

# **FOUR FAVORITE MESSAGES**

by Dr. Manford George Gutzke

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## The Truth in Predestination

Romans 8:28-39

The word *predestination* is a heavy word for Anglo-Saxon ears. We like little words. The Anglo-Saxon language has little words that are strong and pungent in their meaning. They say everything in just a syllable. The big words are derived from other countries. They have roots – Latin roots and Greek roots. When we get to words like predestination, everyone would prefer some little word for it, something for instance like *luck*. Now there's a nice little word – luck. May I say to you right now, that's not predestination.

Now I want to tell you why there isn't any little Anglo-Saxon word for predestination. In the days when the Anglo-Saxon language was developed all the Anglo-Saxons were pagans. Our forefathers worshipped trees, thunder, the sun, moon and stars. Back in those days they would have used a word like *luck* because that's what they believed in. They never did have a word for predestination because they never thought of such a thing. You've got to be a Christian to believe in it. And when they became Christians the gospel came to them through the Latin people and through the Latin language. And coming to them through the Latin language, many of the Christian ideas took Latin form. That's where this word *predestination* has its Latin roots. For this idea of predestination you need a living God, able, willing and anxious to do for His people. And that's the God of the Bible.

Now just because the word is difficult, people try to explain it. There are two common ideas about predestination that are mistaken, but they are very difficult to handle because each of them is half true. Here's the first one. People will say, "You mean what is to be will be? God is just going to do what He is going to do and nobody is going to stop Him from doing it because He is God?"

Now that is an exceedingly difficult idea to refute because it's half true. The half truth is that God does know all things and He knows what is going to come to pass because He has already *decreed* it, as we say. Let me tell you, there isn't anything going to happen that is going to be a surprise to God, but there are a lot of things going to happen that God doesn't want. He allows a lot of things to happen that are not His first choice.

When we say that God knows all things we do not mean that God only knows all things that are going to come to pass. He knows all things that could have come to pass. For every one single thing that happens there are "fifty-seven" other things that could have happened at the same time in that place. God knows them all. When you say God knows all things you mean not only that He knows all that actually is; He knows all that could have been. Then there comes in a function about God that we honor and respect: He is on the throne. "He foreordains whatsoever comes to pass." Which is to say, He sees it coming up the road, if you'll pardon the expression. He permits this thing to go through and the others not to go through. He lets it happen in a certain way. Foreordination is the word to use for that. That's not predestination. I won't dwell on it at any great length, but I want to tell you one thing about the word *foreordination* – it doesn't have any coercion in it. It doesn't have to be that way; because God knows it's going to be that way doesn't make it that way. God knew that Judas would betray the Lord Jesus, but He didn't *make* Judas betray the Lord.

This is a good place for me to end this line of discussion by saying the Bible never one time uses the word *predestination* with unbelievers. There's no such thing in the Bible as that God ever predestinated any man to be lost. That's not a Bible statement. God predestinates believers to go to heaven

to be like the Lord Jesus Christ. And every time you see the word *predestination* used in the Bible, such as "predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son," the only people who are predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son are those who believe in Him. Those who put their trust in Him are the ones He is going to do that with. You never use the word predestination with reference to events. If there is an accident, someone says that was predestinated. That is not an accurate use of the word. If you want to talk in that kind of language, say "foreordained."

God is working on something so far as I'm concerned. He's got a big job cut out. He is going to make me like the Lord Jesus Christ. That's some job. And that's what the Bible means when it says, ". . . all things work together for good to them that love God." What is the good it works toward? It works toward the good that you'll be in heaven like Him. He is manipulating everything to that end.

The other error is really part of the first but deserves special mention. Someone says, "Oh, you believe in predestination. You mean whoever is to be saved will be saved. Whoever is to be lost will be lost." And they think that's all there is to it. If you're going to be saved, you're going to be saved. If you're going to be lost, then you're going to be lost. You can't do a thing about it. I don't know a quicker way to stop Sunday School, stop preaching, stop everything else that's going on around the church than to push that kind of idea. Those that are *in* are in; those that are *out* are out; there's not anything you can do about it. I suggest you go fishing. That will keep you out of more trouble than anything else. If you're going to be saved, you're going to be saved, and if you're going to be lost then you're going to be lost.

Now I have mentioned that three times over and I feel like apologizing for each time. I just want to show you how garish that error is. And yet part of it is true. Do you know which part that is? It is that God knows who will be saved and who will be lost. He knew before the foundation of the world, for the Scripture says of believers, ". . . he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4).

It's very difficult, if not impossible, for us to think the thoughts of God. The first thing you know we try to put time in God's mind. He doesn't have time in His mind. He makes time. He's God. He's eternal. Everything is present with Him all the time. There are no yesterdays or tomorrows with God.

God knows right now who in the next generation (if this world is spared) is going to believe in Him. And, because He knows which ones are going to believe, there is a word we use for that. The word is *elect*. And what so many people leave out altogether is the way Peter puts it, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God . . ." Or, on the other hand, many of us slip something extra in there, and we make it *select*. We think the word *election* means selection, which would be that God looked us over: "Eeny, meeny, miny, mo, now I'll take this one and I won't take that one. The ones I took, they're elect; the ones I didn't take, they're not elect. Elect, they're in; not elect, they're out. They can go home. School's over." This leaves you with the impression that God's going to do it apart from you altogether.

I know the language can be used that way, but I am satisfied that the word *elect* actually means "called." It's very much like our common practice of getting recruits. When you have a recruiting committee, or when a Marine sergeant is ready to recruit men into the Marine Corps, he "calls" them. He will take anybody between certain ages and with certain physical qualifications. Not all are going to come. Some will, some won't. In a certain community they wanted 80; they got 18. Because those 18 were taken in, that isn't the reason why the others were excluded.

