

Courage For Commitment I

by
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The Beginning of The Gospel

Do you understand why they call the report about Jesus of Nazareth "Good News?"

This series of studies will be found in the Gospel of Mark under a general theme "Courage For Commitment." Commitment is the end result of the Gospel process. Before we are through with these studies, we will be dealing with that.

The Gospel call is manifested in three aspects indicated by three simple words, "come," "abide," "go." The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is a word from God, and God says "Come, abide, go." The going will involve commitment, and before we are through with these studies, we will see that. To say "Gospel" is to say "Good News." Some have tried to share the meaning with us by saying "Glad Tidings." When you talk about the Gospel and say "Good News" or "Glad Tidings," this all implies something to be glad about.

What there is to be glad about in the Gospel is not some great prospect in the future: some way in which you are going to be rich, or you are going to have power, or you are going to be very happy, something of that nature. That is not why it is "Good News" or "Glad Tidings." But that expression "Good News, Glad Tidings" refers to a great deliverance.

The world into which Jesus of Nazareth came was a world of trouble, distress. Even today everyone is in it. In the book of Job we read, "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." Most of what people are trying to do is to get out of trouble. Perhaps when they are older they try to keep out of trouble. But this is not possible because of sin. As you read the Bible and study in the Bible you will become conscious of sin. Sin is a God-word. What makes sin as real as it is, and what it is, is the reality of God. Sin is universal: it is everywhere. Everybody is involved, and sin leads to death. That means trouble, trouble, trouble, until death. This is true everywhere. Sin is actually real because God is real. People who do not believe in God at all also have the experience of sin, no matter what they call it. The solution of the sin problem was always known to God, and in the Scriptures it is revealed. In the book of Revelation it is written, "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." The solution of the sin problem is to be found in Jesus Christ, in His death on Calvary's cross. It was there He carried away our sins. God had that in mind before the world was created because His Son was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

We have said that trouble is universal, even with persons who give no thought to God at all. Every person born into this world faces a world of confusion, of conflict. It does not make any difference who that person is. Some people are born into quiet surroundings in sheltered places, and as long as they stay there they may have less trouble than some other people would have. But sooner or later they go out into the world, and when they do, they will find chaos, confusion, conflict. Every person born into this world is in himself or herself too weak to cope with the situations that he or she must face. That is the way it is.

Every person born into this world is too selfish to be considerate of others. And often he or she is too rebellious to accept guidance. Human beings are always too ignorant to meet the demands of the hour.

I could take more time to discuss this, but I just wanted to bring out that anybody born into this world, as we sometimes say, has two strikes against him before he gets started. That is what this world is like.

But Almighty God is over it all. He created the situation and He allowed it to develop the way in which it has. I believe there is something He has in mind. I cannot always see it, but I do trust Him. The Bible reveals a wonderful promise of redemption from this trouble and from this sin.

Some of the most wonderful words that human beings have ever heard is that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). In other words, God has a plan for salvation.

When we mention God, it is important for us to have in mind there is another world than this one. This world of chaos and confusion and conflict and trouble and death is not all: there is something else. There is another world: heaven is real: God is able to save. It is the power of God: it is the power of heaven, that is released in what we call the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The human being can be saved. We need to keep in mind that the condition of man is such that the word "saved" is a proper word. This does not mean that a person is saved from just one crisis, but he can be saved altogether. The person can be saved from the guilt of his own life or of mankind as a whole; and he can be saved from sins in his own members, the addictions that he has. How many of us long to be free! For some of us it may be true we possibly never will be totally free until these bodies of ours are six feet under, as we say, or until we are dead so far as this world is concerned. But God can save us. Even though sin is in us, God can save us by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. He can save us from death.

There is a way to be saved but no human being can ever discover this. You might say, "How can you make such a dogmatic statement?" I make it on the basis of history. Look round about you, look all over the world and thumb through the pages of any history you will ever read, and you will find that apart from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, apart from the Gospel of God as set forth in the truth about Jesus Christ, nobody anywhere in the world ever imagined that Almighty God the Creator would give His Son to save His creatures. But this is what the Gospel says.

