of perplexity and trial and it just seemed as if no one on earth understood? You felt lonely, unable to communicate your feelings. Even those who listened to you could not really understand. If you have felt that, you have a little taste of what Jesus was going through. He longed to see the disciples praying for Him, praying for themselves, but they seemed unaware of what was transpiring.

Just a few hours earlier Jesus had told them He was going to the cross, that He would die, and that they would be brought into great perplexity. But did they listen? No. Too often we do exactly what the disciples did. We sleep on, unconcerned, when God has given us strong warnings to prepare ourselves for the trying hour that is before us.

The disciples did not intend to forsake the Lord any more than we do. However, if we are heedless of the warnings God has given us in His Word, we will be found sleeping in times of danger.

The disciples seemed to have been overcome by a stupor, but they could have shaken it off if they had continued pleading with God. The Christian world is also largely in a spiritual stupor. Jesus has warned us that in the last days men will be filled with the cares of this world, with excess and intemperance, and that the approaching day of Christ will come upon them unawares. (See Luke 21:34.)

Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. (Matthew 26:41)

Jesus was not only speaking to the disciples; He was speaking to you and me. He is saying, “Your mind may be strong and willing, but your human nature is weak.” Though we may love and praise the Lord, that is not enough. We need to understand our potential weakness, and watch and pray.

Jesus knows our hearts want to serve Him, but He also knows how weak we are. He doesn't say, "You need to be stronger." Rather, He wants us to be strengthened by His sympathy. The love and mercy of Christ for His disciples was such that even though He longed for their understanding, He longed more for their victory. He had a burden for them even in the midst of taking upon Himself the sins of the world. No wonder Paul wrote, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). If God gave His only begotten Son to us, who or what could ever be against us? The concern that Jesus felt for His disciples in the midst of suffering is the same concern He feels for you and for me.

The Second Prayer of Christ

He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying,
O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. (Matthew 26:42)

This cup contained wrath and anger and sorrow and sin. It represents the experience that humanity would suffer when standing before a holy God, condemned as sinners. Jesus, in the mystery of redemption, was to become sin for man. There in the garden He began to taste it. This is where His decision to save man was settled.

Have you ever made a decision and then, when you found yourself in the midst of circumstances you could not reverse, you said "If I knew what I was getting into, I never would have done this?" Jesus began to experience the darkness of sin and its guilt in Gethsemane. Knowing full well what was to come, He asked Himself, "Am I willing to do this? Am I willing to save man?" What was His answer? "O my Father if this cup [this experience] may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, [and pass through the darkness] thy will be done" (Matthew 26:42).

We will never go through what Christ went through. But Jesus is calling us to experience in our own lives a willingness to submit,

The Anguish of Gethsemane

to say, “Thy will, O Lord, be done.” This is what Christ is calling every one of His disciples to experience.

And being in agony, he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Luke 22:44)

Most of us have had sorrow and pain. We have cried until we could not cry anymore. But none of us has ever had as much agony and mental distress as Jesus did. Luke, the physician, states that Jesus sweat “great drops of blood.” The medical term for this is *hematadrosis*. Although this is a very rare phenomenon, bloody sweat may occur in a highly emotional state. Jesus’ agony was so great that drops of blood were forced from His pores, falling to the ground.

The sins of the lost world were upon Him—not just the world as it existed at that moment of time, but the world as it has existed from the days of Adam to the end of time, when the door of mercy will shut. Jesus had to taste death for every man, woman, and child who had existed, or ever would. His soul in agony He pleaded, “O My Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from Me” (Matthew 26:39).

He was alone. God wasn’t with Him. The angels weren’t with Him. His disciples were sleeping, seemingly unconcerned for their own souls and the suffering of their Master. Jesus had to pass through the anguish alone.

Sometimes we have to pass through difficult situations and circumstances alone. We find no human sympathy, no human counsel. It might even seem as if God no longer cares. However, we must rest on God’s Word and be willing to do what He tells us to, with a faith that says, “I will trust and obey, even if I am left alone.”

Most people do not like having to stand alone. Trials are easier when your friends and family are around. Of course we should comfort and strengthen one another. But we must learn how to stand alone. That ability comes from studying the Word of God,

praying, and having a relationship with Christ. It is not enough to sing praises and act like a Christian in church. You need to be a Christian even when nobody else is looking and like Christ stand alone.

Jesus was alone as He took the guilt and sin of man. We too must learn to stand solely on “Thus saith the Lord,” with a submission to the will of God.

Because God's will was fulfilled in Christ, you and I can have eternal life. After God gives us salvation and life, He expects us, by His strength and power, to pray and to live, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

The Disciples Again Found Sleeping

In Matthew 26:43 we read, “And He came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy.” After praying the second time, Jesus came to His disciples to once again find them sleeping. Are we, like the disciples, sleeping when we should be watching?

By ignoring the warnings of Christ, we are headed for great despair and perplexity. We are warned in Matthew 25 that all the virgins (professed believers) slumbered. The wise ones cultivated an experience with the Lord, so their lamps (their Christian experience) still had the oil of grace and of the Holy Spirit. However, the foolish ones let their lamps go out. They went to the merchants to find oil, but when they came to the wedding, it was too late. The door was shut.

We are all sleeping to some extent. We need to ask God to help us remain faithful so when the midnight cry goes forth, we will hear the call.

The sleeping disciples represent a sleeping church. In mercy, Jesus gave us this warning,

Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch. (Mark 13:35–37)

The Anguish of Gethsemane

We may earnestly desire to make preparation for the Lord's return, but when it comes, you may be surprised by the suddenness of it.

As God's people we are to be distinct from the world, which is being overcome by the iniquity and cares of this life. The only way we can do that is to watch and pray. The vast majority even in the church, are slumbering. They are the foolish virgins who will find themselves outside the kingdom of God.

When Jesus came to the disciples the second time and found them still sleeping, He was deeply disappointed. He felt a longing for His disciples to give Him some assuring words that would tell of their love and appreciation. To some extent this human compassion could have lightened the darkness overshadowing His soul.

Christ is still looking for some earnest appreciation in His disciples. But He is disappointed in the vast majority of His people today. We are sleeping, heedless of His words, not watching and preparing. Jesus is heartbroken because of our carelessness.

The Third Prayer of Christ

And he left them, and went again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. (Matthew 26:44)

Christ and the Father made the decision that Christ would die for sinful man before the foundation of the world. (See Revelation 13:8). Now, in these anguished moments in the garden of Gethsemane, the time to enter that bloodstained path had come. The decision that would determine the destiny of the world would be made here. The fate of humanity trembled in the balance.

Christ could have refused to drink the cup of bitterness, sorrow, and wrath that belonged to guilty man. He could have wiped the bloody sweat from His brow and left man to perish in his iniquity. He had every right to say, "I will go back to My Father. Let the wages of sin, which is death, fall upon guilty man." (See Romans 6:23.)

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

The angels, both fallen and unfallen, watched the scene with intense interest. Would the Son of God drink the bitter cup of humiliation and agony?

Despite tasting the horror of His impending fate, Jesus said, "O My Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, thy will be done" (Matthew 26:42). Christ's love for His Father, as well as love for us, strengthened Him.

Three times, in soul anguish and surrender, His humanity hesitated from making the final decision of self-sacrifice. Three times He uttered the prayer, "Thy will be done." He saw you, my friend, and He saw me. He saw each of us individually. He saw that the transgressors of the law, if left to themselves, would perish. Jesus in Gethsemane made the final decision to save man, even though it meant death and despair for Himself. He did this for all mankind, even though relatively few would accept Him.

The book of Hebrews records these words about His decision: "For the joy that was set before Him [He] endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2). Yes, my friend, Jesus endured death on the cross and the terror of separation from God for the joy of seeing you saved! Are you worth something to God? You certainly are!

We are but worms, according to the Bible. (See Job 25:6.) We are like grasshoppers. (See Isaiah 40:22.) Our glory fades away like the grass that is soon dried up. (See Isaiah 40:6–8; 1 Peter 1:24.) Yet God so loved man that He gave His only begotten Son so that if we will believe in Him we will not perish. (See John 3:16.)

In the last hours of Christ's life—from Gethsemane until His death on Calvary—the Savior trod "the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with Me" (Isaiah 63:3). It must have seemed that His sacrifice was for nothing. The Jewish people didn't believe. His disciples were sleeping. But Jesus made the decision, not based on sight, but on faith. We too must go through some experiences by faith, not by sight.

Christ in His humanity could have died in the garden as the darkness of sin weighed upon Him, as "in an agony He ... sweat ... as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). However, Scripture reveals "there appeared an angel unto

The Anguish of Gethsemane

Him from heaven, strengthening Him” (Luke 22:43). The power that was to inflict retributive justice upon Christ as man’s substitute was the same power that sent the angel to sustain and uphold Christ. He was sustained supernaturally so “that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Hebrews 2:9).

This angelic being from heaven was not the only angel in the garden. There were legions of fallen angels there as well. Satan himself, who once stood as a covering cherub at the throne of God, was there in the garden too. He and the other fallen angels tried to tempt Jesus to turn away from His mission to save man.

Human nature can endure but a limited amount of testing and trial. But Christ had an infinite capacity for suffering, for He was “God ... manifest in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16). In Christ, human nature existed in the divine; therefore, He could suffer the guilt for the sins of a lost world. No angel or other created being could have taken upon himself the sins and guilt and woe of mankind. Jesus alone was to “taste [experience] death for every man.” This is why He can offer salvation to any one who will believe.

Jesus paid the penalty for every single human being. He suffered the guilt of sin for our world. The agony that Christ endured gives us an understanding of the nature of sin and the retribution that justice demands of the sinner.

“The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Because of Christ’s decision, the sinner can go free—not free to continue in sin and rebellion. Rather, that the love of Christ would constrain us. Therefore we “judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead ... that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:14–15).

Jesus settled the decision to be man’s substitute on the cross in Gethsemane. The great decisions we will make in the future are going to have to be settled now, day by day, as we walk with the Lord.

Christ could have chosen not to endure the agonies of Gethsemane, the trial, and the cross. But He said, “Father, if there’s no other way except I drink this cup, Your will be done.” He could

have chosen to leave man to Himself. And isn't that what we so often do to Christ? We leave His way and go our own way.

In the garden, Satan sought to fill the heart of Christ with dread and oppression, hoping He would turn back. In the trial and at Cavalry he instigated the hatred of the religious leaders. He and all his legions of darkness strove to cause doubt and discouragement. They, who had been created by Christ, were now afflicting their maker!

Christ knew His agony and trials would not cease until He cried out on the cross, "It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost" (John 19:30). But after making the decision in the garden to save man, He gathered strength and encouragement from the angel of God. His depression and discouragement were lifted. He came to His disciples calm and serene, ready to meet the mob that even now was approaching the garden.

Three times the Savior prayed, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." Jesus could have said no. He would have lived on as the Son of God, with the praise of angels. He could have created another world to replace ours. But if He hadn't taken the cup, if He had not passed through this experience, it would have meant eternal ruin for you and me.

Christ passed through the agonies of Gethsemane and Calvary for each of us personally. Where is your life today, my friend? Is it in Christ? May God help you to see Jesus. In His name I pray and ask for this blessing. Amen.

Endnotes:

1. James Strong, LL.D., S.T.D., *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1987).
2. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*. (San Francisco, California: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1967).

Chapter Three

The Betrayal of Christ— Then and Now

In this chapter we will be looking at the life of Judas. Just as there are elements of Peter in each of us, there may be elements of Judas in our lives. As we study his life, we will see glimpses of the great love of Christ and of His character, which should draw us to love Him even more.

Then cometh he to his disciples and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners; Rise let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me. (Matthew 26:45–46)

“Behold the hour is at hand.” As we draw near to the consummation of this world’s history, if we remain faithful to Christ, we too will be betrayed into the hands of sinners. The clock of midnight is about to strike. I don’t know if it will happen next week, next year, or a few years from now, but we are living on borrowed time, and that time is growing shorter and shorter by the day.

The book of Revelation is clear that God’s people will face an hour of severe temptation. Some people believe they will be raptured before that time, but God’s pattern throughout the Scriptures is to keep His children from evil while living in the midst of it. Jesus Himself prayed to the Father, “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (John 17:15).

Revelation chapter 13 reveals that God’s people who do not go along with the beast system because they worship, fear, and give glory to Him will enter into an hour of temptation, but they will be strengthened in that hour.

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

“Rise let us be going behold he is at hand that doth betray Me” (Matthew 26:46). As Jesus came forth to meet His betrayer, standing in front of His disciples, He asked, “Whom seek ye? They answered Him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith to them, I am He” (John 18:4–5).

“As soon then as He had said unto them, I am He, they went backward, and fell to the ground” (John 18:6). As Jesus spoke these words, His divinity was made manifest. Here again was confirmation that Jesus was the Son of God. In the presence of this divine glory, priests, elders, soldiers, and even Judas fell to the ground. When God intervenes, wicked men are shown how powerless they are to carry out their evil plans.

Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said,
Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that
I am he; if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way.
(John 18:7–8)

The Roman soldiers, the priests, and Judas gathered about Christ, eager to seize their prey, seemingly oblivious to the powerlessness they had just experienced.