You know, we should be very careful not to read the Bible's use of the word *election* as meaning the same as democratic political process of election. We have a number of candidates; way back in the simple days we had two. One gets in. That is election according to a democratic process, but that's not election from the Bible process. The Bible's use of election is never from the point of view that if one makes it the other can't. You'll never find that the grace of God is limited so much that when one or two or three are in, no one else can come. That's never the case. The Bible puts it this way: "Whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

Now I am not going to oversimplify this and ignore in my mind the fact that God can have some influence on those who will come to Him, and so on. Our Confession of Faith helps me in this matter. It tells me that God is not the author of sin. When I am preaching on the decrees of God, when I am preaching on foreordination and predestination, our Confession of Faith has a little statement that tells me to be very careful how I talk and to not leave the impression that God is responsible for evil or that man is not responsible for his conduct. It's right in there. If you just keep those two curbs in hand you won't have any trouble. But I will say that at one time I was troubled, because it looked just as though it was going to make out that God made the decision as to who would and who wouldn't be saved. But then I found this statement in our Confession of Faith: "The sum of what we teach is that God predestinates some souls to be saved to him in heaven and foreordains that others are to be lost." It doesn't use the word *predestination* for that. The Bible never one time says anybody would be elected to go to hell. It never one time says anybody was predestinated to be lost. I know it says that Pharaoh was a vessel of wrath fitted to destruction. But when you read it in its context, it means that God didn't snuff him out when he was a boy. He let him live and run his course to serve God's purpose. Even though he was hard-headed and hard-hearted, God knew that he never would turn to Him. But it doesn't give you the idea that God pushed him there.

You see the word *foreordination* doesn't have any "push" in it. It simply tells you what God allows and wills; of all the possibilities, it tells which one will come. The word *predestination* has got a "pull" in it. It's pulling you to God. God pulls to Him those who believe in Him. If you were to speak about predestination with reference to hell, you would be indicating that God was manipulating things in such a way that a man would be lost. That would be a slander on God. You know what God did about lost people? He gave His Son to die for them. Some people will go to hell. Some people will be lost. But I want to tell you that Almighty God gave His Son to die that they wouldn't go to hell. His Son gave Himself and laid down His life and shed His blood so that they wouldn't be lost. And those who are lost are lost in spite of the grace of God, if we understand the Scriptures. How else can you understand the Lord Jesus looking out over Jerusalem and weeping, "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathered her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

What then? The word *predestination* has two parts in it: pre, which means before – you know pre-war, pre-anything, is before; destination, your destination – you know is where you're going to come out, where you're going to end up.

Now, what is predestination? Predestination is that your destination – where you're coming out – is known already. It is to say that when God is working on you He's not working on you experimentally to try and find out what He could make out of you. No, God knows what He is going to do. He's got in mind already where you are going to be. You're not yet fit for the place He's going to take you. He's going to get you fit for the place He's going to take you.

God knows my destination – in heaven, conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, to be before God without spot and without wrinkle, in joy, in love, forever. That's my destination. I'm not fit for it now, but He's going to work on me. Predestination is the name for a special kind of providence that God exercises in which He brings us into His will. That's why "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." He's maneuvering those who belong to Him so that we will get there.

Let me illustrate it to you. Suppose that I was going to New York to go to school, and I packed a trunk, called the express company and asked them to come and take my trunk and ship it. They come in with their truck ready to take the trunk out. They've got a sheet of paper that is blank and they say, "Where is it going? What is its destination?" We say, "Columbia University, Morningside, Heights, New York City." That's the destination and that's written and pasted on that trunk before it ever leaves my apartment.

That guides the express company in everything that they do. It may go fast or slow, over rough road or over smooth road, maybe cold or hot. But every time the express company handles that trunk they look at the ticket and they say, this goes with the New York baggage.

Years ago, when I became a Christian, it was as though God had pinned a label on me and you know what that destination says – "In heaven like the Lord Jesus Christ." I wasn't there at that time. And I wasn't like that at that time. But that was the ticket. That was my destination. And the word *predestination* implies that before God ever sent His Son into this world He had known just exactly where I was going to wind up. In all these years, every single thing that's happened to me, all the good fortune, all the bad fortune, all the pleasure, all the sorrow, all the gladness, all the grief, everything that has happened to me has been manipulated in a way according to that ticket. God is going to manipulate all things together in such a way that I'll be taken right along on my way. That's the meaning of this marvelous doctrine of predestination. God has His eye on you for good. He's not going to let anything happen to you that will hurt you because He which hath begun a good work in you will complete it.

Having given you that illustration, I'll need to give you one more because the illustration is not perfect. I may look like a trunk but I'm not a trunk. You take a trunk and set it over in a warehouse, leave it and come back tomorrow and the trunk will be right where you left it. You take me and put me in a warehouse, go away and leave me. Tomorrow I won't be there. You see, I've got ideas of my own. That raises a problem. How can God get me where He wants me to go while I have ideas of my own? Of course, God could hit me in the head and move me around in an unconscious condition, but that wouldn't be the gospel. He wants my eyes open. He talks to me. He wants me to come to Him consciously.

That's the technical problem you should recognize already between God's sovereignty (He gets His will done) and man's free will (he does as he pleases), and how those two things fit together. To illustrate this point let me tell you a story.

We had in our family at one time four little children, all small at the same time, and I was pastor of a church. Every pastor of a church is very interesting to his people. They want to see the pastor and his family. When they came to visit us they weren't there any great length of time before they asked, where are the children? Now, if you had four little children, and their ages were about 3, 4, 5 and 6, and with no help around, you can imagine that it wouldn't always be convenient to have the ladies of the congregation drop in to see the children.

On a certain day I looked out and saw a woman walking down the street. And I said to my good wife, "Mrs. So-and-So is coming down the street." She hadn't been to see us. So my wife said, "Well, I expect I'd better go to the door." I said, "All right." I knew my job. I went to the back of the house and I rounded up three of the children. I quickly got them looking presentable, and went into the front room and put them on presentation. And the lady appreciated them. Then she said the inevitable thing, "Well you have another one, don't you?" "Yes." She said, "Well, I must see him. I can't go until I see him." Well the other boy was in the back yard playing with a wagon. An uncle had given a little red wagon to these four children, and it was his turn to play with the wagon.