There is a way for the human being to accept this and that way must be revealed from God. That is why the Apostle Paul would say that the Gospel of God was a mystery. When you use the word "mystery" you mean a hidden truth. People do not know it. Human beings cannot find it. It needs to be revealed. Now God has followed a procedure in revealing His will. One of the ways in which God has done this is in dealing with godly men. These godly men in Old Testament times spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. The Scriptures of the Old Testament and the New Testament is one of the ways in which God revealed His will to man. A human being, reading the Bible and studying the Bible and understanding enough of the Bible to see the principles of it will come to know the Gospel.

Another procedure of God was to send His Son, which He did, incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth. He was the express image of God, He came into this world, man-sized so to speak, so that man could look at Him and see what God is and what He had in mind. This truth will not be seen by looking at the person of Jesus of Nazareth during the time He lived here as a baby, as a boy, as a young man, or as a man up until thirty years of age. If you would find the truth in Jesus Christ, you will have to look at the cross of Calvary. Mark's Gospel will lead us there. Each of the four Gospels take us there. The Son of God is a revelation of the will of God. God also uses the Holy Spirit, the third Person in the Godhead, which takes the things of the Lord Jesus Christ and shows them unto us. Now the Gospel of Mark is one account of Jesus of Nazareth who came into this world to do the will of God.

The Subject and Object of the Gospel: Jesus Christ

Is it clear to you why we focus all attention upon Jesus Christ in the Gospel message?

Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21).

The Bible tells us about the work of God in creation and salvation. In creation we think of the natural world which we sense with our five senses. We hear, we see, we taste, we smell, we touch, all of which we are a part. And of the earth God is the Creator, the Maker, the Keeper, the Ruler, the Judge. Now in salvation we think of the spiritual world. We believe it is infinite, in which we can be a part, where God is the Savior, the Father, the Keeper, the Ruler, the Lord, That is heaven and heavenlies. So when we speak of the work of God as being creation and salvation we are reminded of the very simple word that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Man is born into the natural world where law prevails: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," and sin dominates. The believer in Christ is born again into the spiritual world where grace prevails, and the Holy Spirit dominates. Salvation is the work of God in bringing men out of the natural into the spiritual. This work is done through Christ. The meaning of the word "Christ" is "the Anointed One." In the Old Testament days and practices a person would be anointed to a particular task. Sometimes Christ is called the Chosen One. In the Old Testament the term was "Messiah." In the New Testament the term is "Christ."

Salvation operates through faith, in faith, by faith, through believing the promises of God. Because of this basic truth that salvation operates through faith, believing the Gospel is basically necessary in salvation. The whole matter of receiving the blessing of God is grounded in this one principle that we are to believe in Him.

But how can you believe in Him if you do not know what His will is? For that reason the Scriptures have been given.

Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent (John 6:28-29).

Ordinarily speaking when a person is thinking about receiving the blessing of God and wanting the blessing of God the natural man just naturally thinks "What must I do? How am I going to do this?" You remember the rich young ruler coming to the Lord Jesus and asking Him. "What must I do that I might inherit eternal life?" In this same vein many come to church with the idea that in the church they will be told what to do. Many churches seem to fall into this line of thought, and they direct the energies of the congregations into work programs, activities, thinking that there is something to be done that the members might have the blessing of God by doing the will of God. But note again: "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? . . . This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."

Some may say, "I do not see how just believing on Him is going to help any." But what does believing on Him mean? Do you think if one believes on Christ that he will be standing still? Do you think if one believes on Him that he will just be sitting, perhaps in a rocking chair? Do you think that is what believing on Him means? Oh no. Believing on Him is putting my hand in His, and He does not stand still. He is no statue that I can take hold of. He is no post that I can lean on. He is a moving being. If I believe on the Lord Jesus Christ I will be led. I will be moving along. The very experiences I am having in life, those very situations, God is leading me through them and in them I can serve Him. Believing in Him will lead me into walking with Him.