We can go so far in sin and rebellion that even when God performs awesome miracles it's not enough to bring us to repentance. We can excuse perhaps the Roman soldiers, but Judas had seen Jesus raise the dead, cast out demons, and heal people who were terminally ill. The priests had heard all about these miracles; some may have seen a few personally. And yet they also would not believe.

The soldiers were pagans. If they had any religion at all, they were no doubt worshippers of Mithra, the sun god of the Roman Empire. They too should have been affected by the flashing forth of the divinity of Christ when they fell down powerless before Him. They had the evidence that the one who stood before them was not a mere man but the Son of God. Yet they were not convinced. For the power of darkness was working on the hearts of all who came that night to the garden.

The Betrayal

God will do all He can to bring us to repentance. However, even though we might claim to know God, like Judas and the priests, we can go so far into sin that we do not give heed to His warnings, or listen to the voice of His Holy Spirit, or allow ourselves to be convicted by the Word of God. Even when God performs a miracle before our eyes, we can be so hardened in our sins that we refuse to repent. As Jesus said: “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (Luke 16:31).

We have to choose to accept God’s gift of salvation, but even that does not give us merit. We are simply responding to the great love of God and His calling upon our hearts.

And while he yet spake, behold the multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew nearer unto Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?
(Luke 22:47–48)

What was Judas thinking? How could a disciple and follower of Christ, as Judas was, betray Him with a kiss?

“Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?” This question should have aroused his conscience and touched his stubborn heart. Yet Judas showed no heart to repent of his deed, despite the touching response of Christ that should have led him to repentance and confession of his sin. Honor, friendship, and human tenderness had forsaken him and he showed not even a hint of a smitten conscience in what he was doing.

Judas had walked with Christ for more than three years, seeing things such as the raising of the dead, the cleansing of lepers, and the feeding of the multitude. These miracles were clear examples of the divinity and power of Christ. You and I have never had the experiences Judas had; however, we have the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit moving upon our hearts. Yet even with these privileges, are we capable of doing what Judas did: remaining careless and unconcerned when the Spirit of God is reproofing us?

Sadly the answer is yes, many professed Christians are living in open sin and rebellion against God while claiming the privileges of His grace.

Judas had given himself up to Satan, and he had no power to resist him. In our world today there are people who have given themselves over to Satan. They are not following Christ closely in a humble, obedient spirit of love and discipleship as revealed by obedience to God and fidelity to His Word.

When we go the way of Judas, which is to have a profession of love for Christ but living in unrepentant sin, Satan has control over us. Judas’s sad experience led him to take his own life. However what if Judas had lived on? I am sure he would have held a great position in the church of the Jews, even though he was filled with Satan’s spirit.

Judas possessed a form of godliness. Think of that as you read Paul’s description of our time. “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves.” Paul describes how men will be “covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded.” Paul is not speaking here about the unconverted in the world, but those who profess a belief in God. “Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (2 Timothy 3:1–5).

The Judas spirit will be the prevailing spirit in the church before Christ comes. This is why the times we live in are so perilous. That is why we have so many Christians who are unwilling to repent. They claim to serve God, but they are “giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (1 Timothy 4:1) and becoming a “hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird” (Revelation 18:2).

No doubt there were some elements of goodness in Judas. But his character was more under the molding of satanic influences than Christ’s influence. Judas professed to be a disciple of Christ, but in words and in works denied Him. He fellowshiped with

The Betrayal

Jesus. He was a professed disciple. He was even an evangelist. Yet he denied Christ.

We have a whole world of Christians denying Christ today. No wonder Paul said it would be “perilous times” just before the coming of the Lord. No wonder Jesus warned us, “When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). Will He find faith in you, my friend?

Judas had the same opportunities to obtain a sanctified life by faith as the apostle John had. Judas lived and worked with Christ and listened to the lessons of Christ. His character might have been transformed by divine grace. Then why the difference of character and life between John and Judas? In the light of Christ’s presence and love, John saw his faults and sought to yield his heart and mind to Christ. Judas also saw his faults, but in the light of the divine presence he resisted and would not yield heart and mind to Jesus.

God’s Word promises us, “He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). Christ is “the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). Judas and John were both given opportunity to be transformed by divine love and grace. One man was transformed and one man became a betrayer. Why?

It wasn’t that Christ didn’t love Judas. He did. And Christ would have finished His work in him. But Judas regularly violated his conscience and yielded to temptation, developing habits of dishonesty. By expressions of doubt he helped create dissension that affected the other disciples. These character traits, unrepented of, slowly transformed him into the image of Satan.

John had faults too. But his conscience was smitten and he repented. He earnestly sought the Lord. The more he sought the Lord, the more he desired the love of God, and the more his heart responded to the drawings of God’s Spirit and Christ’s love. Under the Spirit’s conviction John developed a willingness and a desire to plead with God for help and to surrender his will to Christ. His heart was changed and in love he followed his Master.

Jesus accomplished His work in John, and He will accomplish the same in you and me if we will surrender our hearts and lives to

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

Him. In many respects one or the other of these two disciples represents each of us. You have the opportunity right now to change, to go from being a Judas to a John.

Some of Christ's followers walk in humility and meekness; others are merely professors of religion. They are not "doers of the word," but "hearers only, deceiving" themselves (James 1:22). Followers who are like the apostle John are being sanctified through the truth; professed Christians who are more like Judas know little of the transforming power of divine grace.

The Word of God has warned us that there will be more Judases at the end of time than Johns. (See 2 Timothy 3:1–5.) That is why we have such worldly Christianity today. Many churches are simply feel-good centers. Their parishioners leave unrepentant and continue their lives professing Christ, yet denying Him in their daily lives, for they do not do the will of God. The church today is filled with the Judas spirit of a profession of godliness, yet denying the power.

Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. (Mark 7:6)

We are clearly warned in Scripture of those who will be deceived and why.

And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thessalonians 2:10–12)

You can profess the truth, but if you do not have a love for the truth that leads you to seek, by God's grace, to overcome all unrighteousness, you will in the end be deceived and believe a lie.

The Betrayal

Much of the professed Christian world will be like Judas because they hold onto unrighteousness and do not love the truth. Judas heard the truth, and he saw the power of Christ, but he didn't receive the truth. If we claim to be Christians and continue taking pleasure in unrighteousness, a satanic spirit will overcome us. This is what happened to Judas. In the last hours of that fateful night when Judas betrayed his Master, he was reaping what he had been sowing in his heart for years.

When Christ washed the disciples' feet in the upper room, Judas was initially moved to confess the evil deed he had conspired to commit. Sadly, however, his pride and Christ's example of humility turned his heart away. Following such a humble Messiah presented no chance of gaining position, power and glory. However, Christ, in His wonderful love, gave Judas another opportunity to repent, for the Scripture records:

And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, Is it I? And another said, Is it I? (Mark 14:18-19)

The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born. Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said. (Matthew 26:24-25)

Even when Jesus made it clear that He knew what Judas was about to do, Judas couldn't see and understand the love of Christ for him. He couldn't see the glory of God in Christ that caused the mob who came to arrest Jesus to fall to the ground as dead men. The full result of his long-cherished and hidden sins were made manifest in the betrayal of the Savior of the world.

If we take pleasure in unrighteousness and do not love the truth, we will in the end be a betrayer like Judas. And, like Judas, you will meet a destructive end in eternal loss.

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

One of Judas's faults was that he was constantly striving to benefit himself. We see this in the following Scriptures:

Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. (John 12:3-6)

We all need to plan. But what is the focus of your plans? Do you ask, "Lord, what is Your will? What is Your desire? What does Your Word have to say?" Do you ask the Lord to guide you and help you? Do you confess, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23)? Is that your attitude? Or are you more like Judas, constantly planning to benefit yourself?

In the upper room Judas asked, "Lord, is it I?" But when he was identified he wasn't willing to repent. We need to look at our hearts and ask with some serious sincerity, "Lord, am I a Judas?" We need to pray, "Lord, if I am a Judas, save me from myself." If you humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, Christ will save you from destruction.

Judas did not walk in the light of Christ's presence, even though he heard the teachings of Jesus and worked with Him daily. By indulgence in sin he invited the temptations of Satan, and instead of overcoming, his experience grew darker. This is just what Jesus said would happen. "Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth" (John 12:35).

Judas had high expectations of being someone great in the kingdom of Christ. But because he was not walking in the light of truth and appreciating his privileges as a disciple of Christ, he

The Betrayal

did not realize where the darkness of sin and selfishness would take him.

We all have evil traits, characters that are defective. We are in need of the grace of God. When we begin to walk with Christ, He will reveal our evil traits to us. He also gives us the grace to overcome them. By His Spirit we war against the flesh.

God wants to bring us to the point where those evil tendencies are swallowed up in the love and grace of Christ. Then, while walking in the Spirit, we will gain the victory in Jesus. However, if we indulge in sin and are not walking in the light, evil character traits will gain the ascendancy. In the life of the true Christian, Christ's spirit and character predominate. The following Scripture makes this clear:

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. (Romans 6:16–18)

Jesus often had to tenderly and plainly rebuke His disciples for their errors. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Revelation 3:19). The disciples did not always readily accept Jesus' counsel to them, individually or as a group, yet their hearts were continually drawn to Christ. Peter, when Jesus asked if he and the other disciples would turn away from Him, said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:68–69). However, there came a time in Judas's experience where, in heart if not in word, he began to turn away from Christ. Sadly, his heart was probably never united to the Lord.

Judas had responded with impatience at the favor Jesus showed toward Mary at the feast of Simon. He was upset at Christ's gentle

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ’s Life

but plain rebuke at his pretence of concern for the poor, which revealed a lack of love for his Master. Now the evil in his heart began to take shape as he entered into a plan to betray his Lord. The Scripture records these sad words:

Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him. (Matthew 26:14–16)

By becoming the slave of sin rather than the servant of Christ, Judas unknowingly gave himself to Satan, which led to even greater sin. Judas never came to the point of surrendering himself fully to Christ. He did not give up his worldly ambitions of securing a high position in the Messiah’s new kingdom. Apparently he had a love for money, because Scripture says he cared not “for the poor; but ... he was a thief” (John 12:6). While Judas appeared to be a disciple of Christ, he did not submit to Christ’s spirit, His word, and His ministry. He wanted the advantages of being close to Christ yet he retained his own judgment and opinions, and he cultivated a disposition to criticize and accuse. Judas was behind many of the arguments among the disciples as to who should be the greatest in the kingdom.

We all have our individual opinions, but they need to be surrendered to a “Thus saith the Lord.” We need to constantly ask, “What is Your will, O God?” It is not in the nature of man to direct himself. That’s where the struggle often comes. We want Christ and the advantages of His kingdom, yet we want to retain our own judgment and opinions. However, that is not the way of Christ.

God wants us to retain our unique personalities, but He also wants us to be changed. He wants us to be yielded to Him so that He may guide and direct us. The beautiful part is, the more we yield to Christ as the apostle John did, the more we yield to His word as John did, the more we desire and love to serve Christ and obey Him. Then following His will becomes a delight.

Judas had the same opportunities the other disciples had to experience a change of heart and mind. He listened to the same

The Betrayal

lessons of the Master. However, the practice of the truth, which is required in Christ's kingdom, was ever in conflict with the desires and purposes of self. There was warfare between the flesh and the spirit in Judas's life. This is the case in the life of every soul who has been drawn to Christ. The problem comes when we continue to yield to the flesh and our desires, our purposes, our judgments, and our opinions instead of Christ's Spirit and word.

Judas did not give up his ideas to receive the wisdom of heaven. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). We need to recognize our need, but we cannot even do that by ourselves; it is the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit strove with Judas and with all the disciples. He strives with us as well. The Spirit wants us to recognize our need of Christ and salvation. However, many, like Judas, yield just enough to begin to make a profession. They may go to church regularly and maybe even minister. However, their character is not fully yielded to Christ's will and way, and the desire to follow their own ideas and opinions remains strong. It grows stronger and stronger, until one day they steal from the church, or commit adultery or some other sin.

In reply to Peter's confession of faith in Christ, Jesus said, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray Him, being one of the twelve" (John 6:70-71). The devil had a hold on Judas long before the actual betrayal. The devil has a hold on some people's hearts today as well, even before they commit grave or public sins.

When we come to Christ we are filled with sin. We struggle with ungodly habits and practices. Yet by the power and grace of Christ, as we come to love Him and know Him, we are strengthened to overcome. Then, instead of cherishing sin, we cherish the love of God and we want to overcome. As we yield our hearts and minds to God, we will obtain victory.

It is perilous to our Christian experience and our hope of eternal life if we allow sinful thoughts or habits into our lives. One cherished sin will work like cancer, growing imperceptibly and continually weakening the body until the fateful diagnosis is made

and our very life is threatened. Little by little, sin will debase what God intended to be a noble and upright character. Through the indulgence of even one evil habit, the defenses of the soul are broken down and Satan is given opportunity to influence and lead us astray. All the while, like Judas, we think we are Christ's disciples. That is the power of sin. That's why we cannot leave any opening for sin. We must ever be seeking God, asking Him to help us and save us, to give us the spirit of repentance and a willingness to serve Him. Sin that is not overcome eventually overcomes us.