Now you know there are some people who, when they don't like anything, it shows in their faces. Well this boy is one of those people. You can just tell by looking at him. And I wanted the lady to think he was a nice boy, but he wasn't going to like my interrupting his playtime. So I had a problem, as you can see. But I remembered we also had apples. So I went to the back of the house with an apple in my hand and I called his name, "Mark." Well, the minute he heard his name he stiffened. I knew he didn't want to come. Well, he looked. Now he was still at that age when I could have insisted. He would have come if I had brought him in. He wouldn't have liked it, but he would have come.

I held the apple up in front of him and made a gesture to him to imply, "It's yours." Well, he thought for a moment. I don't know what he figured. Maybe he figured he could always play with the wagon. He couldn't always get an apple. Maybe he figured he was through with the wagon anyway.

Whatever it was, he dropped the wagon and started toddling across the back yard. I told him, "Isn't that a lovely apple? It's yours. Well now, let's just take off this play suit." That was all right; he was through playing anyway. "Now let's come on in here and take off the playsuit, and with that you might as well take off the rest – it's dirty too." I just stripped him. We had to wash his hands. While I washed his hands I said, "I might as well wash your face. It's just part of the deal." So we washed his hands and face and then combed his hair. It's all in one package; we just do the whole thing while we're at it. Then we put clean clothes on him, and we tell him that the other three children are in the front room. And so we get through with him, and we lead him up to the front room, put the apple in his hand and push him in. He's got the apple, sees this strange lady, while he is still delighted and pleased. Of course the woman looks at him and she ooh's and ah's and says, "Oh, what a beautiful boy – just like his daddy."

Now I want to ask you a question. Did that boy come in of his own free will and accord? You tell me, sure. And I'll admit he did. He came in because he wanted to. Now I am going to ask you, did I bring him in? You know right well I brought him in. That happened too, didn't it? Why certainly. I started the whole business.

Long ago God held up the little red apple to me. You know what the little red apple for me was? He promised to forgive me my sins. He promised to keep me forever. He promised a free pardon. He promised He'd never leave me. There it was. And I want to tell you right now, I dropped that little red wagon up there in Northern Manitoba and I started toddling in His direction. I've had my face and play suit dirty many times since. But I'm going to have that apple anyway. God didn't try to fool me. And one of these days He's going to put it in my hand and push me on into heaven, and when I get there I'll just be delighted and pleased. I will have made it because He brought me in.

I must say that ever since I have come to know the Lord Jesus Christ there has never been a rebellion in my heart-not to want to be well pleasing in His sight. He died for me. I really believe it. He gave Himself for me. I believe it. He forgives me. I really and truly believe I am forgiven. He can have anything I've got. And He's with me, carries all my loads, takes care of my family, watches over everything I do, even blesses what I do, more than I can ask or think. But do you suppose I don't know that He's doing it? Why, of course He's doing it . . . I was chosen in Him before the foundation of the world.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come nor, height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

We have a wonderful Savior, and, if you have accepted Him, you're safe in His hands. He knows what He is going to do with you. He is going to take you home. He's not going to lose you.

## The Danger of Being An Ordinary Person

Matthew 25:14-30

Our passage covers the well-known parable of the talents. And, of course, when you read that story, I would expect your attention to be drawn immediately to the man with the one talent. If there was any single verse I would want to use as a text for our thinking right now, it would be the 25th verse with these words, "I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine." This is the problem: why do so many Christians do so little in their Christian lives?

Now, the thoughts that I shall be sharing with you have no particular reference to unbelievers. Unbelievers have a condition of their own and they are facing a certain fate of their own. It's a sad one. We're sorry for them and we'll do everything in the world we possibly can to get them to become Christians. But they are not the particular concern in this passage.

What I want to talk about is Christian people. By that I mean people who believe in God and in heaven. They believe that Jesus Christ is their Savior. They believe Jesus Christ died for them, and so far as they personally are concerned they want the Lord Jesus Christ to save their souls and they're trusting Him to do it. And, as for me, right now I feel like saying, "Praise the Lord," because I have reason to believe that He'll do that very thing for me.

But why is it that so many Christian people amount to so little in spiritual things? I am thinking about people who come to church. They'll help build the church, and they'll participate in the church. Some of them may even teach in Sunday School, and all of them may be on the church roll. How can you account for the fact that, with all that we believe, we do so little, spiritually speaking?

For example, take the way we feel about the Bible. I imagine that there are many, many people in the church today that honestly and truly believe that the Bible is the Word of God. They really and truly believe that it is inspired of God, and they want the preacher to preach the Bible. But they never read it. They're in favor of it. They believe in it, but they don't read it. Now that's a serious thing.

That isn't the only index that I have in mind. There is the matter of prayer. Christian people believe in prayer. You can tell they believe in prayer because if they have real trouble they want someone to pray for them. If there is real serious illness in the home, nothing pleases them more than for the preacher to come and pray for them. And if they have real disaster of any kind, they appreciate it very much if the Bible class they belonged to prays for them. And they probably even have the feeling that it would be a fine thing if there was prayer meeting Wednesday night or any kind of prayer service in the church where they would be mentioned in prayer. But I ask the question, why don't we pray more? I can understand the man who doesn't pray because he doesn't believe in it. Back in the days when I didn't believe there was a God, I didn't pray. And that made sense. But now I believe in God. And if I let a day go by and don't pray, how does that make sense? That's my question to you.

Again, take for instance the matter of the church. Any number of Christian people would be glad to see the church full. We think people ought to go to church. Yet we have people living on our same street and never ask them to come.