In order that men might believe, God revealed His will.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets (Hebrews 1:1).

This brings to our mind that in the Old Testament times, God revealed His law in the Ten Words and indicated this was His will for man. If one wanted to find out what would be acceptable in the sight of God, he should read the Ten Words, the Ten Commandments. The history of the people whom God called, namely, Israel, showed that the natural man, even when he is called of God, even when he is blessed of God, could not or would not obey God. That was clearly demonstrated.

Then because God would keep His Word that He would bless the children of Abraham, He revealed that He would work His will in a different way. He would do a new thing. So God began in Old Testament times to reveal His plan to send into the world a Savior to save His people. This Savior would not only save God's people from destruction, He would not only save God's people from their unhappy destiny toward which they were headed, but He would save God's people into the will of God. He would save them into the very presence of God. God would send this One, the Chosen One, the Anointed One, to accomplish this task.

In the Old Testament times this Anointed One was called the Messiah, the Christ. The Old Testament prophets predicted His coming and His Kingdom. They wrote about it, and in the Old Testament Scriptures you can feel this emphasis, the pointing forward to the coming of the Chosen One, the Messiah, whom we call the Christ. The Old Testament prophets here and there described His coming, and told things that would happen at the time He came. These things were fulfilled in the coming of Jesus of Nazareth in such a way that people who saw these things were able to identify Him as the coming King.

Also the Old Testament prophets described living in His Kingdom, what it would be like when believers were living under the leadership of Christ. Reading in the book of Psalms one can actually get an idea of what the experience would be of a person who is constantly in the presence of God.

The Chosen One whom the Old Testament called the Messiah and the New Testament called Christ was God's own Son. This was what was recorded in the New Testament Scriptures: He was born of a virgin, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Son of God. The time came when Jesus of Nazareth asked His disciples, "Whom do men say that I am?" They told Him different persons: He was one of the prophets; He was John the Baptist; He was Elijah. "Whom do you say that I am?" And Peter speaking for the group said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

"Christ" is a title, very much like "emperor." In our country and in our culture, we would say "president." He is the one who is in control. And by the way, where you have "Christ" in English, you could think of "Caesar" in the Latin. That is the same word. "Czar" in the Russian is the same word. "Shah" in Persian is the same word. It means the idea of "ruler over all." This was the name that was given to Him when Jesus Christ came into this world to seek and to save the lost. We shall find out as we study about this that He would not only save them from destruction, but He would save them into the life that is with God, that they might have the blessing of God.

Titles of Jesus: Son of God, Son of David

Do you understand how Jesus of Nazareth could be both the Son of God and the Son of David?

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" – that is the way Mark starts his Gospel in Mark chapter 1, verse 1. Then again in chapter 10 verse 47 we have this word: "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me." A title is generally added to a name to indicate some relationship. When we say "President James Carter" we mean that he is president of the United States. When we say "Premier Trudeau" we mean he is premier of Canada. When we say "Queen Elizabeth," we mean she is queen of Great Britain. When we say "General Eisenhower," we refer to his position in the army. A title always indicates a relationship. A title may indicate an origin, a relationship that existed which produced this person; or it may indicate a function, what that person is going to do.

The Scriptures reveal that Jesus of Nazareth was the only begotten Son of God. They tell you about the origin of His earthly body. They also reveal that He was the Son of David, who was to be King of Kings. When that expression "the Son of David" is used, your attention is called back to the Old Testament record of the covenant that had been made with David. Almighty God promised David that one of his seed should sit on the throne forever. The title "Son of God" points directly to the eternal Being: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one of the three. The title "Son of David" points directly to His being of the House of David, heir of the covenant that God made with David. These two titles are not absolute alternatives. They actually complement each other. In His essential being Christ was the Son of God. In His earthly function He was the Son of David. For instance, the Prince of Wales in Great Britain could be captain of a warship: so that you could call him Captain, or you could call him Prince. The titles would be true in both cases. The owner's son in a great factory could be foreman of a working crew, so that although he was the son of the owner, he could also be the foreman of a group that were working on a particular project.