Each of us is under the control of either Christ or Satan. Some people have the mistaken notion that they can be free of either. They say, "I don't want to become a Christian because I want to be free." But if you are in sin, you are not free. If you are a professed Christian but have unconfessed and unforsaken sin in your life, you are not free. You have a death sentence hanging over you. Satan is influencing you, guiding you according to his will. There is no neutrality in warfare. We are either on the side of Christ or on the side of Satan.

Jesus gave one last warning to His followers that applies equally to those who live in the last hours of this earth's history, our very own time. "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:12). Jesus was not speaking just of the conditions prevailing in the world but among the people of God. Because of the abundance of iniquity, compromise, and sin, many who love Christ would begin to accept and then partake in iniquity. Over time their love for Christ evaporates or grows cold. It is only "he that shall endure unto the end ... [who] shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13).

As we review the steps that led to Judas's downfall, may each of us learn that we must "take heed, ... lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12).

- Judas had a form of godliness, but denied the power.
- Judas denied Christ in his daily fellowship with Him.
- Judas yielded to temptation.

The Betrayal

- Judas had habits of dishonesty.
- Judas was not a doer of Christ's words, but a hearer only.
- Judas did not open his heart to receive the power of divine grace.
- Judas shunned the truth that exposed his errors.
- Judas made plans to benefit himself.
- Judas did not surrender his heart to Christ.
- Judas followed worldly ideas and ambitions and allowed them to motivate him.
- By not overcoming sin, sin overcame him and he became a slave of Satan.

What will it be, my friend? Will you be a Judas and betray Christ, or will you repent? "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15). I pray that it may be the Lord. In Jesus' name, amen!

Chapter Four

Christ Taken Captive and Arraigned Before Annas

In this chapter we are going to focus on what Jesus went through after He was taken as a prisoner in the garden of Gethsemane, as well as some of the actions and attitudes of those involved in Christ's trial. Here we will find lessons for us today.

Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons. Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. (John 18:3–5)

And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss Him. But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss? (Luke 22:47–48).

Jesus' question to Judas was an appeal to his heart and conscience, though by now he was totally under the devil's control and did not hear Christ's tender appeal. Heaven was going to glorify Christ, as His divinity was to be made known, for we read next: "As soon then as He had said unto them, I am He, they went backward, and fell to the ground" (John 18:6). The sin-hardened religious leaders and unbelieving soldiers fell prostrate before the majesty of heaven.

Soon, however, the glory of God passes, and these men regain their composure. As they approach, Christ asked them again,

“Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am He: if therefore ye seek Me, let these go their way: That the saying might be fulfilled, which He spake, Of them which thou gavest Me have I lost none” (John 18:7–9). What love Christ shows here for His disciples, even though they had disappointed Him with their lack of concern and sleepiness in the garden as He struggled alone. Further, He knew they would soon forsake Him, for He had foretold it.

Those who were gathered to take Christ captive had just seen a supernatural presence from heaven that caused them to fall to the ground. How could this event be so soon banished from their mind? The answer is found in the fact that “men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved” (John 3:19–20).

The manifestation of the divinity of Christ that caused the mob to fall backward should have spoken to the hearts of Judas, the priests, the soldiers, and all who were present. It should also have confirmed the disciples in their faith and saved them from the dark hours before them when their faith was to be bitterly tried.

Another event that demonstrated that Jesus was the Son of God should have aroused the consciences of all present, exposing to them their sin. “And they laid their hands on Him, and took Him” (Mark 14:46). “When they which were about Him saw what would follow, they said unto Him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And He touched his ear, and healed him” (Luke 22:49–51).

Peter, who would so shamefully deny his Lord a short time later, was now zealous for his master. “Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:10–11).

Jesus, though held by the soldiers and perhaps bound by cords, released Himself and reached over to heal the servant's ear that had been severed. Despite this wonderful healing, the mob, the

Christ Taken Captive and Arraigned Before Annas

leaders, the Roman soldiers, and even His own disciples did not understand what they were seeing. So it would be over and over through the hours leading to the cross. The Spirit of God strove, and consciences were aroused, but the darkness of men's hearts prevailed. Once again it seemed men loved darkness more than the light.

Normally in such a tense situation, there would have been a heated battle, with many deaths and injuries. But the presence of Christ worked to keep the situation calm, another evidence of the influence of heaven prevailing on this night of darkness and evil deeds. The disciples were no doubt afraid and anxious as to what was to transpire. But Jesus, resting in the love of His Father and fully conscious of the path He was entering, declared, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" (Matthew 26:53-54).

Before being bound and led away captive, Jesus looked upon the elders and priests, and His words were brought home to their consciences by the Holy Spirit.

Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves?
(Luke 22:52)

Jesus conducted His ministry openly, and all could see and judge for themselves if it was of God. But the darkness of this night represented all too well the darkness of the hearts of the religious leaders. Therefore it was under cover of darkness that they were led to do their perverse deeds. "Be ye come out, as against a thief?" Was Jesus a thief? Of course not. Did He need to be captured and intimidated with armed soldiers? Of course not. He goes on to say:

When I was daily with you in the temple, in the day ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness then they took him, and led

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off. (Luke 22:53–54)

As the disciples saw Jesus cruelly bound and led away, they were afraid for their own safety. “And they all forsook Him, and fled” (Mark 14:50). Jesus had declared after the Last Supper, just a few hours earlier, that this would be the case. It had been prophesied hundreds of years before.

And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. (Mark 14:27, see also Zechariah 13:7.)

The disciples forsook Jesus, afraid and surprised at the turn of events. Only a few days earlier Jesus had triumphantly entered Jerusalem amidst speculative excitement that He would establish His messianic kingdom. However, in the last weeks of His ministry, and with increased emphasis in the last few days, Jesus had been telling the disciples of His soon-coming death. He told them: “Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified” (Matthew 26:2). At the same time that Jesus was telling His disciples what was soon to transpire, others were working to bring about His death.

Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people. (Matthew 26:3–5)

Now we know why it was night when they came to capture Jesus: They were afraid of the people. Sadly, however, they had no fear of God, for His Spirit had left them.

What about us? How many times do we find ourselves afraid and perplexed, in doubt and troubled? And why? Because we, like

Christ Taken Captive and Arraigned Before Annas

the disciples, do not listen to the words of Christ. Perhaps we are confused by the traditions and false teachings of the modern-day scribes and Pharisees and thus do not clearly understand Christ's words to us through the Scriptures. If we are listening to the traditions of religious leaders above the clear testimony of God's Word, we may find ourselves unable to recall the words of Christ in times of crisis, and thereby left in doubt and confusion, terrified by the circumstances we find ourselves in.

When the disciples forsook Jesus, they didn't go to their homes and villages. They did not run to a different part of Israel to hide out. They scattered, perhaps into the shadows and trees of the garden, hiding and watching what was taking place. Of all the disciples, only Peter and John regained their composure. The Scripture records that "Peter followed afar off" (Luke 22:54). However, he wouldn't identify himself with Christ, lest he also be accused.

How many of us have been like Peter and followed afar off? My friend, we need to boldly identify with Christ. We shouldn't be fearful about what others may think or say.

Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him, and led him away to Annas first; for he was father-in-law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year. (John 18:12-13)

Annas was the head of the officiating priestly family. He was once the high priest, and he was recognized by the people as someone of authority. (See Luke 3:2.) We still find this kind of arrangement today. People who are retired from high office continue to exercise control, and sometimes it's not a godly influence.

Why did the people give Annas so much deference? Was it his godliness, his knowledge of the truth, his fidelity to the principles of God? Sadly, no. It was because of his age, his experience, and the fact that five of his sons had held the position of high priest. His son-in-law was now in that position. The counsel of religious leaders is sought not because of righteousness or fidelity to the truth and integrity to the Word of God but because of their age and position.

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

The voice of God is His Word, not the words of men, not even men in positions of authority, regardless of how many years they have served. We should only give them respect so far as they live and follow a “thus saith the Lord” in attitude and practice.

Annas insisted on being present at the interrogation of Christ at this nighttime trial, for he feared that his less-experienced son-in-law, Caiaphas, and the other priests might fail to secure the condemnation of Christ that many of them desired. If the decision had been left up to the people, they would not have condemned Jesus. It was not the priests of the synagogues in the towns and villages where Jesus taught who were trying to condemn Him. The highest levels of church authority took upon themselves the task of destroying Jesus. The same is often true today.

Annas was experienced in church politics and used to securing his aims. He had a purpose. He was not looking for justice or truth. He had a predetermined plan: to destroy Jesus. And he would make every effort to gain his purpose, regardless of the mockery of truth, righteousness, and justice.

Annas had been appointed to the position of high priest by Quirinius, the Roman legate of Syria, in A.D. 6. Being a political appointee, he was trained in the art of political maneuvering. He brought to the examination and trial of Christ all the cunning and subtle deceit and manipulation he had learned over the years.

How many times has the trial of Christ been repeated through the ages against His children? The attitude has prevailed, “No matter what it takes, we are going to destroy these heretics, these fanatics, these troublers of the church.” It has been going on for centuries, and it will continue until Christ says, “It is done,” and the door of mercy shuts.

“The high priest then asked Jesus of His disciples, and of His doctrine” (John 18:19). Sounds good, doesn't it? “Bring out the evidence, Jesus. Tell us what You really believe.” Was this an opportunity for Jesus to lay out the truth clearly before the religious leaders so their misunderstandings and suspicions could be removed?

Have God's people through the ages when brought before their accusers been able to reason from the Scriptures? As with Jesus' trial that is often not the case. The accusers of Christ and His

Christ Taken Captive and Arraigned Before Annas

people have always been under the charge and guidance of Satan, the accuser of the brethren.

Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said. (John 18:20–21)

Were the religious leaders actually investigating Christ and His ministry? No. Though they questioned Jesus regarding His ministry, they were not really interested in truth or righteousness or justice. They were only interested in destroying Jesus.

Jesus gave no argument in defense. He simply said, “Look at the evidence of My ministry.” If His accusers had been willing to look at the evidence, they would have found Jesus healing the sick, cleansing lepers, and saving souls from sin and eternal death. They would have seen Jesus opening the Word of God and opening people’s minds to the love of God, which brought conviction and change of heart and life.

They knew very well what Jesus taught and what He stood for. The leaders and their agents followed Him only to find something to condemn Him for. Even when Jesus performed one of the greatest miracles of His ministry, raising Lazarus from the grave, His accusers found fault. That wonderful miracle should have brought them to their knees, giving glory to God. The Scriptures, however, record something far different

But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done. Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death. (John 11:46–53)

The priests desired to accuse Jesus of two charges. First, they sought to prove that Jesus was a blasphemer. If this charge was established, they were certain, the elders and the people would condemn Him. They believed the influence Jesus was gaining would be turned away from Him and back to themselves. The second charge they sought to establish was that Jesus was an enemy of the state, a rival for the government of Caesar.

Both charges have been used again and again in the trials of God's saints. Do you love God enough that you are willing to be falsely accused, as Jesus was? The Scripture is clear: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12).

Annas questioned Jesus concerning His disciples and His doctrine, not to learn the truth, but with the hope that Christ would say something that would give him evidence by which he could condemn Christ. He tried to manipulate Christ's words and actions to prove that He was gathering followers to Himself with the purpose of setting up a new kingdom in opposition to Caesar. However, Jesus had no secrets in regard to His life, work, or doctrines. "I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing" (John 18:20).

Annas was silenced by the forthrightness of Christ's answer. It seemed Jesus was not the least bit intimidated by His accusers. In fact, Jesus' accusers were in constant fear that He would say something regarding their own lives. For they well remembered when they tried to entrap Jesus and stone the woman caught in adultery,

Christ Taken Captive and Arraigned Before Annas

how Jesus began to write their sins in the dust, and they left in embarrassment and shame. (See John 8:3–9.)

“And when He had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so?” (John 18:22). As with Jesus, so with His saints. When brought to trial, rather than humble themselves and acknowledge their wrong, many accusers become angry and strike back, be it with words or physical abuse. We must learn from Christ’s example in His hour of trial and abuse. Christ calmly replied, “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou Me?” (John 18:23).

Jesus was not merely seeking to defend Himself from such abuse. He was seeking to appeal to their hearts and draw their attention to justice. Christ suffered keenly under the abuse and insults directed at Him, just as you or I would. Christ, the Son of God who made all things, was superior to His accusers in every way. For Jesus to be surrounded by human beings under the control of Satan was revolting to Him, though in love He longed for their souls.

Annas, having failed to secure his purpose, sent Jesus to his son-in-law, who was the serving high priest at the time. Here, for a second time, Jesus was interrogated and tried unfairly. “Now Annas had sent Him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest” (John 18:24). Caiaphas belonged to the Sadducees, the liberal theologians and priests of the Jewish religion, many of whom were enemies of Jesus. The teachings of Jesus had often been in conflict with their liberal views and misinterpretations of Scripture. Rather than humbling themselves and accepting the truth, they became upset with Christ and His doctrine.

We need to examine ourselves, because we can be enemies of Jesus by not doing what He says, by denying His will and word and not obeying His commandments.

Caiaphas was not as forceful a person as his father-in-law, Annas. However, he was severe, heartless, and unscrupulous. Annas and five of his sons had served in the position of high priest, but none of them was called of God. They used manipulation and power to gain their positions. What could be expected of men such

as the Pharisees and Sadducees but worldly attitudes and grasping for power and influence?