I am going to call such Christians ordinary people. And these average people have fallen into a snare that's common. There is great danger in being an ordinary person.

The first time I told my wife I was going to preach on that topic she asked me with some concern, "What are you going to say to your audience? Are you going to tell them to be extraordinary?" And I said,

"No, I'm not going to tell them to be extraordinary, because the people I am talking to couldn't be extraordinary if they tried. They are just ordinary folks. But I want to talk about the danger."

If you were extraordinary – meaning you were either exceptionally good or exceptionally bad – you'd have problems of your own. The exceptionally good people have got problems, and the exceptionally bad people have got them, too. But I want to talk about the people that are neither exceptionally good nor exceptionally bad, just average folks, of all levels, average church members, average church officers, average preachers, the people that aren't so very much this way and aren't so very much that way. But they're really genuine Christian people.

It's not true that if a man was very, very smart he would therefore know a lot about the Bible. You probably know some people who wouldn't rate as being exceptionally smart, but they read the Bible with a great deal of profit and pray with much power. I hope you have such a person in the family somewhere. They are the kind of people who aren't exceptional about anything except that they really get somewhere with the Lord.

This man who received the one talent is an illustration of the Christian who is an ordinary person. You know when the one man received five, obviously he had capacity for five. The man who received two obviously had capacity for two. And the man who received one talent was one of these people that obviously have the capacity for only one. But then, note that this man who had the capacity for only one talent is the man who failed. That's the average man. And he failed. In what did he fail? It is indicated to you in our text. He said, "I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth." He was afraid.

We are commonly afraid of two things in our Christian life and experience. I will speak of them as being two perils or snares. The first one is that we tend to overestimate the difficulty of walking with the Lord. We overestimate the difficulty of cultivating spiritual things. Take this matter of Bible study. Any number of people don't read the Bible for a very simple reason. They will tell you – if you get them talking privately – that the reason they don't read the Bible is because they are not smart enough to understand. They will say, "I've tried reading the Bible, but I can't make it out. It's too difficult. If I was smarter and knew more, then I would read it, but the way it is I just can't do it." And I hope I won't sound too short and sharp and blunt, but that's just not true. That's simply, plainly not true. Very common, ordinary people have read the Bible and been blessed.

Of course there will be things in the Bible you don't understand. If you read it and read it and studied and studied and kept on reading and studying for years and years and years, there would still be things in the Bible that you wouldn't understand. The Bible is God's Word and God is greater than any human being. His Word is eternal in its implications and its significance. No human being living in the short space of seventy years down here on earth is going to know everything about God's Word. God's Word covers around the world for all time from the beginning to the end of time. This Word of God will always be found to fit. It's bound to have more in it than I can ever see, even if I lived everywhere and did everything.

But there isn't anybody reading the Bible with an open heart who couldn't see that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Savior of sinners. That's the main thing to see. There isn't anybody who couldn't know from reading the Bible that he is personally a sinner. That's important. And this reader will know that Christ Jesus died for sinners, meaning for himself. Anyone whoever came to Christ was never turned away. That's wonderful! You can find that truth any time you open Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and read. You and I may never have handled sheep, but there isn't one of us who won't know what it means when we read, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." And so I am saying to you, by way of urging you and arguing with you just a little bit, that this matter of Bible reading and Bible study is not that difficult. Most of us are able to read fairly well, and, more than that, we can understand pretty much what we read, and were we to read the Bible we would be blessed. So let me urge it upon you that we keep out of this snare. The Holy Spirit will show you the meaning of Scripture for your heart. Just as sure as you live, if



you will open the Bible and read it, wanting to know and asking God, you will be blessed.

Take the matter of praying. I am satisfied that there are any number of people who do not pray as a general thing because deep down in their hearts they've got this kind of feeling: "I'd like to, but I don't know how to do it – I just don't know how to do it." My sympathies go out to such people, but if I have any faithfulness in my heart at all I want to tell you something. In the first place I want to tell you nobody knows how to do it. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought." That's what the Scriptures say. I know you will think, "I know some people and they can just pray." What do you mean? You mean they can make a speech? Do you mean they just get started and can talk and talk and talk in prayer? Or they use out-of-the-ordinary words? Let me not say anything against that, but let me tell you that you don't have to use their language. You can use your own.

Anybody can pray to God just as well as any child can ask its mother for something it wants. And I can remind you that a small baby can get things from mother and dad before he can even talk. If you think a baby can get something from an earthly parent that way don't you think you can reach your heavenly parent in the same way? Why, of course you could. Let's not be snared by this thing of thinking it's too difficult.

Some years ago in our family we had a little fellow who stayed with us for only seventeen months. We had five children altogether and the four older children lived and are living to this day, by the grace of God. The fifth little fellow came along late in our lives and we had him only seventeen months when he suddenly died. On the day he was dying and my heart was breaking, and I was hardly able even to breathe, I tried to think through why I loved him so. Why was it that my heart was so wrapped up in this little baby boy? I thought to myself, if I knew why I loved him like that, I might know why God loves me. That little fellow had never done anything for me, just as I had never done anything for God. And that little fellow oftentimes had given me trouble. You're not going to have any little baby living around your house for seventeen months without your losing some sleep. He's going to give you some trouble, and he was just the same as anybody else. And yet I loved him.

When I got to thinking about it, among various things, I decided one reason I loved him was because he was mine. And I saw that as one reason God would love me – because I belonged to Him. I belonged to Him because Christ Jesus died for me. And then I remembered another reason why I felt so close to this little fellow: by the time he was a year old he and I were good pals. And in that last six months of his life we had lots of fun, together. And to this day I can remember what a pleasure it was to come in from the day's work and hear his little shrieks of laughter when he heard my footsteps. And he would come running around to meet me, and then he and I had little doings that nobody else knew anything about. He loved it and so did I. He would peek around corners and so on, and we did things that would just set him off giggling in hysterics, and he was just so happy. And as I remember those things, I understood that that was probably one of the reasons why I loved him so. You know when I was thinking about that I felt badly that my Father in heaven didn't have any of those experiences with me. I probably didn't look up to Him nearly as often as this little boy looked up to me.