But there is an important corrective that we need in order to keep these two titles in the proper priority.

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions (Matthew 22:41-46).

In this portion these two titles are involved in such a way as to indicate that while He could be called the Son of David, from one point of view, He actually was the Son of God in His essence.

Mark reports several instances where He was called the Son of God.

And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: and there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (Mark 1:9-11).

This passage has several aspects of importance to us, but one seems to be very important. There is here such a clear presentation of the Trinity. Sometimes people wonder whether the Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are just three different names of the same Person. But this record shows three: there came a voice from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son" which puts God the Father in heaven, and Jesus of Nazareth, the Son, on earth. "And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him": there is the Holy Spirit coming down on Him. The Father was in heaven and spoke, the Spirit came down and settled upon Him and Jesus of Nazareth was here upon earth. If anybody has any problem to wonder whether the Bible teaches that there are three Persons in the God-head, this is a classic passage.

That God the Father in heaven and Jesus of Nazareth the Son of God are two distinct Persons can be seen again in this passage:

And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power. And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into a high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. And there appeared unto them Elijah with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid. And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him (Mark 9:1-7).

Now Peter refers to this very incident in II Peter:

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount (II Peter 1:16-18).

Another passage in Mark records the fact that He was named the Son of God in the very brief description of the crucifixion. And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God (Mark 15:37-39).

This was the testimony of the centurion.

The blind Bartimaeus used the other title in referring to Jesus of Nazareth.

And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me (Mark 10:46-47).

Is it clear in your mind why he would link those two thoughts together, that Christ was the Son of David and that He would have mercy? The Old Testament Scriptures predicted the coming of the Messiah who would come as the Son of David: who was to be King of Kings, and Lord of all; the One who was to be on the throne forever. The Old Testament prophets described to some extent the work He would do. One of the works that He would do would be to open the eyes of the blind. That is the way it was predicted. Evidently Bartimaeus knew that. So when he cried out, "Jesus, thou son of David" he was referring to the one who came fulfilling that prophecy. The Old Testament prophets had predicted that when Messiah as King, as the Son of David, would come one of the things He would do would be to heal the unfortunate. We have been meditating in this study how Jesus of Nazareth was referred to both as the Son of God which refers to His origin and His being, and as the Son of David which refers to His function and His work while He was here upon earth.

Titles of Jesus: Son of Man

Do you understand how Jesus of Nazareth was different from other men?

Our studies are following along in the Gospel of Mark with the general theme "Courage for Commitment." We shall see that the life and experience of the believer in Christ is grounded in commitment to the Lord. The individual does not do this in his own strength, but Christ Jesus working in and through him. It is important to know Him.

To understand Jesus of Nazareth we need to remember that He was the Son of God born of woman. He was eternally the Son of God, but in fullness of time He took upon Himself the form of man. Paul tells about this in Philippians.

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made 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 (Philippians 2:6-8).

We should note carefully, exactly what is written in this. He could not change Himself. He never did. He was forever the Son of God, but His form was changed. "He took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself." Adam was created in the image of God, but that did not make Adam God. Adam always was earth of the earth, made of the dust of the ground, but in the image of God. The Son of God took upon Him the form of a

servant and was found in fashion as a man, but He was and is and ever will be the Son of God.

Mark wrote of Him as the Son of God; and he reports that Jesus of Nazareth spoke of Himself as the Son of Man. The term "the Son of God" refers to His relationship with the heavenly Father. "The Son of Man" refers to His fleshly form. These are not absolute opposites. It is not necessary to take one or the other. You may take them both, because they are both true. Jesus of Nazareth implies the dual aspect in speaking to Nathanael.

And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man (John 1:51).

That reference is obviously to what we call "Jacob's Ladder": the stairway, "the ascending steps," that Jacob saw in his vision from earth to heaven. And this is very significant.