Though greatly lacking in moral character, these religious leaders did not appear vile to the people. Everyone thought these were great men of God and followed them accordingly. Sadly, the same situation still prevails in many churches today.

Jesus was led to Caiaphas in the early morning hours. They walked by the light of torches and lanterns. Armed soldiers escorted Jesus as if He were a dangerous criminal. And in the eyes of the religious leaders, Jesus was indeed dangerous. He was a danger to their influence and pride and false doctrines.

The attitude prevailing in the second trial, where Caiaphas was the presiding officer, was no different from the first one, only now Jesus' enemies were more desperate, having failed to secure His condemnation in the first trial.

Caiaphas and the religious leaders gathered with him would do whatever they could to destroy Jesus, no matter what it took, no matter how many lies or injustices were required.

This spirit is still with us today. It doesn't matter if something goes against the church rules, the church manual or creed, biblical principles, or our own sense of justice, some people are determined to destroy God's messengers.

Most of the priests and religious leaders had not been at the home of Annas when Jesus was brought there as a prisoner and questioned. Thus that trial could have no legal authority. Now most of the counsel was assembled, having been aroused from sleep at this early morning hour. But this trial was also illegal. People like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea and other priests who were sympathetic to the cause of Christ were no doubt missing from this unjust assembly.

When the council had assembled in the judgment hall, Caiaphas took his seat as presiding officer. The atmosphere was intense. They had Jesus in their hands now. They would soon condemn Him and destroy Him. It seemed as if Jesus had no way to escape. Everyone focused on Jesus. And what did they see?

A holy influence seemed to surround Jesus. The Spirit of God illuminated the darkened minds of Christ's enemies. Yet still they

Christ Taken Captive and Arraigned Before Annas

did not stop. From the time Jesus was taken captive in Gethsemane until Pilate delivered Him to be crucified, a heavenly influence brought strong conviction to draw them back from the path of destruction they were determined to follow. Sadly, heaven's influence was beaten back time and time again.

Chapter Five

The Second Trial— Christ Arraigned Before Caiaphas

One of the major reasons that Caiaphas sought to destroy Jesus was that he regarded Him as his rival. The root cause of the great enmity of the priesthood toward Jesus was their own pride and fear that He had too much influence, and the people were no longer under their control.

Christ was not seeking for position; He was seeking to win men's hearts to the truth. Neither do the true children of God strive with selfish desire for positions in the Christian community. They simply want the truth of God to have an influence upon hearts and lives so that people can be saved. They want God and His truth to be exalted. If you are a true messenger of God, you will have no spirit of jealousy or rivalry.

Some religious leaders get angry and uncomfortable when the truth begins to move hearts. Because their hearts are not moved by the truth, they judge things on a human level, thinking, "This person is my rival, my competitor. He is trying to take away my authority." The children of God are not competitors. We do what we do to give glory to Christ. God's messengers cry out, "Fear God and give glory to Him" (Revelation 14:7). "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake" (Psalm 115:1).

Our only desire should be to do what is right and to serve God with all our heart, mind, and soul in whatever God has called us to do.

The demons said of Jesus, "I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God." (Mark 1:24). Peter said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). The officers sent to arrest Jesus commented, "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46).

"There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto Him,

Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:1-2).

Jesus, when He walked this earth among men, was the Son of man, but He was also the Son of God. Jesus was superior to Caiaphas in every respect, by virtue of His holy and righteous character, His position as prophet and Messiah, and in His nature as the Son of God, though veiled in human flesh.

Jesus did not come saying, "Make Me high priest. Make Me the one the Jews should look to." He was not concerned with these things He was concerned with the conversion of the heart. He said, "Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21).

People asked Jesus, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" Jesus answered, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent" (John 6:28-29). Jesus was concerned with the salvation of men and establishing the truth of God in their hearts. Jesus was not seeking priestly prerogatives, influence, or the perks that went along with that position. He said, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head" (Luke 9:58). Jesus came to minister.

Some of the people gathered at this trial, under the conviction of God's Spirit, compared the vengeful deportment of Annas and Caiaphas with Christ's dignified bearing under such abuse and unfairness. The multitude hardened as they were asked the question, "Should this righteous and godly man be condemned as a criminal?"

Caiaphas perceived that there was a shift in the attitude of the counsel as sympathy toward Jesus gained ground. He desired to hasten the trial, lest the moment be lost and Christ escape once again.

This too, has been going on throughout the ages when God's servants are brought to trial. When religious leaders see the truth having an influence, they hasten the trial. The same spirit that moved upon Caiaphas is still moving on hearts today. It is the spirit of the accuser, of the devil.

The Second Trial—Christ Arraigned Before Caiaphas

Believers will not often be vindicated in the courts of the last days. My friend, do not look for vindication from men. Settle it in your heart right now that by faith you will accept your vindication from God, knowing that you are doing what is right and following the truth. Stand on His Word, though all forsake you. That is the faith we need now and in the future.

Caiaphas desired to hasten the trial but did not know how best to proceed. People who are attacking the truth are often perplexed because they are not simply attacking a person; they are attacking God Himself. And what man can stand before God?

The members of the Sanhedrin were divided. There was bitter animosity and sharp disagreements between the Pharisees and the Sadducees regarding doctrine and practice. Certain disputed points that might have been expedient to bring up in Christ's trial were avoided for fear of argument and controversy. Jesus was well aware of this. With just a few words He could have brought the esteemed Sanhedrin council into a heated debate, which could have changed the course of the trial. Many witnesses had heard Christ denounce the priests and scribes, for Jesus had publicly declared:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. (Matthew 23:25–28)

The Sadducees knew that bringing up Jesus' accusations against the Pharisees would accomplish nothing, for they often spoke of these religious leaders in similar unflattering terms. In addition, these arguments would have no influence with the

Roman officials. They too were often disgusted with the attitude of the Pharisees.

Jesus had disregarded the traditions of the Jews. And while that fact might elicit condemnation from some of the council, the Pharisees and Sadducees were in disagreement regarding the place of traditions as well. The trial momentarily came to an impasse. "And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put Him to death; and found none" (Mark 14:55). With all their scheming, they could not find anything to condemn Him on except falsehood.

May that be true of us in our trials, that we would be so faithful to God and His Word that only lies are able to condemn us.

Witness after witness came forward to condemn Jesus, but much of it was vague accusation and their testimonies were contradictory. The Scripture describes it in this way:

For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together. And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together. (Mark 14:56–59)

Early in His ministry Christ had said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). Christ often spoke in parables or used scenes from the common things of life figuratively. By the destroying of the temple He was foretelling His own death and resurrection. "He spake of the temple of His body" (John 2:21). The Jews had interpreted these words in a literal sense when Christ spoke them, for they responded, "Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?" (John 2:20).

Of all that Christ had said and done, the priests could find nothing to use against Him except this. And even then, they had to misapply these words in order to condemn Him in the eyes of the Romans.

The Second Trial—Christ Arraigned Before Caiaphas

After the Babylonian captivity, the temple and city of Jerusalem was rebuilt over many years. The Romans who now occupied Israel had been engaged in restoring and beautifying the temple, and they took great pride in it. Any claim to destroy this structure would be a cause for concern. By accusing Christ of having plans to destroy the temple, the Pharisees and Sadducees could condemn Jesus for being a religious extremist, dangerous to both the Romans and the Jews. To establish this charge, “at the last came two false witnesses, and said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days” (Matthew 26:60–61).

Patiently Jesus listened to the conflicting testimonies and the lies of men. Yet at no time did He speak up in self-defense. We might say, “Well, Jesus knew He was going to go to the cross, so what’s the use of arguing?” However, can you imagine what a struggle it must have been for Jesus? Everything that was being said against Him was false. Yet as prophecy had declared, Jesus “as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth” (Isaiah 53:7). He knew His innocence, His holiness, that He was the Son of God. Yet because of His love for these men and for all mankind, He submitted to this mockery and abuse. To all the charges, “Jesus held His peace” (Matthew 26:63).

Unfortunately for the religious leaders, the accusation against Christ was still making no headway toward an indisputable verdict of a crime worthy of death. Caiaphas was becoming desperate. Christ must be forced to condemn Himself. “And the high priest arose, and said unto Him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? But Jesus held His peace. And the high priest answered and said unto Him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God” (Matthew 26:62–63).

So far as the Scripture record is concerned, this is the first mention of seeking God in Jesus’ trial. There was no real desire to know God’s will. Calling on God’s name was simply a formality, an expression designed to show authority. Their own will and way was the only thing they wanted.

Despite the impassioned plea of Caiaphas to “tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God” (Matthew 26:63), the true

knowledge of Christ and of His mission and His relationship to God was not the purpose of the question. Over and over Jesus had told the multitudes, His disciples, and the religious leaders, "Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me: or else believe Me for the very works' sake" (John 14:11).

At this late hour, would Caiaphas and the priestly class truly listen to Christ? Jesus had spent three years, by word and deed, telling them who He was. He said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). They had heard Christ's teaching and seen miracles. Would they now be convinced of the truth of Christ's authority as the Messiah and Son of the Most High God? No. Time and again God spoke to the men involved in the trial of Christ by His Spirit, but they would not listen.

In answer to Caiaphas's impassioned plea, Jesus told him, "Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64). Praise God, Jesus is coming again. "When this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54).

When we lay our loved ones in the grave, to all human surroundings and circumstances it can seem hopeless. Yet we trust in God's Word. We trust in the love of Christ and in His promise to come again and to redeem us and raise us from the grave. The words of Jesus, as recorded here in the trial, are a blessed hope.

While Jesus' words are a great encouragement to our faith, notice how Caiaphas reacted to them. "Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard His blasphemy" (Matthew 26:65).

Human beings can come to such a point in their rejection of Christ and His truth that the very words of Scripture are used to do away with the truth.

When Jesus answered Caiaphas, He knew that what He said would be used to condemn Him. Did He fear to speak the truth, knowing it would mean His death sentence?

The Second Trial—Christ Arraigned Before Caiaphas

God's servant Daniel did not hide the truth. He continued to pray to the Lord even though doing so meant the lions den. (See Daniel chapter 6.) Daniel's three friends did not hide their faith either. They stood firm and refused to bow to the king's image, though disobedience meant death in the fiery furnace. (See chapter 3.) The same has been true of God's children throughout the ages. We must stand for truth even if the truth we profess becomes the instrument of our persecution and condemnation. We must follow the example of our Lord.

Jesus acknowledged His relationship to God and claimed that He would come again in power as a conquering king. He declared, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64). When Christ acknowledged His divinity, I believe it was not only spoken but also seen and felt, as the divinity of Christ flashed through His humanity.

In Christ's answer to Caiaphas, He spoke of the time when the scenes at the trial would be reversed. For "He is Lord of lords, and King of kings" (Revelation 17:14). At His coming, men will cry out, "Hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Revelation 6:16). When the Lord comes He "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts" (1 Corinthians 4:5).

The words of Christ startled the high priest, for the sect of the Sadducees had denied the doctrine of the resurrection. In momentary horror his mind came under fearful conviction, "for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matthew 7:2).

But the deep conviction of the Spirit was soon replaced by a corresponding darkness, and the spirit of the dragon was manifested.

Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death. (Matthew 26:65–66)

Caiaphas sought to show his horror at Christ's supposed blasphemy. However, this act was deeply significant. For the high priest to tear his robes was to separate himself from God. Caiaphas and those in the council had long accustomed themselves to following the commandments of men rather than the Word of God, and they did not seem to understand the significance of this act. Though it was done to influence the judges and secure Christ's condemnation, the high priest had actually condemned himself.

Notice what the law said regarding this matter: "And he that is the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, nor rend his clothes" (Leviticus 21:10).

The high priests, as God's representatives, were to be upright in character and in no wise mar the glory of God in their dress or by their actions. Though the Jews had a tradition of rending their clothes at the death of a friend or loved one, the high priest was not to do this. "And Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons, Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people: but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the Lord hath kindled" (Leviticus 10:6).

Human traditions and the commandments of men had set aside God's clear command regarding the conduct of the high priest. Men had declared that in the case of blasphemy a priest could rend his robes and yet be guiltless. But the commandments of men can never replace the commandments of God. (See Mark 7:6-7.)

After rejecting Christ's testimony that He was the Son of God and would come again, the leaders "spit in His face, and buffeted Him; and others smote Him with the palms of their hands, Saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote Thee?" (Matthew 26:67-68). "And when they had blindfolded Him, they struck Him on the face, and asked Him, saying, Prophecy, who is it that smote Thee?" (Luke 22:64). Luke adds that Christ was blindfolded when receiving this abuse, but blindfolding Christ did not free His assailants from the watchful eye of heaven and the condemnation they would receive for what they were doing.

The Second Trial—Christ Arraigned Before Caiaphas

We too, are held accountable in God's eyes for this beating when we like the people long ago neglect the word of Christ.

The Sanhedrin pronounced Jesus worthy of death. But it was illegal to try a prisoner by night. Each meeting conducted at night represented the darkness that had overtaken the hearts of these wicked and perverse, yet religious men. Further the two nighttime trials and interrogations had no legal authority. To be legally binding, a decision had to be made during the day and before a full session of the council.