And then I remembered how this little son of mine had just lived to be seventeen months old and he couldn't say many words. We decided he had only about twenty words that he was using at the time, but he would sit beside us at the table, in his high chair, and he would point to something he wanted. He didn't know the name of anything. He didn't even try to say the name. But he would just lift up his hand, stick his arm out real straight and that little finger would uncurl and point right at something. We knew what he meant. He couldn't say it, but we knew what it was. (I wouldn't have hurt him or frustrated him for anything in the world, but I hope you won't think I was terrible because I would occasionally give him not exactly what he pointed out but just the next thing to it. And I suppose I just enjoyed the impatience with which he would shake his head and he'd just keep that hand pointed right straight at that thing he wanted. And if I gave him something on the other side, the second time, he got really provoked with me.

Why? He knew I knew. And of course I knew.)

Let me suggest to you, if you're a Christian person, don't you think your heavenly Father knows what you want? Don't you think He knows what you need? Suppose you can't say it. Don't you think He knows it? You could point to it. If you've got a burden on your heart and you believe in God and you believe God answers prayer and there's something that you really want God to do, but you don't know how to word it, I'm going to suggest something you could do. You could get on your knees alone before God and you could point to that thing. In your heart you could cry out to Him to do something about that thing. You wouldn't even know how to say it. But He'd know and don't you think He'd do for you? I did for my little boy when he couldn't even name what he wanted.

The matter of inviting people to church, bringing people along with you to Sunday School, that's not as hard as it sounds. You should just try it some time. There are a great many people living in your community who are not going to church now and their children are not coming to Sunday School. Maybe they're just newcomers in the community and would appreciate a neighborly invitation. It's not that difficult.

I've said that one of our snares is overestimating the difficulty of walking with the Lord. The other one snare is like unto it: we underestimate our own importance. We just don't think we matter . . . *and that's not true*. Christ Jesus died for you. I know He died for others, but, brother, sister, He died for you. If He hadn't died for you, you wouldn't be saved. You matter that much to Him. You might say they don't need you at the church. I don't know about the people, but God needs you. You might say you couldn't do anything, or that "they wouldn't miss me." You need to be there, for you do matter to God. He would miss you. One of the most wonderful things about the Lord Jesus Christ is that He has His eye on each one of His people, and He has His eye on you. Sometimes in a feeling of depression, I'm inclined to get the idea it just doesn't matter about me. That's not true. It does matter about me and it matters about you. Christ Jesus died for each of us.

In the matter of Bible reading you might say, "Well, what difference does it make whether I read the Bible? The Bible is the Word of God and the preacher's got it and the Sunday School teachers teach it. Why should I read it?" For you and the Lord, the more that you read it the more the Lord can speak to your heart. He wants to speak to your heart. I know He will speak to the preacher and to the Sunday School teacher. Certainly He'll speak to the missionaries. But He wants to speak to you, as well. And when you read those words, He's speaking to you.

The same is true with praying. You might say "There are a lot of people who can pray far better than I." Fine, but nobody can pray your prayer. And God waits to hear the request from your heart.

The same is true with reference to witnessing to other people and seeking to recruit people to bring them into the church. You can do something that nobody else can do. There will be some people that you can invite that no one else but you can bring.

So, when we consider the whole matter of our relationship with God and our whole spiritual experience, let's be careful about these two things. let's just be careful we don't fall into the snare of thinking it's too hard. That's not true. Or the other side, avoid also the danger of thinking, "I don't count." That's not true either.

Let's not give in to spiritual lethargy. Let's be up and about our Father's business. Let's amount to something – for Him.

## What Think Ye of Christ?

Matthew 22:15-45

The message which God would bring to our hearts centers in Christ Jesus. This person who lived in the world some nineteen hundred years ago was called Jesus of Nazareth, but He was actually the Son of God. He came into this world to seek and to save the lost, and He gave Himself a ransom for many. He gave an invitation to all men. That invitation has gone out wherever the gospel is preached. "Come to the Savior, make no delay, here in our midst He is standing today, tenderly saying, 'Come.' "

What we think of the Lord Jesus Christ marks our faith. Not only do we think who He is, but what He does and whether or not He will do it for us. That's what actually marks our faith. I am going to draw your attention in this Scripture to four different questions. Each one of them is a good question, but the first three we are going to look at are not good enough when it comes to focusing our hearts and our minds on the important thing that there is between us and God.

The passage is found in the Gospel according to Matthew, Chapter 22 and beginning at the 15th verse: "Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk." The Lord Jesus had been preaching and these Pharisees were opposed to Him. They wanted to embarrass Him and get Him to stop preaching. They conferred as to what procedure they could follow to get Him all mixed up in His speech.

"And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians." These Herodians were a particular party of Jews. All we need to know about them for the moment is that they supported the reign of Herod the King, which meant that they collaborated with the Romans. And so, the Herodians, together with some representatives of the Pharisees, came to the Lord Jesus Christ. Here is the question they asked: "Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth; neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men." That is a good way to set the stage to get Him to say something that would embarrass Him. They started out by saying, "We know that you're going to tell the honest truth, and we know that you're not afraid of anybody. You just say anything you want to say." That's a good way to get Him to just come out now and say something that would get Him in trouble.

"Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?" Put into our language, they were asking, "Should we pay taxes to the Roman government, or shouldn't we?" Now they were Jewish people speaking to the Lord Jesus who was a Jew. All the Jewish people hated this business of giving taxes to the Roman government. And if they could get the Lord Jesus to make a positive comment on something like that, they could have him at outs with all the Jewish people. They could embarrass Him and hinder Him in His work.