The common expression "Jacob's Ladder" implies the bottom was on earth and the top was in heaven. Thus the stairway was the connection between the two. This would imply Jesus of Nazareth in Himself brought heaven and earth together in one organic union. The Son of God was from heaven, and was incarnate on earth in human form, but all the time He was God. This is actually a manifestation of the nature of a born again believer.

When we speak about a believer in Christ, the New Testament presents such a person having "the old man" and "the new man" both in the same believer. Flesh and spirit are both in the same person. By coming into the human family and taking on Himself the nature of Abraham, Jesus of Nazareth came to do His work. Scripture reveals that He did this on purpose. But when I was born into this world, no one will say about me that I took upon me the form of a man. No, I was born that way.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham (Hebrews 2:14-16).

If He had taken on Him the nature of angels, He could not have died because angels do not die. But He took on Him the seed of Abraham that He might die, because by His death He would set us free. In all of this process He was always the Son of God.

But right here is a grave danger. As important as it is that the Son of God came as a man, it is important to remember that He actually is the Son of God.

And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence. And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house. And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief (Matthew 13:53-58).

It is obvious those neighbors had no doubt of His existence. He was right there in front of them. And there was no denial of His wonderful works. They saw His works. Yet He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief. Has it ever occurred to you how terribly effective unbelief is? It is actually able to limit the work of God. This is seen also in a similar passage in Mark.

And he went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him. And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Judah, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. And he could there do no mighty

work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And he marveled because of the unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching (Mark 6:1-6).

What did they not believe? They did not believe He was the Son of God. That made the difference. Do you realize that to emphasize the humanity of Jesus Christ is to limit the possibility of what He can do. "Take heed lest any man deceive you."

Jesus of Nazareth used the title "Son of Man" more than anyone else in Scripture, but it is astonishing how He invested this title with power and with authority. He said for instance in Mark 2:10 that "the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins." In Mark 2:28 He says, "Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath." In Mark 8:31 He says that the Son of Man must suffer and then must rise again, speaking of His resurrection. And in chapter 13, verse 26, "And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory." And in chapter 14:62, "And ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Yes, He used that phrase to emphasize that He actually was in the flesh but He always was the Son of God.

The Kingdom of God

Do you know what is meant by saying "The Kingdom of God is within you?"

I want to share some thoughts with you concerning the Kingdom of God. Kingdom is a concept, is an idea, that belongs in the problem of order. Naturally things are helter skelter. You did not have to make it that way in your kitchen, it just is that way. You do not have to make it that way in your bedroom, things will just naturally be that way. Just follow anybody around that is acting naturally and without thought, and you will see chaos, disorder and confusion. That is natural. In that condition, under those circumstances, there is no rest, no peace, no power. Many people do not even expect order.

But random activity on our part which leaves everything in disorder may be brought under control. Dominion implies some one unit controlling activities. In Bible language that was the king. This was man's first assignment – subdue the earth, have dominion over it. Because of sin, man's ambition became selfish. He attempted to subdue other men treating them like things, so that he might have dominion over them. Man's kingdom depended on force to control by dominating, by domineering, by forcing things.

Daniel had a vision of the Kingdom of God where the control would depend on love. This would be a new creation under the dominion of the Chosen One, the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Son of God. He would come into the world the seed of the woman, born of a woman, in human form as a Son of man. The Head of the new creation would be Christ who could say, "I do always the things that please my Father."

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel (Mark 1:14-15).