My friend, Jesus will do whatever He can to save you. Will you let Him? Or will you go down the road of the rejection of truth, neglecting His love, and be found guilty of the murder of the Son of God? May God help you. In Jesus' name, amen!

Chapter Six

Christ Before the Full Council

In the darkness of night, Christ had been taken to the home of Annas, where He was questioned in an attempt to bring some charge against Him, yet nothing worthy of condemnation could be established. In the early morning hours He was brought before Caiaphas, where Christ's supposed guilt was established based on twisted and false testimony. Three trials took place in a matter of hours, all for one purpose: to secure the condemnation of Jesus at any cost. The Scripture confirms this. "When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death" (Matthew 27:1).

When Jesus declared Himself to be the Son of God, the religious leaders charged Him with blasphemy. But the confession had been made in private, and at night. In the daylight, before a full council, if Jesus would once again claim to be the Son of God, their purpose might be gained. They could turn His claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God into a political charge of sedition, of trying to overthrow Caesar. Thus Christ's death would be assured.

And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and scribes came together, and led him into their council, saying, Art thou the Christ? tell us. And he said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe. And if I also ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go. Hereafter shall the Son of Man sit on the right hand of the power of God. Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am. And they said, What need we any further witness? For we ourselves have heard of his own mouth. (Luke 22:66-71)

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

As soon as it was day, they sought to secure Christ's legal condemnation. However the light of day did not change the darkness of their hearts. These religious leaders, who appeared so pious in public and were held in such high esteem, had so accustomed themselves to following the traditions of men above God's Word and had so often resisted the conviction of the Spirit of God that now a corresponding darkness filled their souls. Though claiming to love and serve God, the leaders of the Jews hated Him. This hatred was made plain, for they hated His Son and would not obey His law.

"The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God" (1 John 4:14–15). These leaders would not make that confession; therefore, their claim to serve God was without foundation. Because they did not really know God, they could not obey His law and instead followed their own traditions. By this they showed they were not spiritual but carnal, and "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Romans 8:7). This enmity and hatred was clearly demonstrated in the Jewish leaders' treatment of Christ. They had departed "from the faith," and thus were "giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:1–2).

My friend, if you claim to follow God, you need to ask yourself, "Am I rejecting, neglecting, or setting aside God's Word, or the convicting work of the Spirit that seeks to lead me to repentance?" If you continue to do so, no matter what your profession of belief in God may be, you are guilty of the abuse heaped upon Jesus. Those who are living in violation of God's law are showing that they hate Him.

The Roman officers declared that the Jews had gone beyond their rights as a religious council in pronouncing the death sentence upon Jesus. The Jews were now in danger of breaking the law by taking upon themselves the right of condemning a man to death, a right belonging only to the Roman authorities. The Roman officers reminded the Jews that it was even against their own law to

Christ Before the Full Council

condemn a man to death upon his own testimony. This intervention by the Romans brought a momentary stop to the proceedings.

Unable to abuse Christ physically, the priests and rulers laid aside the dignity of their office and abused the Son of God by their words, taunts, and accusations. These men, caught up as they were in the spirit of Satan, seemed not to know or care that the God they claimed to serve was watching. Truly, heaven that day faithfully recorded every abuse against the Lord of glory. One day these men would see Him, when “He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him” (Revelation 1:7).

These men who rejected and abused Christ, along with all the lost who are alive at Christ’s coming, will face a scene of anguish and horror. The Bible describes it this way:

And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. (Revelation 6:15–16)

One day, my friend, “every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12). We can doubt it, we can ignore it, but that does not change the reality that there is coming a day when we “shall give account to Him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead” (1 Peter 4:5). Let us not be like those of Jesus’ day who were religious and zealous for God, yet by following the blind religion of men rejected the Son of God. We have the testimony of the events of long ago, and of the Word of God, and of God’s Spirit reproofing our hearts. “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” (Hebrews 2:3).

Chapter Seven

Christ Brought Before Pilate and Herod

After condemning Christ in the full council, the priests led Jesus to Pilate in what would be the fourth examination in less than twelve hours. Never had there been any justice; never had there been any opportunity for Christ to vindicate Himself. For the priests and the rulers had determined that no matter what, Jesus would be killed.

Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover. (John 18:28)

These religious men are about to keep the feast of the Passover, the great feast ordained by God to commemorate the Hebrews' deliverance from Egypt, which also pointed to the coming Messiah. In conjunction with the Passover was the Feast of Unleavened Bread, then leaven a symbol of sin was to be put aside. Paul wrote, "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8). These religious men were so concerned with keeping the Passover that they dared not enter into the judgment hall of a pagan ruler. If they had done so, they would be ceremonially defiled. Yet they seemed not to know or care that their hearts were defiled with murder and hatred of a satanic nature.

We too, can come to such a point in the rejection of God and His word that we exhibit hatred toward His servants and yet still want to continue our religious ceremonies. If we neglect, despise, and ignore the Scriptures, if we resist the voice of the Spirit of God,

we will develop the same unreasonable hatred against God's truth as these Jewish leaders did so long ago.

“And the whole multitude of them arose, and led Him unto Pilate” (Luke 23:1). Christ now stood before Pilate, the Roman governor, bound as if He were already a guilty and condemned criminal. Surrounding Christ was the ever-present guard of soldiers, and the hall was filled with spectators. Just outside the entrance stood the judges of the Sanhedrin, the priests, rulers, elders, and people who had been drawn by curiosity and the excitement of the moment. Yet all feared entering the hall of Pilate lest they be defiled.

Who attended the trial besides the Jewish religious authorities? The Scriptures merely say, “and the people” (Luke 23:13). They were caught up in the moment, moved by the impassioned pleas of the priests as Jesus was rushed through the streets of Jerusalem to Pilate's judgment hall.

Many people in the churches today are like those caught up in the excitement of Jesus trial. They are not ruled by the principles of God's Word; they are not yielding heart and mind to the Spirit. They are moved by the pressures and flattery of the leadership, by the way things are in society, by the standards of others in the church. They don't think for themselves by following godly principles.

Scripture reveals another group of blind men who also have a great profession for God. Christ calls them “lukewarm.” They are represented by the Laodicean church, the church of the last days, our day. It represents the state of the majority of professed Christians at the end of time. Jesus says of them, “Thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17). Further He says, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20). Jesus is not in the hearts of many professed believers. Those who do not repent will be guilty of the rejection of the Son of God, just like the Jewish leaders so long ago.

Christ Brought Before Pilate and Herod

Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man? They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee. (John 18:29–30)

Did anyone answer the question, “What has this man done?” No. They couldn’t come up with anything. They simply said to Pilate, “By the basis of our authority as representative men of the Jews, we would not bring this man before you if He wasn’t evil and vile and worthy of death. Pilate, you don’t need to concern yourself with making any kind of formal judgment or examination of this man. He is guilty. Take it by our authority.”

By evading Pilate’s request for a confirmation of the accusations against Christ and instead stressing their authority, they hoped to impress him with a sense of their importance. They hoped Pilate would accept their request without going through the normal procedures of examination. The Jewish leaders were anxious to have Christ’s sentence of death ratified quickly, for they knew the people who had been touched by the healing hand and ministry of Christ could give a testimony far different from the lies they were using to condemn Him.

And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King. (Luke 23:2)

They brought against Christ the charge of “perverting the nation.” Yet what moral perversion could Christ be involved in that would elicit any response from Roman officials?

There was much perversion in the world in Jesus’ day, but that charge would not get anywhere with the Roman authorities. As in our day, so in the days of Christ, it is often the religious leaders who are responsible for the perversion of truth and the subsequent perversion of men’s hearts.

Notice what they charged Jesus with next: “forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ a King”

(Luke 23:2). Now we have something to interest the Romans! This person is leading a tax revolt!

They accused Jesus, saying, "He is encouraging the people to stop paying taxes. In addition He wants to make Himself a king." Was this true? Did Jesus come to pervert the nation? Hardly. He came to lift the people up from their sins by establishing the kingdom of grace in their hearts. He called people to give to God what belongs to Him, and to give what belongs to Caesar to him. He said there is no other king and God but the Lord Jehovah. Jesus taught, "My kingdom is the kingdom of the heart that is touched by the grace of God, changed from a life of sin to a life of righteousness." But that's not what the religious authorities said. They twisted Jesus' words and once again lied, hoping they might condemn the innocent Lamb of God.

The Jewish leaders understood they had to hide their hatred of Christ lest it appear to Pilate this case was a matter of religious prejudice and interpretation of the Jewish laws. If this became plain to Pilate, they would have no case, and they might invite Pilate's anger. They had to make it appear that Jesus' work and ministry was actually working against the law of Rome. Then He would be punished as a political offender.

Only a few days earlier the Pharisees had tried to entrap Jesus.

And they watched him, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor. And they asked him, saying, Master, we know that thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest thou the person of any, but teachest the way of God truly: Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no? But he perceived their craftiness, and said unto them, Why tempt ye me? Shew me a penny. Whose image and superscription hath it? They answered and said, Caesar's. And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's. (Luke 20:20-25)

Christ Brought Before Pilate and Herod

Many had heard this exchange between Christ and the spies sent to entrap Him, even Roman soldiers. Scripture records their reaction: “And they could not take hold of His words before the people: and they marveled at His answer, and held their peace” (Luke 20:26). Despite this, the priests once again perjured themselves as “they began to accuse Him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ a King” (Luke 23:2).

Three accusations were made against Christ, without any proof or any basis in fact. The priests knew that what they were saying was a lie. These people who claimed to keep the commandments of God, who claimed to be Jehovah’s true representatives, built their accusations against Christ on three lies.

Jesus warned that this can happen to us too. He said, “Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for My name’s sake, because they know not Him that sent Me” (John 15:20–21).

How did Pilate react to these accusations? “And Pilate asked Him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And He answered him and said, Thou sayest it. Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man” (Luke 23:3–4). Basically Pilate was saying, “He is innocent. There is no case here.” We need to remember that; lock that in your mind. We are going to learn something about Pilate’s indecision and compromise, and his desire to please the Jewish leaders that would override his own sense of right and justice. His case may speak to our own hearts, because there are many today with the spirit of Pilate.

Pilate discerned a difference in Jesus. As he looked at this man who had been insulted and mocked and accused yet without any angry retaliation, he knew He could not be as unjust as His accusers, who were strident and intolerant in their treatment and attitude toward Christ. Pilate was pagan, a man who existed to simply exercise the prerogatives of power and the privileges that went with it. He was not a moral man. Yet he could see the difference between Christ and those who were accusing Him.

Pilate, hoping to learn the truth from Christ and to escape the commotion of the crowd, took Jesus aside privately and questioned Him. "Art Thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest" (Matthew 27:11). Jesus did not answer Pilate directly. Jesus understood that the reason He was taken aside and the reason Pilate had acknowledged that He was guiltless was that Pilate was under the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. Pilate was a worldly man who had been guilty of many sins, yet Jesus desired his salvation. Jesus wants to save everyone. That is the nature of God's great heart and spirit of love. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die" (Ezekiel 33:11).

Jesus gave Pilate an opportunity to acknowledge his conviction. "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:10). Jesus answered him, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of Me?" (John 18:34). Pilate understood Christ's meaning, for He was really saying, "Pilate, what has prompted your question? Is it the accusations of the priests, or is there a desire to receive light from God?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered Thee unto me: what hast Thou done?" (John 18:35).

Jesus said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence" (John 18:36). Jesus was saying, "Yes, Pilate, I am a king. But that does not concern Caesar or you. I have not come to overthrow Rome. I have come to establish a spiritual kingdom in the hearts of men."

Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto

Christ Brought Before Pilate and Herod

the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all.
(John 18:37–38)

Pilate's heart was stirred. "What is truth?" he inquired. But he did not wait for an answer.

How often we do as Pilate did! We ask God to show us the way, to show us His will and His truth, to give us direction in our lives, but then we don't wait on the Lord to answer. We go running off to something new, something we think more important.

Pilate was the governor of Judea. He was in charge. He could have taken all morning to interview Jesus, to learn from Him. He could have dispersed the crowd or at least sent his soldiers to quiet them down and spent time alone with Jesus. However, he was taken in by the pressure from the Jews.

How often have you refused or neglected to take time with Jesus when you had the opportunity? The things of this world and the responsibilities we have seem, at the time, to be more important. So we set Jesus aside to go take care of these other things.

The clamor of the crowd outside recalled Pilate to the interests of the hour. Going out to the Jews, Pilate declared to the chief priests and to the people, "I find no fault in this man" (Luke 23:4). Look at the reaction of the Jewish leaders to Pilate's declaration of the innocence of Christ.

And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place. When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilaean. And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time. (Luke 23:5–7)

How many times has this sad history of Pilate been repeated? Pilate had declared that Jesus was innocent. "I find no fault in Him." However, because the Jews responded with relentless pressure and accusations, Pilate said in his heart, *I don't want to deal with this. It's too much for me. Let someone else bear the responsibility for this decision.*

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

My friend, when it comes to salvation, to truth, and to the things of God, no one else can make decisions for you. Not your father or mother, your wife or your husband, your church, your pastor, not even circumstances. You must make the decisions to do right for yourself. Pilate thought someone else could make his decisions for him. That was a fatal mistake. It will be just as fatal for us.

Pilate could see that Jesus was innocent and that His accusers were the guilty ones, trying to condemn an innocent man on false pretence.