"But Jesus perceived their wickedness [He saw through their evil design], and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Show me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's. When they had heard these words they marveled, and left him, and went their way."

Now out of that story I want to raise this question – here is the first kind of thought that comes to us when we think about our getting right with God – is it lawful? Do I have to do that? Is it required by law? Now let's think about how that would be with God. You could have a frame of mind, with reference to your relationship with God, in which you think that all that matters is whether you're doing what you're

required to do. Do I have to go to church? Do I have to give anything to the church? Do I have to belong to the church? Do I have to be baptized? This amounts to saying, what I've got to do I'll do, and what I haven't got to do I won't do. I wonder how many of us at any time feel that way about our own Christian experience or about our own relationship with God.

I mention the church, because that's such an easy, open, obvious reference. If I am living in the community and I want to have anything to do with God, I'm going to think about the church. And if I don't want to have anything to do with God, the easiest way is to just stay away from church.

In that frame of mind, even when we're coming to church, we will constantly be faced with questions. When do I have to be there? What do I have to do? Do I have to sing? I'll come to Sunday School, but do I have to stay for church? I was at church this morning; do I have to go tonight? I was at church on Sunday; do I have to go on Wednesday night? As little as I can do is what I want to get away with. And if I've got to go to church, I hope three times a month is enough. I just hope you don't have to go all the time. And if I've got to read the Bible, I hope five verses is enough. Or perhaps four verses will do. One of these is pretty long; maybe two verses will do.

I believe in prayer and I think I ought to pray. I wonder how many Christians have gotten it down to where they can pray faster and faster and faster. You can pray so fast you can hardly hear it. I wonder if any of us are in that frame of mind? You know how you got that way? You got that way by thinking that praying was something you *had* to do. Anything you have got to do you don't want to do.

That's one reason why paying taxes is a pain in the neck. It isn't that it's so much money, really and truly. When you consider everything we have in this country, the amount of taxes you pay is cheap at that price. And I want to tell you right now there isn't one of us that doesn't figure out just how many exemptions we can get; how little we can possibly pay. Why? Because we have got to pay it.

I wonder why the ordinary little household tasks become such a terrible burden for people who have to do them all the time. You know washing a set of dishes is not any very great trick. But then why is it that it gets to be so terribly, terribly hard to do? It's just because you have to. What you have got to do you don't want to do.

That comes right up into your Christian spiritual experience. If from the bottom of your heart your understanding of your relationship with God is such that it is the fulfilling of a number of requirements, something is wrong. What's wrong is that the question you asked didn't go nearly deep enough. You only asked the question, is it necessary? Is it required? Is it legal? Do I have to? That was the question of the Pharisee.

Now I come to the next question. This concerned another group of people called the Sadducees. "The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection." They didn't believe in the resurrection from the dead. They didn't believe in eternal life. Elsewhere we read, too, that they didn't believe in the soul. They "asked him, saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection, whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. Jesus answered and said unto them, ye do err [You make a mistake], not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead [and that was their real problem], have ye not read that which is spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. [That is to say, He said "I *am* the God of Abraham," not, "I *was* the God of Abraham." Abraham is still alive. "I *am* the God of Abraham."] And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine."

We'll leave the part about the resurrection, but we are going to look at the question raised by the

Sadducees who came and asked Him: "Is it reasonable? You are implying that after death there is heaven, and when a person is through living here on earth he will be raised from the dead and will be with God in heaven. What you're saying isn't reasonable. It doesn't make sense." And then they set up this illustration: they proposed that a woman had married seven different men. Now if you say that there is a resurrection from the dead, who will be her husband in heaven?

You see, what they were trying to do was to make out that what the Lord Jesus was saying was ridiculous. And their whole frame of mind is this: we are going to believe just as much as we think sensible. If it isn't reasonable, we won't believe it. People can have that attitude honestly, but it limits them. When we open the Bible and think about the things of God, if by any chance we limit ourselves in our own consciousness to believing only just as much as we can understand, we have tied a rope around our necks. We have just limited ourselves and tied ourselves down to our own selves.

You say that if you can't understand it, you won't believe it? Well you certainly wouldn't believe in God because you can't understand God. That's just a way of disconnecting you from God.

You've got some friends like that. You may have folks that belong to your family that are in this frame of mind. They don't come to church and they don't believe in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The reason why they don't, they say, is that it doesn't make sense. What is preached in the church is just foolish. Who could believe that after you're through with this world you're going to live again? And you could say to such a person, "What's foolish about that?"

"Well, I never saw anything like it."

"What difference would that make? Have you seen everything?"

But as long as they are in this frame of mind, they will just shut their eyes. They will refuse to see it.

Is it reasonable? This is a better question than the first one. The question, do I have to, is the least worthy. I have more respect for the person who asks if it is reasonable, but even so, neither has an attitude that is going to help them to understand the gospel. So let us hurry on to the next question that is raised.

"When the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer [not a lawyer in our modern sense of the word, but this is a person trained in the law of the Bible, a Bible scholar, who sometimes would be called a scribe. He was a person who was an interpreter of the law, of Moses], asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" The law tells you what's right. So this man asks, "What's the right thing? What's the right thing to do?"

Here again you have a question about our relationship with God. Someone wants to find out how to get along with God. How can I get close to God? How can I have God bless me? And perhaps this idea will develop out of one's own heart and mind: I want to do what's right. I just want to do the right thing. What is the right thing to do? What does the revelation of God show that I should do?

This question is better than either of the first two. But it is still inadequate. One reason why it isn't good enough is that even if I knew what was right to do, the way I am naturally I wouldn't want to do it. Just because a thing is right isn't the reason people will do it. Christian people, acting as Christians, will do the right thing because it's right, but that's because they're Christians. But so far as the world (the natural heart and mind) is concerned, you can show a natural person what is right, but he will do what he wants to do anyway. How many of us there are who, even after we have found out what's right, go and do something else. Just knowing what's right isn't enough.