The Kingdom of God was available right then. All that man needed to do was to repent, to acknowledge his wrongdoing, his wrong being, and to confess his sins and to believe the Gospel, the promises of God. The Kingdom of God was manifested in Jesus of Nazareth. As He lived in this world He was a walking open demonstration of what is meant by the Kingdom of God. That is to say, He Himself lived in obedience to His Father, doing just what His Father wanted Him to do. His Father controlled every part of His being because the Lord Jesus was willingly obedient. This relationship with God, this Kingdom of God, is available now to whosoever will come unto Him. The Kingdom of God is not something that is to be done. A person does not work up to it. A believer does not work in it, nor does he work through it. It is to be received by believing in Christ, by putting one's trust in Him, by letting Almighty God work in you, giving His Holy Spirit in the believer to prompt the believer into His will. In Mark 4:26-29 we read that

believing can start with one small seed. It will grow. If a person believes just a little; if he begins to believe in God as he lives along, he will grow in the disposition to come closer to God. In Mark 9:47 we read that believing in God is doing His will. This may involve self-denial as to some natural interest. But the denial of the flesh will be worth it.

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).

Mark quoted Jesus of Nazareth who said:

And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast in hell fire (Mark 9:47).

These words recommend a person should discipline himself and deny himself, even if it would mean cutting out some natural interest that he has; but doing that in order that he might be fully obedient to God.

Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein (Mark 10:14-15).

Here is something very important. This relationship with God, that we speak of as the Kingdom of God, is not for the sophisticated. It is not for the highly educated people. It is for sincere, humble people, those who will act just like little children who take from God what He offers. Children cannot pay, they do not expect to pay, they only expect to receive; and God is glad to give it to them.

"How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God " (Mark 10:23-25)! That expression "how hardly" means how scarcely, under what narrow conditions, shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God. Jesus of Nazareth went on to say, "Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." I am told that the small gate, that we would call a pedestrian gate that folks would walk through, was called in their idiom "the eye of the needle." It appears the walled cities had a large gate that caravans would go through. Camels in procession would go through the big gate. But at sundown the big gate was closed; but beside it was a small gate that people on foot, we call them pedestrians, could walk through. That small gate was called "the eye of the needle." A camel could squirm through that small gate, but he would need to get on his knees to crawl through and he would need to have his baggage taken off. This illustration fits exactly. That is the way the rich man can come to God.

But riches are not only money. That is the way the strong athlete can come to God. That is the way the smart scholar can come to God.. That is the way the beautiful girl can come to God. When a person humbly unloads everything he has to his advantage and simply comes trusting in the mercy of God.

We read in Mark 15:43 about Joseph of Arimathea. What a wonderful testimony he had that when everybody else forsook Jesus of Nazareth and left Him hanging on the cross, dead by the hand of that mob, it was Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, who came forward and asked Pilate for the body of Jesus of Nazareth. It says about him, "which also waited for the kingdom of God." He was a man looking for the blessing that comes from the promises of God. The prophets had predicted a time when the Kingdom of God would prevail, and Joseph of Arimathea was looking forward to it. He came forward when everyone else had gone away. What a significant sight that was! Jesus of Nazareth dying on the cross, no one from the temple, none of the religious leaders, none of the outstanding persons in the worship of Israel coming forward to do one thing for Him. But this layman, this man of whom the only thing said about him is that he was a rich man, came forward, and asked for the body of Jesus of Nazareth. This action said in effect to Pontius Pilate: "I am one of His. He is my Lord." The Kingdom of God is a situation in which the will of

God is done in the heart because the believer obediently follows His guidance. Do you realize that when we are talking about that, we usually call it "heaven" because that is exactly what heaven will be like?

Christ: The Suffering Servant

Do you realize that suffering is inevitable for the believer in Christ?

The revelation of God's plan in Scripture promised that His Anointed Servant, Christ Jesus, would come to save and to rule. This is what the Bible teaches. The Son of God came to do His Father's will as Jesus of Nazareth, and when He would talk about that for Himself He would say as in Luke 22: 27 these words: ". . . But I am among you as he that serveth." The Apostle Paul said about Him: "He took upon Him the form of a servant." He demonstrated this character on His part in washing the disciples' feet, as it is re-corded in John 13:15, "For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you."

This Servant was to become King of Kings. He taught in Matthew 20:27, "And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." The Servant was to suffer. He was to hurt. He was to experience the pangs of death. He was to share what was given to Adam because of sin: "dying thou shalt die." Jesus of Nazareth as the Servant of God knew that for Him in the will of His Father He must suffer.