Many people who profess faith in God see the injustice and falsehood of programs and doctrines that come into the church. But because doing what is right is inconvenient or uncomfortable, or might make them unpopular, they give the responsibility to somebody else.

I tell you, my friend, God will hold each of us accountable. All of us are in control of our own eternal destiny. God is calling us to do what is right simply because it is right, based upon the Word of God.

Pilate, hardened sinner though he was, twice declared Jesus innocent. Therefore, justice demanded that Christ be immediately released. However, Pilate did not desire to bear the ill will and accusations of the people. Though he was the governor, he was afraid of what the people were going to say and how they would react.

Pilate knew if he refused to give Jesus into the priest's custody to carry out their sentence, disorder would ensue. He had probably gained and kept his position because he sought to please men. He knew how to get what he wanted by saying the right things at the right time. Doing that may get you somewhere in this world, sadly, often times even in the church; however such a character will not get you to heaven.

As Christ was led to Herod, the Scripture records, "And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see Him of a long season, because he had heard many things of Him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him" (Luke 23:8). Herod had not been convicted by what he had heard about Jesus.

Christ Brought Before Pilate and Herod

He was simply a curiosity seeker. He wanted to see the miracles of Jesus firsthand.

“Then he questioned with Him in many words; but He answered him nothing.” And all the while, “the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him” (Luke 23:9–10). Jesus remained silent. He had no words for Herod because Herod had sinned away his day of grace. Herod had killed John the Baptist, and his troubled conscience soon gave way to a hardened conscience. Unlike in Christ’s trials with the Jews and before Pilate, where at times the Spirit strove to lead men to repentance, the Holy Spirit was now silent. For Herod there was no more opportunity for repentance and salvation.

Herod was irritated by this silence and moved with anger. Doesn’t this man know who I am? Doesn’t he know that I caused John to be beheaded? I have authority and power. Herod took Jesus’ silence as mockery, as a rebuke of his position. He could not convince Jesus to talk or to perform a miracle. It was as if Jesus was ignoring him. That made him even more angry.

Sadly, what took place in Herod’s heart takes place in many hearts today. People have become so accustomed to ignoring God that God says they are “joined to idols: let ...[them] alone” (Hosea 4:17).

What if Jesus had performed a miracle then and there? Would Herod, the soldiers, or the priests have been convinced? No. Jesus had said earlier in His ministry, “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (Luke 16:31). Miracles cannot convince the soul unwilling to hear the word of Christ. If Jesus had performed a miracle, Herod would still have been filled with a spiteful spirit, and the scribes and priests would still not have believed that Jesus was the Christ. Scripture records that in response to Jesus’ silence, and in a show of his authority, “Herod with his men of war set Him at nought, and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him again to Pilate. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves” (Luke 23:11–12).

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

Isn't it sad that these two men settled an old quarrel over the trial of Christ? Herod's conscience had been desensitized by sin and Jesus had no word for Him, while with Pilate, over and over the Spirit of God spoke to his heart. Yet both of them rejected Christ and salvation. What will these two men feel and think when they stand before Christ on trial for their lives? "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Chapter Eight

Christ's Final Arraignment and Condemnation

How must Christ have felt undergoing all this abuse and mockery, knowing He would soon die for a world that would largely reject Him? God was manifested in Christ, for He was “Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matthew 1:23). What a trial for the Son of God to face at the hands of those whom He had created and was soon to die for. What an exhibit of God’s great love and the patience that has been extended to this world and to you and me. Great is the mystery of godliness; great is the mystery of redeeming love.

After Herod’s examination and mockery of Christ, He was taken back to Pilate.

And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverts the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him. (Luke 23:13–14)

This is now the third time Pilate declared Jesus innocent. Even Herod, despite the mockery heaped upon Christ, could find no fault, for Pilate said, “Nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto Him” (Luke 23:15). Pilate once again acknowledged the innocence of Jesus based on Herod’s failure to find anything against Him.

Pilate was under conviction and almost believed this man was the Son of God as He claimed. But consider what he says: “I will therefore chastise Him, and release Him” (Luke 23:16).

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

Pilate had been weak and indecisive all along, but here he really shows his weakness. Though He had declared Jesus innocent, he was willing to have Christ scourged to appease His accusers. Pilate sacrificed justice and principle in order to compromise with the multitude who were clamoring for the death of Christ. To please those whom he knew were accusing Jesus out of hatred and jealousy, he chose to please the crowd rather than do what was right.

The boisterous crowd of priests, and the mob that followed them to the judgment hall, took advantage of Pilate's indecision and willingness to scourge an innocent man. They worked with even more earnestness to press Pilate for the life of Jesus.

My friend, when you are indecisive about following the truth of God, you will not be left alone. The devil is going to try to lead you further and further from the truth. He will press on you just as these Jews pressured Pilate to go further and further in ignoring principle and justice. If we refuse to stand for the right, we will be making the same tragic mistake as Pilate. And we are going to have the devil and all his angels working to take us down to eternal loss.

If only Pilate had followed his convictions that fateful morning. The Jews would not have dared to dictate to him, the governor of Judea, who had the authority to dismiss the crowd and set Jesus free. The priests' hatred against Christ was such they would have found a way to put Him to death on their own, braving the possible backlash from the people and the Roman authorities, but Pilate would not have shared the guilt for Christ's death. Pilate violated his long dormant but now awakened conscience time and again that day, yet he continually set aside the voice of conscience rather than exercising justice. Because of this stifling of conscience he was helpless in the face of the clamoring priests and rulers.

Even at this late hour Pilate was not left to act upon human reason alone, for once again the love of God made known to him the path he was descending that would lead to eternal loss.

Praise God for His loving mercy. God continually tried to save Pilate, Caiaphas, the priests and rulers, and the people from ruin. However, we cannot afford to presume upon the goodness of God. If we do, we risk making the same fatal mistake Pilate did.

Christ's Final Arraignment and Condemnation

While Pilate was hesitating as to whether to yield to the priests and rulers or set Christ free, Scripture records that a message from God warned Pilate of the danger he was in. "When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him" (Matthew 27:19).

Scripture is silent regarding the nature of the dream; however, because this was a warning from heaven, I am sure Pilate's wife must have seen Jesus on trial in the judgment hall, and His unjust treatment before the priests and rulers who were filled with envy and malice and madly accusing Christ. She must have seen Christ's unjust condemnation, and the truthfulness of His claim to be the Son of God. Whatever the nature of her dream, it terrified her. When she awoke she immediately wrote to her husband, warning him. "Have thou nothing to do with that just man." Was there more detail in the note than what was recorded by Matthew? Perhaps there was. But regardless of what the message said, it should have spoke to Pilate's already troubled and wavering heart. This note, brief as it may have been, was enough, for Pilate already had evidence of Jesus' innocence.

I have often wondered if Pilate thought more deeply about the events of that day as he made his way home after the morning's trial, or after his wife shared her dream in more detail. There is no record of Pilate ever repenting. In fact, he later lost his position and took his own life.

Pilate's sad story continues in the lives of many today. Instead of exercising his authority as the governor of Judea and making a wise and just decision to let Jesus go, he chose instead a plan that seemed wise and prudent to him. By this plan he would be released from the responsibility of making a right but unpopular decision and thereby incurring the anger of the Jews. He believed this plan would allow Jesus to be set free. Pilate utilized a custom that could be used, he thought, to secure the release of Jesus.

Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. Therefore when

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ’s Life

they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? For he knew that for envy they had delivered him. (Matthew 27:15–18)

Was Pilate’s plan, based on human custom and reasoning, going to gain Jesus release? No.

“But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus” (Matthew 27:20). The religious rulers did their best to prejudice and inflame the minds of the people, and the crowd succumbed to mob mentality. The people, however, were without excuse, for they had minds of their own.

Who is speaking to your heart? Are you listening to priests and rulers who want to destroy the truth? Millions of people down through the ages, even to this day, have been moved by the religious and political rulers of their day. We need to be moved by the truth of God’s Word alone.

We see in the trial of Christ what happens when pastors are corrupt. The Jewish leaders were in a position where they were able to influence the people to prefer Barabbas over Jesus, to follow the spirit of the world rather than the principles of God.

Now, who was Barabbas, and why would Pilate believe that the people would choose Christ over him? Barabbas was under sentence of death, for he had raised an insurrection and committed murder. He was a vile, hardened criminal. The accusations against Jesus were abundantly true of Barabbas. Pilate thought that by giving the people a choice between Barabbas, a man whose very countenance spoke of his criminality, and the innocent Savior, the Jews could be aroused to a sense of justice. Pilate thought, *If I set Barabbas and Christ side by side before the people, surely they will accept the good over the evil.* Pilate’s plan, however, was doomed to failure, for unconverted human nature, no matter how religious it is, will rarely choose the good over the bad.

Men become confused when they reject the convicting voice of God’s Holy Spirit and His Word, when they refuse to do the right thing because of the pressure of the crowd and because it is

Christ's Final Arraignment and Condemnation

inconvenient. Hoping to gain sympathy for Jesus, Pilate turned to the crowd directly and declared, "Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called the Christ?" (Matthew 27:17). Pilate had rejected truth and righteousness and justice, yet he appealed to the people's sense of those same virtues.

The crowd had been manipulated to follow the dictates of the religious leaders. Scripture records, "But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them" (Mark 15:11). The crowd wasn't going to do the right thing.

Pilate's character is reenacted time and again today. Many reject God's Word, the way God tells us to do things, and follow human reasoning, believing they are doing God's will. Or they set aside God's Word and will for their own, believing good will come of it. The tendency of the human heart is to choose the easy and broad road over the narrow way.

No doubt Pilate hoped his plan to have Christ released would be successful. But what was the answer from the crowd? "And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas" (Luke 23:18). In the commotion and excitement, Pilate thought that the people had misunderstood his question. "And Pilate answered and said again unto them, What will ye then that I shall do unto Him whom ye call the King of the Jews? And they cried out again, crucify Him" (Mark 15:12-13).

How could the Jewish leaders and the crowd come to such a decision? Because Barabbas was the reflection of their own sinful hearts. Their rejection of Christ reflected how they had chosen evil over good, human traditions over God's Word, all along. What about today? Do we choose Barabbas over Christ?

"The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and My people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" (Jeremiah 5:31). As in Jeremiah's day, prophets and teachers often bring falsehood and error. Priests minister by their own authority rather than God's. And the people love to have it so. But the end result of neglecting and rejecting God's Word is ultimately the rejection of Christ.

In response to the maddened throng who clamored for Jesus' death, Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil hath He done? And they

cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify Him” (Mark 15:14). Pilate was very troubled. He didn’t want to deliver an innocent man to be crucified. Yet surely he must have known it would come to this. But the case had gone too far.

Even at this last moment, despite the clamor of the religious leaders and the crowd, Pilate had the authority to call in the soldiers and disperse them. But he allowed himself to be directed by circumstances and the religious leaders and the mob. “And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged Him, to be crucified” (Mark 15:15).

“And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe, and said, Hail, King of the Jews! And they smote Him with their hands” (John 19:2–3). After this abusive treatment, Scripture records that “Pilate therefore went forth again, and Pilate saith unto them, Behold, I bring Him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in Him” (John 19:4).

“Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!” (John 19:5). Oh, if they had only beheld the Lamb, not the man. If only they had beheld the Son of man, the Messiah. If only they had beheld with spiritual eyesight. Oh, they saw Him physically, but their hearts had become so darkened by sin and rebellion and the rejection of God’s Holy Spirit and His word that all they could see was a man whom they hated and despised for no other reason than His purity and goodness. That is where the darkness of unbelief and sin will take you.

There stood the Son of God, wearing the robe of mockery and the crown of thorns. Someday the scene will be changed, for at Christ’s second coming it is revealed in the book of Revelation, “His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. . . . And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords” (Revelation 19:12, 16).

Christ stood before His accusers, stripped, beaten, abused, and mocked for you and me. Our guilt, our transgression, and our compromise was heaped upon Him. We are responsible, not just

Christ's Final Arraignment and Condemnation

those people long ago. You and I are responsible, and the only way we can be free of that guilt is to make Him our Prince, our Lord, and our Savior, “that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him. The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; and went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? (John 19:6–10)

Despite claiming Jesus' innocence, Pilate was willing to give Jesus up to be crucified in order to please the crowd. However, when Pilate heard the Jews declare, “We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God,” he became afraid. One last time Pilate was given an opportunity to exercise his authority for the right. Pilate asked Jesus, “Whence art thou?” Now, however, because Pilate had ignored and rejected the pleas of God so many times, “Jesus gave him no answer.” Pilate responded to Jesus' silence, “Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?”

If only Pilate did have that power! At the beginning he did, but through refusal to yield to the truth and do what was right and just, he gave that power over to the mob and the religious leaders. Despite his boasting, he was now basically powerless because he would not humble his heart.

Many people claim to have authority in the church and in the world, but they won't use that influence to do what God's Word has said or to follow that which is just. They are concerned about the crowd, about their positions, about what others may say.

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. (John 19:12–13)

Having lost so many opportunities to exercise his lawful authority and release Christ, Pilate was a desperate man. The cry from the leaders—"If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend"—struck fear into Pilate. He knew that if word got back to Caesar of any questionable allegiance or administration, it could lead to removal from office or even death.