Now having mentioned those three questions – the person who says, "Is it required? Do I have to do it?" and the person who says, "Is it reasonable and sensible?" and then the person who says, "Is it the right thing to do, is it the good thing to do?" – all three of those will fall short because the human heart isn't willing. Even if I know what is required, I'll do as little as I can. Even if I know what is sensible, I will only follow it as far as I want to. Even if I know what is right, I will only do what I like.

There is another question, and the next question we come to is one the Lord Jesus asked of them. "While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? whose Son is he?"

"What think ye of Christ?" That's the question. When I think about being right with God and about having the blessing of God on my soul, I don't have it in me to do what I ought to do. Each one of us human beings have our own weaknesses and our own shortcomings. In the first place we can't see straight. In the next place we're going to do the thing that we like to do. This is one of the places where we misunderstand a great many things. We see somebody doing something wrong and we have the feeling right away that we ought to go and tell him what's right. I am sorry to disappoint you, but going and telling what is right wouldn't do any more than just get you into some sort of an argument. The reason that person is doing what he is doing is not because he doesn't know any better. The reason is that he is doing what he wants to do. And even if you surrounded him and prevented him from doing it, he'll scheme a way to do it and he'll get to it eventually. He is going to do what he wants to do.

But I am going to suggest a question that gets right to the heart of the matter. "What think ye of Christ?" What do you think about Jesus Christ? What do you think He came in the world for? Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Savior? Do you believe He is *your* Savior? When you really and truly believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that He did come into this world to seek and to save the lost, and when you can say that from the bottom of your heart, "I do believe that He died for me." something happens. God begins to work in you. And when you believe in Him and receive Him, "as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."

Becoming a child of God means that God begins to work in you "to will and to do of his good pleasure." He gives the Holy Spirit to you, and the Holy Spirit will strengthen you in the things of the Lord Jesus Christ. You will find yourself inwardly wanting to do the things that are well pleasing in His sight. You'll not do it because you have to, you'll not do it because you understand it, and you'll not even do it because it's the right thing to do. You'll do it because it pleases Him. When once your eye is focused on the face of the Lord Jesus Christ, you inwardly become lifted to Him and drawn to Him and you want Him to be yours.

When you ask yourself this question – What do I think of Jesus Christ? Do I really and truly think He's my Lord? Do I really and truly think He's my Savior? – that will clear the way for you. When you understand that Christ Jesus came for you and you're putting your trust in Him, you can claim the promise of God: "whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

It's far simpler than we thought. It's in Jesus Christ. Look to Him. Take Him for your own. And as surely as you do He will bless you and keep you.

Anyone that ever turned to Him and received Him, Christ Jesus received that person. Anybody that turned His back on Him, Christ Jesus turned His back on that person.

God Almighty in heaven watches us – not to see where we are going to go, not to see what we are going to do, not to see the way in which we do things. What will you do with Jesus that is called the Christ? That's what God in heaven wants to see. If you will receive Jesus Christ as your Savior, God will receive you.

## Make Me A Little Cake First

I Kings 17:8-16

The blessing of God is promised to those who obey Him. For any of us this is such a very important thing. Our whole thought in turning to God at any time is that we might be blessed of Him. We need His blessing so much and the condition to receive blessing from God is obedience to Him. This matter of obedience poses a very real problem in Christian living. It's not natural to yield the control over one's self to others.

When God arbitrarily disposes our affairs in His the matter, this removes considerable uncertainty, I know, but it also brings with it less blessing. God does this to a great extent. The rain falls and the sun shines on the good and the bad alike. And apparently, so far as the various actions of God in providence are concerned, the choice of man is very little involved. And so the weather may be hot, or the weather may be cold. The day may be stormy, or the road may be rough on occasion, and we have really nothing to do about that. These things are in God's hands. But when it comes to those matters in which we could make a choice, then the matter of blessing becomes directly related to our obedience to Him. What God actually approves in living is willing obedience from the heart in love to Him, as was manifested in His Son, Jesus of Nazareth. It is possible to choose to live this way.

As we are thinking about these things, we may remind ourselves that when man was first created, the Bible tells us that man was created in the flesh and apparently was designed to live in this world, involved in this world. Man must eat the food that this world provides. He has to breathe the air that this world has. He lives in this given world. But in the course of living he has some opportunity to make choices. There are some things a man can do. He can have a garden or be without a garden. In the garden he can plant corn, or he can plant beans, or he can plant potatoes. He has some choice in the matter. According to his choice are the things that will grow. The principle becomes established that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." God created man to live in this world and to make personal choices in selection of the things round about him.

This principle is to be seen, in a tree, for example. All the elements that are in that tree are actually taken from the ground and the air. The tree lives by utilizing elements that it selects from the environment in which it is. The tree doesn't take up everything. It selects out of the environment that which it needs for its nature and its being. And so men are to live in this world. We didn't get to make the world. We didn't get to make the people. We don't get to make the weather. We live in this world as it is and as it unfolds. And yet, in our living we exercise personal preference, a certain amount of choice. Even as the tree through its roots takes certain elements out of the soil, so man in his activities in the world takes certain things out of his environment in which he lives.

In the case of Adam, God made a garden and placed man in the garden to dress it and to keep it. The garden was to be useful to Adam, depending to a certain extent upon the way in which he would handle it. This tells us that man's fortune and welfare are dependent upon, the exercise of his intelligence and his diligence. Man will exercise his dominion over the world as he uses it, according to the will of God.

This is probably enough background for us to understand man's great peril. That is that man will become interested in himself; he will make everything come to himself. As man's interest becomes focused upon himself, he has the tendency to be short-circuited. He turns his attention back in on himself

and it's not healthy or good. To help man that he might have blessing in this world in responsible living, the book of Genesis tells us of something that God did. God placed in the garden, where man could reach it, a tree. And then God told man that he was not to use that tree. We call it the forbidden fruit. We are all familiar with it. But it's a very significant item. I am going to call it "the separated portion."