You might not think a person who was perfect, who never did anything wrong, would ever suffer, but He did. At the same time you will remember He could heal the sick.

And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again (Mark 8:31).

Suffering is not always physical. It is not always because someone hits him with a stick or cuts him with a knife. Suffering can be personal, the way in which he is treated.

And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men (Mark 8:32-33).

In the call of Paul as we have it written the word was:

For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake (Acts 9:16).

Paul was to be an apostle. He was to be a missionary. He was to be a great preacher, but none of these things are mentioned. What particularly is mentioned is this: "I am going to show him what he must suffer for My sake." This is the lot of all believers in Christ.

For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me (Philippians 1:29-30).

It was given unto them because they were believers that they should suffer for His name's sake. But this is not without its reward. Paul also wrote about this in Romans.

If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together (Romans 8:17).

Moses had this in mind when he made his great decision of which we read in the book of Hebrews.

Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward (Hebrews 11:25-26).

Moses knew that it would mean suffering if he stepped out and associated himself with the Hebrews, but he knew that he would have a great reward in fellowship with God.

Followers of Christ are urged to be "looking unto Jesus" as they follow in the will of God.

. . . Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1-2).

We need to keep in mind when we are thinking about this whole matter of suffering that suffering does not come because of weakness. It is not the weak people who suffer. Suffering does not come because of failure. Jesus of Nazareth did not fail, but He suffered. Suffering does not come because of sin, because of wrongdoing on the part of the sufferer. Jesus of Nazareth suffered unto death, and He had done nothing wrong. Suffering comes because of sin, it is true. It may be the sin of others; as it was with the whole human race, where we say it is the sin of Adam. Or it may be the sins of others in our own time, and we may suffer because of that.

The classic instance of suffering in the will of God is revealed to us in the record about the Garden of Gethsemane. When Jesus of Nazareth went in there, He turned to His Father in prayer and calling upon Almighty God He said words like this:

O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt (Matthew 26:39).

There the whole picture is set out before us. The suffering was due to come; it was going to be heavy and hard, and He had no desire for it. There was no reason why He should suffer personally. He would have wished to be spared, if one may use that kind of expression. The record shows that Jesus of Nazareth came out from the Garden of Gethsemane and went to the cross of Calvary, and suffered for our sins. That was the will of God for Him. Jesus of Nazareth knew that He must suffer. He knew that that was going to come and He walked straight into it.

We need to remember that He was Al- mighty God. In Him was the Holy Spirit without measure. But it was also true that He had a human form, and He took that human form straight into the human situation which would undo Him, which would actually cause His death. He was not personally involved in choosing what would happen. He put His whole trust in His Father who said He would raise Him from the dead. So we find that when He knew that He must suffer, He walked straight into it.

When He came out from the garden and the soldiers came up to arrest Him, Peter drew his sword and wanted to defend Him against the Roman soldiers. Jesus of Nazareth told him to put away his sword. That was not the way He would do. He told Peter that it would be necessary for Him to die. "How else will the Scriptures be fulfilled?" This does not mean only how else will prophecy be fulfilled which predicted the death of the Messiah, but how will the promises be fulfilled that promise to every believer a new life in Christ Jesus. The new life that is in Christ Jesus does not depend upon what we do but depends upon what He gives. This is what Jesus of Nazareth wanted to demonstrate. So He refused protection from Peter when Peter would have defended Him.

Jesus of Nazareth Himself laid down the basic principle for every disciple.

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me (Matthew 16:24).

And that just means that suffering is in the picture for all believers. If one walks with the Lord, he will have occasions when he will be missing out in something human. There will be things that humans have, which he cannot have because he has given himself over entirely to the Lord. That is the way to have His blessing and that is sufficient. Jesus of Nazareth because of the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame; and believers can have that same experience. If they walk with the Lord, they will also suffer with Him. But if they suffer with Him, they shall also reign with Him. They will come through to glory, to the praise of His Name.