And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar. (John 19:14–15)

How many today, like the Jews of old, have no king but Caesar? Though they make a profession of religion, in reality they give heart service and allegiance to the world and its principles.

"And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will" (Luke 23:25.) Barabbas the murderer, the leader of insurrection, was now a free man. And what of Jesus? He who healed the sick and delivered the minds and bodies of men possessed of devils, who freed the sinners bound in the prison of sin, was to be condemned as the lowest and vilest of criminals.

Though millions today profess the name of Jesus, many of them are still choosing Barabbas over Christ. How? When we do not make Jesus Savior and Lord, our heart's service is divided. For, "To whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are

Christ's Final Arraignment and Condemnation

to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness” (Romans 6:16).

When Pilate saw he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. (Matthew 27:24)

Was Pilate innocent? No. He had a part to play in the crucifixion of Christ that he could not escape, especially since light and truth had been given him over and over and he rejected it. You and I have a part to play in the acceptance or rejection of Christ and His truth too. We dare not do as Pilate did, yielding to what others say, or to the threats and taunts of the world, or to the fear that we may lose our church positions or our jobs or our influence.

As Pilate washed his hands before the multitude, he must have looked once again at the clamoring mob and the peaceful but abused Savior. What thoughts and feelings was he experiencing? To this day when men know they have done wrong and yet are too weak to make things right, there is fear and self-loathing, accompanied sometimes by an outward attitude of indifference.

Pilate, turning away from Jesus, said to the Jews, “Take ye Him, and crucify Him.” Though Pilate desired to release Jesus, to do so would put his position and honor in danger. Pilate wasn’t willing to take up the cross.

Many of us are unwilling to take up the cross of self-denial and follow Jesus. We do not understand that true honor and riches come from the Lord. The riches of this life are soon gone. Far too many in the church and in the world are like Pilate. They sacrifice principle in order to avoid loss of position or the ill will of the crowd.

The Bible speaks of two ways: the broad road and the narrow road. The question is, which way will you choose? And choose we must. We are either going down the road of Pilate and the religious leaders, the way of Caiaphas and Annas and Judas, or we are going down the road of eternal life, faith, and hope, of fearing God and giving Him glory.

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

Praise God, Jesus died for our sins. The question is, will His death have been in vain? Jesus died for your sins. Will you reject Him, like Caiaphas, Annas, the rulers and elders, the crowd, and the Roman soldiers? Or will you be like the “many women ... which followed Jesus” (Matthew 27:55), who were there at the cross? Jesus died for all, but His death will not avail for us if we do not exercise faith, respond to the grace of God, and become obedient to Him. Is His death going to be effectual for you? Or will you have to reap the guilt and condemnation of the rejection of the Son of God? What will it be, my friend? The choice is yours.

Chapter Nine

Forsaken and Smitten of God

In this lesson we want to look at the Old and New Testaments to learn what Christ went through during the crucifixion. The prophet Isaiah said:

He [Jesus] was taken from prison and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken. (Isaiah 53:8)

We are going to look at the mystery of redeeming love, what took place there on Golgotha, why Jesus had to die, and what the prophet meant when he declared that He was “cut off” for you and me.

In Philippians 2:5–8 we read, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” Here is an admonition for us to partake of the mystery of godliness, a transformation of character as the mind of God becomes more fully the mind of man. The author of Philippians goes on to say that Jesus, “being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation.” Jesus didn’t think equality with God was something to cling to. Instead, He gave up His divine privileges and He “took upon Him the form of a servant.” Though Christ was equal with God, He became a servant “and was made in the likeness of men.” Jesus in heaven was in nature like God, but when He came to this earth He came in the likeness of men, “and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

Jesus being in very nature God, became a man. Going even further He humbled Himself to be crucified by the very men He

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

created. Here in Philippians we find the outline of the humility and condescension of Christ and an admonition to seek the same attitude as our own.

What lesson does the cross of Calvary have for us? Calvary presents to our sin-darkened minds that God indeed so loved the world—so loved you, my friend, and me—that He gave not one Son among many whom He could spare, but “the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). In the cross the greatest gift of heaven is bestowed. The greatest gift of all eternity was there, manifested in the Son of God as He died upon the cross. And “unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [is] the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:24).

In the revelation of love at the cross are “riches and honour ... yea, durable riches and righteousness” found (Proverbs 8:18). With the help of the Holy Spirit we need to seek “the deep things of God. ... Not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Corinthians 2:10, 13). Experiencing the redeeming love of God, revealed at the cross, is where we find love and “the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory” (1 Corinthians 2:7).

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. (1 Corinthians 2:9–10)

Let us look at this mystery of love revealed at the cross, the hidden wisdom that has the ability to change us from glory to glory through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

In Isaiah we read of Jesus, “He is despised and rejected of men.” This is not just the despising and rejection of a few soldiers, of Pilate, of the Jewish leaders and the mob of long ago. You and I have also despised and rejected Christ. “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid

Forsaken and Smitten of God

as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not” (Isaiah 53:3). Jesus was beaten, mocked, and hung upon the cross, not for anything wrong He did, but because of what you and I have done.

Jesus bore our sins and was wounded for our transgressions. In 1 John 3:4 we learn “sin is the transgression of the law.”

He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)

Praise God, we can be healed from this sinful life we have been born into. We can be healed from the sinful actions and thoughts we have cultivated.

The Bible reveals that none of us seeks after God. The only reason we have love for God, the only reason we seek after God, is that God has placed that desire in the human heart. His Holy Spirit seeks to draw us to Him; otherwise, we would have no use for God. (See Romans 3:10–11.) Despite the fact that “all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way ... the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6).

The whole planet is in rebellion. And the guilt and sin of that rebellion was placed upon Christ, who in His own life knew nothing but righteousness and holiness.

We learn further, “He was cut off out of the land of the living” (Isaiah 53:8). Two other men were crucified at the same place and time as Jesus. They also died a gruesome and horrible death. But one of the three men who hung upon those crosses was not simply a man; He was the Son of God. His death on that cross was not to pay the penalty of crime committed against the Roman Empire. Rather, He hung upon that cross to pay for the crime of a planet of individuals, including you and me, who were in rebellion against God.

Two prophets, Daniel and Isaiah, spoke of the Messiah being “cut off.” Let us look at what this means. He was cut off from the land of the living. Does that simply mean He was crucified and after a time He died? In the prophecy of Daniel 9, which deals with

the Messiah, we read, "And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for Himself" (Daniel 9:26). This refers to the seventy-week time prophecy where a day equals a year. (See Numbers 14:34.) Therefore God marked off 490 years of prophetic time from the commandment to restore and rebuild Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity until Jesus began His public ministry as the Messiah at the start of the seventieth week. And "in the midst of the week" (Daniel 9:27), or three and half years after the start of His ministry, Jesus the Messiah was to be cut off.

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). Jesus came to buy us back, to redeem us from the curse of sin, which is death. Now, some people have the mistaken notion that the law is a curse. No, the curse is the result of the violation of the law, and the condemnation and guilt and death that violation brings. Jesus came to redeem us from the curse, condemnation, and guilt of a broken law. He was "made a curse for us." Jesus took the curse upon Himself, even though He lived the law of God perfectly and was without sin. Jesus paid the ultimate penalty of death, "for the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

The execution of judgment revealed in Revelation 20 is not just the death that all living creatures experience. This is the "second death," a time when every human being who is outside of Christ stands before the judgment seat of God to receive the punishment for things done in this life. This will be a time of overwhelming guilt, condemnation, and mental anguish. The people standing before that great white throne will know they have lost eternal life. It was to experience this judgment that...

We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, [then after His ascension He was] crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. (Hebrews 2:9)

Jesus, in bearing the guilt and condemnation of "the wages of sin," which is death and the horror of separation from God, was "cut off." In the mystery of the plan of salvation, Jesus tasted death for every man. He experienced the separation, the wrath, the guilt,

the condemnation that will overwhelm the mind and heart of the one who is eternally lost.

Jesus became sin for us so that we don't have to pass through this judgment and condemnation and be eternally lost. If we accept Jesus, we will pass from death unto life, because He bore the penalty on our behalf. God is just; He upholds His law and His principles. But God is also the justifier. (See Romans 3:23–26.) God so loved man that He sent His only begotten Son to pay the penalty of man's sin. That is why Jesus was cut off.

What killed Jesus? It was the guilt and condemnation of sin that broke His heart. We read, "For He [God] hath made Him [Jesus] to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus never experienced sin, not even by a thought. But there on the cross, the wrath of God for mankind's sin was placed upon Him.

He was "made ... to be sin for us, who knew no sin" (Ibid). This holy and righteous being became a man, then as a man lived a pure and perfect life. Then He took upon Himself the guilt that belongs to you and me. No wonder it crushed out His life. If we accept this by faith, we will "be made the righteousness of God in Him" (Ibid).

The separation that caused the darkness and despair in Jesus' soul, which He first tasted in Gethsemane and finished on Calvary, exceeds the despair that the guilty will feel before the great white throne judgment. It is then that they are separated from God for all eternity because of their sin and rebellion. Then are they "cut off" from the life of God and destroyed in the lake of fire.

Then I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a flying roll. And he said unto me, What seest thou? And I answered, [this is now Zechariah answering the angel that was speaking to him in vision]. I see a flying roll; the length thereof is twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof ten cubits. Then said he unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth. (Zechariah 5:1–3)

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

Here in a vision Zechariah sees a flying roll. This roll is the curse that “goeth forth over the face of the whole earth.” What is in this roll that brings the curse?

For every one that stealeth, [that's the eighth commandment] shall be cut off as according to it; and every one that sweareth, [that's the third commandment] shall be cut off as on that side according to it. I will bring it forth, saith the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name: and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof. (Zechariah 5:3–4)

This flying roll represents the Ten Commandments, the moral law to which all men everywhere are held accountable. It is a law of righteousness showing God's standard, which is to guide the thoughts and actions of man. It is represented here as a flying roll, and its authority is over the whole world. When we steal, it condemns us. When we swear falsely, it condemns us. The moral law is not a curse; it never has been and never will be. However, “the wages of sin is death,” and those who continue in sin will be cut off. Jesus was cut off and was made a curse for us, because He took upon Himself our sin with all its guilt and shame.

Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers. For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for men stealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine. (1 Timothy 1:9–10)

The law is there to condemn the guilty, not the righteous. For the righteous have the law of God written on their hearts, and they

Forsaken and Smitten of God

delight to do God's will and obey His law. (See Hebrews 10:16–17; Psalm 40:8.)

Jesus, hanging upon the cross, experienced the guilt and condemnation of the murderer, the profane, the ungodly, the disobedient. He experienced it for you and for me and for the entire world.

To be “cut off” means to die the death that all unrepentant sinners will face because of their transgression, sin, and rebellion. Therefore, to the extent that Jesus took upon Himself the guilt and sin of all mankind from Adam onward, Jesus paid the penalty of all mankind. In this sense Jesus was cut off for the transgression of us all. He experienced the woe and anguish and wrath of God hanging upon the cross, just as the wicked will know it. While the darkness of despair Jesus felt on behalf of sinners could realize no hope beyond the grave, He died victorious and He is risen. He can give us His life if we accept His death.

“For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it. But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth” (Proverbs 2:21–22). This is a prophecy, I believe, of the new earth, when God's children will be gathered together with Him, and that day depicted in Revelation 20 when the wicked will be cut off and shall be no more.

When Proverbs 2 declares the “wicked shall be cut off from the earth,” it is not speaking of the physical death we all experience, for both righteous and wicked die. No, this is speaking of something far greater. It says “the transgressors shall be rooted out of it” (Proverbs 2:22). The final result of the wicked is to be cut off from the life of God, to be cut off from all life, to be destroyed for all eternity. Jesus experienced the guilt and condemnation that the wicked will feel when they stand before God with no hope of salvation, only “a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:27). We read of the wicked in the book of Psalms:

They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood. But the Lord is my defense; and my God is the rock of my refuge.

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

And he shall bring upon them [meaning the wicked] their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; yea, the Lord our God shall cut them off. (Psalm 94:21–23)

In this world of sin, sometimes the wicked live longer and have more prosperity. Yet the Bible says the wicked will be “cut off” from the life of God.

“But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off” (Psalm 37:38). Jesus took upon Himself the wages of sin that man will experience when he stands face to face before a holy God. Oh, my friend, we cannot even imagine the mental anguish that will be experienced at that time. But Christ bore that anguish for the world.

The Bible describes two deaths. There is the death that every living creature experiences, which is the cessation of all mental and physical functions and physical decay. Then there is a death that only human beings have to face, for human beings are the only ones of all God's creation on planet earth with a conscience and moral accountability to Him. Man as originally created was God's highest creation, made to be in the image of God.

In the Bible we read, “So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David” (1 Kings 2:10). Throughout the Old Testament, in the history of the kings of Israel and Judah, numerous times we read, “And they slept with their fathers,” meaning they died.

At one point in Jesus' life, His friend Lazarus was sick. Jesus and His disciples were some distance away when Lazarus died. Jesus said, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said the disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death; but they thought He had spoken of taking rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead” (John 11:11–14). Christ plainly states that Lazarus “sleepeth,” meaning he was dead.