Man could have any part of the garden except the separated portion. This separated portion, he was not to eat thereof. And he was warned that if he did disobey God in eating of that tree that he would suffer death. This brings the issue of obedience into vivid focus.

We often talk about obeying God. How could you obey God? What happens? Since God is invisible and your thoughts of Him are all in your mind and in your heart, how can you know whether or not you are obeying God? Well, the fact of the matter is that obedience to God is shown in the way in which we handle this world's affairs. The principle of obeying God is to be seen especially in the way we handle what I am going to call the separated portion.

Now let me show you how this was revealed in Scripture in an easy-to-understand way. When Moses gave the people of God instructions as to how to live, they were to practice the tithe. Of all the income that came to them, one tenth was to be given to God. In the same way and for the very same significance, one seventh of the time was to be devoted to the service and worship of God. We call that the Sabbath Day. So in these two items, the tithe and the Sabbath, you have in this classic way the real meaning of the separated portion. This actually demonstrates obedience to God. You can't see it so well in other things but you can see it in this.

A man might be doing what God wants him to do while he is going about his regular work day in and day out, but obedience shows up more clearly if at some point the man does something special because God asked him to do it. This is the reason why the whole matter of what we call stewardship is so very important. It's a common thing for us who know and understand something about the ways of God to say that all things come from God. That is true. But this fact that all things come from God needs to be demonstrated in specific things. I myself need to have the experience of actually showing this in my conduct.

There comes to my mind an incident that happened in my youth up in Canada. In the city of Winnipeg, there is a certain portion of the property that the Canadian Pacific Railway owns which was used as a public street. It was where the people drove in to the station when they were bringing in passengers and baggage. The public made use of it just like it was a city street. It was the law of the country that if this property was left for public use indefinitely, by common usage it would revert to what we call public domain. If the Canadian Pacific Railway allowed the public to use that property as a road continuously for a certain length of time, by law it became property of the City of Winnipeg. This is what I saw: on Labor Day, once a year, there were certain stands set in the street and posts were set up. Then a very nice golden chain would be put across this property. And for one day nobody was allowed to drive in there. This fulfilled the legal requirement, because now the Railway company had established its ownership by reserving one day in the year when nobody could come in.

I think something like that actually happens so far as we are concerned. The human being is inclined to just accept everything as if he owned it. People live in this world as if they owned the whole world. People live every day as if they owned every day. When people begin using every day for themselves they become self-centered. And if all the money they receive they just keep for themselves they grow increasingly self-centered. And so we have this principle set out in the Scriptures for the guidance of man for his blessing: one seventh of his time belongs to God. Man has the seven days in the week, but one day in the week, so far as his work and his play are concerned, are for God – not for himself. Well this has an effect on the people. If a man will observe the Sabbath Day and keep it holy so that one day in the week he will not use for his own purpose, that man will be very conscious all the other six days of the week that he really doesn't have the time for himself; it all belongs to God.



Now a person could say, "I think it all belongs to God." Very well, if you think it all belongs to God you still shouldn't object to taking one day in seven to set aside for Him in a special way. And believe me, this is important. Regardless of what you say – even that it all belongs to God – if you treat every day alike, the first thing you know you'll think it all belongs to you.

So also with reference to money: a man could say, "Everything I have, I have from God. I realize that my health and my strength and my opportunity – everything I have, I have from God." Fine, now do you really want to keep that in mind? Then tithe. Take one tenth of your income and set it aside for the Lord in a special way. Now you can do more than that if you want to. You can give the Lord more than a tenth. But have at least a certain amount, and a tenth is a good proportion; take one tenth of your income and set it aside for the Lord. From personal experience I can, tell you that you will pretty soon get to where you will know the other nine-tenths comes from God. This is part of the blessing that there is.

This whole principle which is so plainly set forth in the tithe and the Sabbath and which I have called "the separated portion" is operative in special instances any time. I am going to bring to mind an Old Testament story in the context of things that I have been talking about.

In 1 Kings 17:8-16 we read, "The word of the Lord came unto him [Elijah], saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake [bread], but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. [The woman is saying they are so afflicted with famine they only have a little bit of flour and a little bit of oil left. She has only enough for her son and herself to eat one more time; then they'll have to die.] And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah."

Elijah challenged the woman, "Make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me and after make for thee and for thy son." This call of Elijah placed upon the woman a demand for her obedience. When he asked her to do this he promised her that God would see that she would have plenty. So we are to understand that the woman did what she did, not because she was afraid, but because she believed.

Now will you notice that Elijah's call to the woman did not involve the use of her surplus. She had very little and the call was to use that in obeying God.

The second thing I want you to notice is that this call recognized God's prior claim. God can say, "Do this for me first and the other things will be taken care of."

It also involved self denial. For the woman to do this she had to actually, as it were, hold off feeding herself and her son. They weren't going to have anything more to eat. And yet they were asked to take some of this very food and turn it over now to God, trusting in God.

Again you will see that as a part of self denial this requires self control. The only way the woman could do this thing was to be in charge of herself, to have self control.

Finally, although this call from Elijah directed her as to what she ought to do, with it was the promise of God clearly stated to encourage her to obey. And all of this is written for our learning. This is the lesson in stewardship that I wanted to share with you.

When God wants us to remember Him, He actually gives us guidance and direction with reference

to the way we handle the things we have in this world. He will ask that we use some of our substance for Him first; so that He may bless us afterwards with reference to other things. If we want the blessing of God we must deny ourselves in this immediate instance and give in service as we wait on the Lord for His blessing. Then God will actually bless. As we live in this world, God puts in front of us everything and then says, "Some of this you're not to use for yourself. In order to keep the record clear, use some of it for Me. And if you will use some of it for My work, then I'll bless you with all the other things."

"Make Me a little cake first."