When a man is dead, he is “asleep.” Death is an unconscious state when body and mind (or spirit) cease to function. Bible writers trying to grasp what this mystery might be like consistently use

the term *sleep* as a description of death. When you are in deep sleep, your wife or children could die, your bank could collapse, your business could burn to the ground, and you would know nothing of it. Such is the way of death, “in that very day his thoughts perish” (Psalm 146:4).

Paul said of King David that “after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption” (Acts 13:36). Peter says of him, “David is not ascended into the heavens” (Acts 2:34). The reason: “David slept with his fathers and was buried” (1 Kings 2:10).

Of Stephen it is recorded, “He kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep” (Acts 7:60). The Bible plainly teaches that when man dies he has no physical, mental, or spiritual awareness, for man has no inherent immortality as part of his nature.

This death or sleep is called the first death, the death of all living creatures. But praise God, it does not end there if we believe and accept the death of Jesus as our own by faith. However, those who reject God, those who live lives of rebellion and sin, will face what the Bible calls the second death.

“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power” (Revelation 20:6). We pass from death unto life when we accept Jesus as Savior and Lord, are born again, and henceforth live for Him. These partake of the first resurrection, when Jesus comes the second time.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17)

For the saints raised at the first resurrection, the second death has no power. Jesus has paid the penalty for sin, and if we by faith accept it, we will also know the resurrection of life.

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. (Revelation 20:11–13)

All the wicked of the ages will be raised up from the grave, and brought before the great white throne to hear the condemnation and sentence of eternal death. Here the wicked will learn that hell is no party, as many today carelessly express. Rather, their recognition of the rejection of God and their accountability to Him as Creator will come upon the wicked with indescribable force. And then the sentence will be executed, which is eternal death, from which there is no escape. Thank God it will not be an eternity of being tormented and punished; it is an eternal punishment in the lake of fire that will eventually go out. The only thing left will be ashes, as the wicked are gone, destroyed for all eternity.

The Bible says that Jesus “should taste death for every man” (Hebrews 2:9). He experienced the darkness of being separated from God; He knew the guilt of being a sinner before a holy God. This is what the lost of all ages will experience before being cast into the lake of fire that will eventually destroy them. The prophet Malachi described the final fate of the lost this way:

For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall

Forsaken and Smitten of God

tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 4:1–3)

Many of God's children through the ages have suffered death by slow torture, even here in the twenty-first century. People are being tortured for ethnic reasons, religious reasons, and political reasons, all abhorrent in the sight of God. Jesus was not the only one to die on a cross. Hundreds of thousands have suffered death by crucifixion. How does the death of the Son of God differ from the deaths of others who have experienced cruel and horrible deaths?

The anguish of Christ was beyond the limit of human endurance. But He was not simply a man. Scripture says of Christ, "God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16). For Christ bodily pain was not the worst agony He experienced on the cross. Another aspect of His agony exceeded His physical suffering. "For He [God] hath made Him [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21). He experienced agony for sins that were not His; they were yours and mine and mankind's. The wrath that you and I deserved was upon Him.

On the cross Jesus felt the guilt of the lost and the darkness of separation from His Father. This was what crushed His divine soul, not simply the physical pain, as great as it was. Jesus passed through the darkness of despair that the wicked will experience, who hear the words, "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: [then] there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 25:30). Jesus tasted what the wicked will experience in their despair and hopelessness.

The separation that sin makes between God and man was fully experienced by the Son of God. There was no light, no hope to encourage Christ as He hung alone upon the cross. When the wicked stand before the great white throne judgment of God they will have no hope for the future, nothing but despair and blackness and condemnation.

The Suffering of Rejection

As Christ hung upon the cross He experienced ridicule, mockery, and rejection from those He came to save. But more than that, Jesus was experiencing the rejection of His Father. The separation between a sinner and God is due to our own actions. However, the separation between God and Christ was not for anything He had done; it was for what you and I have done.

In Psalm chapter 22 we read, “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?” (Psalm 22:1). These are the very words Jesus cried upon the cross. To Him it seemed as if God had forsaken Him, as He was left in the utter darkness of despair.

Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. . . . But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. (Psalm 22:1–3, 6)

Whatever the psalmist was trying to portray in his own experience when he wrote this, his words are also prophetic. Jesus, the Son of God who created all things, when hanging upon the cross was, in the eyes of the people and in God's treatment of Him, like a worm, beaten and despised.

All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him. But thou art he that took me out of the womb: Thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly. Be not far from me. (Psalm 22:7–11)

From the cross Jesus heard the taunts recorded here in Psalm 22. Though despised and rejected, the psalmist declares that

Forsaken and Smitten of God

Jesus was the chosen of the Father from His mother's belly. (See Luke 1:35.) And now the lifelong relationship with God was being broken through the separation of being made sin for mankind. Matthew records the scene he saw that was also written centuries before in the book of Psalms.

And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. (Matthew 27:39-43)

Let us continue to understand the experience of Christ upon the cross through the psalmist:

Be not far from me; for trouble is near; and there is none to help. Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round about. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: My heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. (Psalm 22:11-14)

The heart melting like wax depicts the stress Jesus experienced under the guilt and condemnation of sin. "It is melted in the midst of my bowels" is an expression of the intense emotions of rejection and heartache Jesus felt as He was made sin for every man.

My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ’s Life

and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. But be not thou far from me, O Lord: O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; and my darling from the power of the dog. (Psalm 22:15–20)

Religious leaders who do not speak and act for God are likened to dogs. They, with the curious and unbelieving gathered around the cross. Christ was pierced with cruel nails, as depicted by the psalmist. “And they crucified Him, and parted His garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted My garments among them, and upon My vesture did they cast lots” (Matthew 27:35). Further, God turned silent as Jesus cried out unto Him, God no longer heard Him, even as God will not hear the pleas of the wicked, when arraigned before Him because they have sinned away their day of grace. Jesus experienced this suffering of rejection; that’s why His heart was melted.

Let us now look at Psalm chapter 35 as we continue to view the cross through the eyes of the psalmist, who wrote centuries before of the sufferings of Christ.

False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not. They rewarded me evil for good to the spoiling of my soul. But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom. But in mine adversity they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together: yea, the abjects gathered themselves together against me, and I knew it not; they did tear me, and ceased not: With hypocritical mockers in feasts, they gnashed upon me with their teeth. Lord, how long wilt thou look on? rescue my soul from their destruction, my darling from the lions. (Psalm 35:11–13; 15–17)

Have you ever been falsely accused? It hurts, doesn’t it? The Son of God was accused falsely by those He had come to save and

Forsaken and Smitten of God

for whom He had only love. For Jesus, who healed the sick and helped the afflicted, there were none to help Him. In fact His sorrow was the cause of rejoicing for His enemies. As Jesus hung upon the cross, the only thing He heard was condemnation and ridicule from those about Him, and no doubt the taunts of demons as well. Jesus said, “Lord, how long wilt thou look on? rescue My soul.” Yet there was only silence, the silence of rejection.

Lord, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me? I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; Thy terrors have cut me off. They came round about me daily like water; they compassed me about together. Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness. (Psalm 88:14–18)

The plan of salvation was laid in heaven before man fell. Jesus, at some point in His youth, began to understand that the cross lay before Him. But the knowledge of what was before Him was nothing compared to the reality of the darkness that was His when He hung upon the cross. There He felt forsaken and rejected, as He was rejected of God and even “His own received Him not” (John 1:11). The mental anguish that weighed upon Christ is infinitely greater than any heartbreak we have ever experienced.

Bearing the Wrath of God

“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?* that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46). The word *forsaken* means “to leave behind, to desert.”¹ In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus had already settled the decision that He would save man at any cost. But now the cost weighed heavily upon Him and He cried out, “My God, my God why hast thou forsaken Me?”

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

As we contemplate the sufferings of Christ and the atonement gained for us on the cross, we must consider the spiritual aspects of His agony.

Christ as a man experienced the brutality of the cross; however, even greater was the anguish He felt in taking upon Himself the sins of the whole world. He took our punishment, experiencing the wrath of God for sin that was not His. His anguish upon the cross involved feeling that He was forsaken by God. He passed through this experience so that you and I would not have to, so we could pass from death unto life, so we could know the joy of salvation rather than the wrath of God.

Christ was on the cross for several hours. During much of that time there was a supernatural darkness about the cross and apparently the whole of Jerusalem and Judea. "And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth [land, country] until the ninth hour" (Luke 23:44). This darkness represented the darkness of men's hearts that had rejected Christ and the darkness that overwhelmed the soul of Christ. Jesus declared:

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father. (John 10:17–18)

Some people have the idea that Jesus knew for a certainty that He was going to rise again. True, Jesus had declared this time and again before the cross; however, there came a point when He felt the wrath and separation from God to such an extent that victory and life beyond the grave could not be seen.

O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee: let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry; for my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave. I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength: free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave,

Forsaken and Smitten of God

whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; thou hast made me an abomination unto them: I am shut up, and I cannot come forth. Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: Lord, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee. Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee? Shall thy loving kindness be declared in the grave? Or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? But unto thee have I cried, O Lord; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee. (Psalm 88:1–13)

The psalmist was writing about an intense experience. Perhaps it had a localized and personal meaning at the time, but it is clearly speaking of the Messiah.

Not all who accept Christ's death on their behalf have considered the monumental reality of the cross. We have limited views of the sacrifice of Christ. During these hours Christ had no evidence of His Father's love and acceptance. This was the source of His anguished cry, "Why have you forsaken Me?" Those taunting Jesus, "Save thyself, and come down from the cross" (Mark 15:30), knew not that He could have come down. But He didn't. What an amazing amount of self-sacrifice and love. For Him who "knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21) to become sin for guilty man and to taste the anguish of eternal separation from God and the darkness of despair should lead us to declare, "Behold what manner of love" (1 John 3:1).

Bearing the Sins of the World

The sins of mankind weighed heavily upon Christ, and the sense of God's wrath against sin was crushing out His life. It wasn't

Behold the Lamb—The Last Hours of Christ's Life

the cross that was killing Him; it was the mental anguish, the guilt and darkness and despair, and the fact that His Father's love and presence was being removed from Him.

Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones. (Zechariah 13:7)

A sword of justice was falling upon Christ. As a knife in the sacrificial service would slit the throat of an animal representing Jesus, so Jesus' body was pierced and smitten. Wounds opened and blood flowed freely down His body and upon the ground. Truly the sword of justice was unsheathed upon Christ.

The incarnation of God in Christ is the most important thing in this world, and it must be the most important thing in your life. How can we allow anything to separate us from the love of Christ? Yet today we have lost sight of the true Christ. We have created a Christ of our own imagination. This Christ who suffered for us is little known in the churches of this world.

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). Just as the sinner in the Old Testament sanctuary service had to lay the weight of the guilt of sin upon the sacrificial animal, so God laid upon Jesus the iniquity of us all. Jesus' death is sufficient for all who will ever live.

The guilt of mankind pressed upon Christ. That includes you and me and everyone in the human family, from Adam onward. No created being could bear this level of guilt and condemnation except He who was divine, who in His divinity had the capacity to take upon Himself the guilt and sin of mankind. As a man there was no way He could bear that, yet as a man He died. As a man His life was crushed out, but as God He had the capacity to bear the sins of every man.

Christ's physical pain was overshadowed by His great mental anguish. This teaches us how terrible sin is in the sight of God and how terrible it will be for the lost.

Many who claim to believe in Christ think the cross frees them from obedience to God's law. (See John 15:10; Mark 8:34.) Yet the guilt of man for the law transgressed, in thought and in action, is what led to the death of God's Son in our place, for "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

Jesus Died of a Broken Heart

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the Ghost. One of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. (John 19:30, 34)

Jesus' heart had ruptured; that is why there were two distinct streams of blood and water. Jesus literally died of a broken heart, a heart that burst under anguish and the pressure of guilt and condemnation as He experienced the wrath of God. This was the same sort of anguish that had forced blood out of His pores in the garden of Gethsemane. However, on the cross there was no angel to strengthen Him until He cried out, "It is finished."

Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. (Psalm 69:20–21)

It was not the soldiers spear thrust; neither was it the pain of the cross that caused the death of Jesus. For crucifixion was a tortuous process that could take days for death's sweet release. He was slain by the sins of the world. If the Holy Spirit can impress this reality upon us, what a change it could make.

Faith Is the Victory

For the hours Christ hung upon the cross, there was no word from God, no hope from the Father. But as He died, His faith revived. His faith was not based on what He saw or felt, nor by His surroundings. His faith was settled upon the love and word of His Father. "And when He cried with a loud voice, He said, Father, into thy hands I commend My spirit: and having said thus, He gave up the ghost" (Luke 23:46). Jesus died in faith. He was a victor, and He wants to give us the faith of victory if we will only believe and accept His death on our behalf and then take up our cross and follow Him.

What are you building on today, my friend? You may be building on unbelief and carelessness and unconcern. You may be building upon a liberal theology that makes light of sin. You may be building on a church that is very much like the world. But truly there is no real hope in anything less than Jesus Christ and His righteousness. And to that end does this book go forth. May God help us. Amen.

Endnotes:

1. James Strong, LL.D., S.T.D., *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, by Reprinted by Baker Book House Grand Rapids, Michigan 1987

