

That's The Way I Understand It - Series

IS THE CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST CENTRAL TO HUMAN HISTORY?

For Harp And Adequately Powered Tape Recorder

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Introduction Comments
[Not a part of the reading.]

“Is The Cross Of Jesus Christ Central To Human History?” is a musical dramatic reading examining the Bible and Bible issues including the issue of “is God a rewarder?” This examination of the Bible and Bible issues is done by listening to the musical dramatic reading. However, just the words to “Is The Cross Of Jesus Christ Central To Human History?” are contained in the document you have.

This reading makes use of what we call the seven last words of Christ. While looking at these seven last words of Christ, we will tell the story of the thief on a cross who was killed at the same time that the famous Jesus of Nazareth was killed on a cross. The thief was on a cross beside Jesus. They suffered side by side.

The thief on the cross bad-mouthed Jesus severely. Then, in less than a few hours the thief converted. What happened? Why did the thief convert? What possibly went on in his mind that day? At the cross is probably the only time that the thief had met Jesus of Nazareth.

Setting the thief’s story and the seven last words of Christ against each other can show some basic issues about the Bible for an introduction or review. This makes up the basis for the presentation.

There are many views about the Bible. Our view has sought to make the famous Jesus of Nazareth our ultimate authority on the Bible.

Thank you for your consideration of “Is The Cross Of Jesus Christ Central To Human History?” Please tell others, as appropriate, about this reading and about the Message.

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As of the time of this writing, the plans for the music for this reading are indefinite. Times have changed since the writing of this document because the tape recorder for a musical presentation will now probably be a laptop computer. Check danielhookemusic.com or other relevant related key words on the web in the future.

Information on how to get a copy of “Is The Cross Of Jesus Christ Central To Human History?” may possibly be at danielhookemusic.com or check other relevant key words on the web. Do not make any changes to your copy of “Is The Cross Of Jesus Christ Central To Human History?” Please handle carefully so that errors do not enter into the document.

Thank you for your interest!

* * * * *

Permission is granted at the present time for you to give a presentation or do a study of this reading titled “Is The Cross Of Jesus Christ Central To Human History?” if it is presented in its entirety in the manner stated in the document and in Appendix Two. Thank you for your interest!

This reading can be presented as a Personal Private Study, as a Study for Lent, as a Sunday School Study for adults or older youth, and it can be presented in its entirety to a group all on one occasion although this has never been done at the time of this writing. The uses of bold, all caps, and underline in the document are for reading aloud purposes. Please see the Appendix Two for comments on making various kinds of presentations.

If this reading is read to people of another language, be sure that the reader is very fluent both in English and the other language. The reader can read the English to himself one sentence at a time and then give the translation of that sentence aloud. A presentation involving translation to another language should use the Sunday School Study presentation described in the Appendix Two because the other two types of presentations would not have enough time or would not work.

It is suggested that you punch holes in your printing of this reading and put it into a three-ring notebook.

See the website danielhookemusic.com for other Bible related documents.

Please enjoy “Is The Cross Of Jesus Christ Central To Human History?”

[Do not read aloud the title or any kind of headings or anything in this kind of brackets.]
[Read with urgency and speed.]

That's The Way I Understand It - Series

IS THE CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST CENTRAL TO HUMAN HISTORY?

By Daniel Hooke

Movement I - Introductory Recitative

A Thief Considers The Question

[Beginning of “Session One” of “Study for Lent” presentation.]
[Beginning of “entire reading all on one occasion” presentation.]

[For the “entire reading all on one occasion” presentation: The reading needs to be started by 15 minutes after the beginning of the session (8:45 A.M. if you started at 8:30 A.M.)]

Is the Cross of Jesus Christ central to human history? The first person in recorded human history to consider this question with any degree of urgency was not a philosopher, a theologian, or a religious leader. The first known person to urgently consider any of the implications of the question of the centrality of the Cross of Christ was a criminal thief on his way to certain death. His story is recorded in that unique book called the Bible or Holy Scriptures.

Here is the thief's story with possibly why he may have acted as he did. Why did the thief consider the questions raised by the fact of Jesus dying on a cross? By conjecture of what might have been, based on Bible ways of how God works with people, we can fill in the gaps in the thief's story in the Bible hopefully somewhat similar to what might have happened. This little exercise will help us get a better feel for some key issues in the Bible and a better feel for what was going on in the Bible. For instance, the original readers of the Bible New Testament knew first hand the horrors and scare of a torturous death by crucifixion from seeing crosses by the roadside as they passed by on the road. We in our era of history do not have this living feel for the crucifixion in our historical memory and must conjecture to feel and empathize with the people in a crucifixion scene. So, if by tentative conjecture we fill in the gaps in the Bible record of the thief's story, his story can present the main evidence that we have been given to make a decision about the Cross of Jesus the Christ.

Meet The Thief

Let's go to Jerusalem in the Jewish country of Israel at the time of the Roman occupation. It is one Friday morning a long time ago. This is the day that it happened. This is the day that they crucified Jesus of Nazareth on a cross. Today turns out to be a big day in the life of our thief, too.

Around eight o'clock in the morning we find the thief with some Roman soldiers on a road going out of Jerusalem. The thief is frowning and kicking some gravel in the road as he angrily plods and stumbles along. The thief is dreading this morning and the next few days. He wishes that this painful ordeal would hurry up and be over.

It was just a few days ago that the thief was on an early morning hunt enjoying the smell and feel of the early morning dew and damp. He remembered the birds singing prettily and the beautiful sky that dawn. But life can change quickly.

Look at what a fix the thief is in now as he plods along today. On this morning now, in contrast to a few days ago, the thief is angry -- boiling angry and sweating. He is angry because he got caught at being a thief. He is angry because they are now taking him outside the city to kill him for his crimes by crucifying him which is nailing him up on a cross made out of wood and letting him hang there to die. He is angry and sweating because the Roman soldiers are forcing him to carry his own heavy wooden cross down the road as they go to the place where they will execute him. He is angry at these particular Roman soldiers because they have beaten him severely with painful whips. The tired thief in drudgery is letting the bottom end of the cross drag along behind him. The cross bumps and bounces on the rough pavement as the thief drags the cross along. The thief is dragging a whole wooden cross which means that he will have the most painful of all of the types of crucifixions. This is the most painful type of crucifixion because he will have to go through the trauma of having his cross dropped jarringly into the ground while he is nailed to the cross which sometimes exerts enough force to pull joints out of socket. If the thief would have been carrying just the crossbeam of the cross, it would have meant that he would have been hauled up with ropes to be nailed to the crossbeam on a planted pole instead of having his cross being dropped into a three foot hole while he was nailed to it. As the thief drags his cross along, he winces at the whiplash sores stinging under the heavy weight of the rough wooden cross digging into his flesh. He glares grudgingly at the soldiers and says some bad words under his breath. And, also, the thief is angry at God for letting life be such a mess.

During his life, the thief would not stay out of those situations or refrain from doing things that little by little would get him deeper and deeper into something. Before he knew it he was into trouble again or doing something wrong. But the thief didn't choose to consider the fact that he might be a part of the problem. That he might not be correct was not one of the options. To further complicate the matter, the thief had a habit of using his choice of behaviors and his outbursts as a way to try to control others as if it was their fault that he had to choose to behave the way he did. This pattern to control others was just one of the many schemes the thief used to try to make it look like you were the bad

person if he did not get his way. And, the thief had not broken these habits because after a while habits can have a huge control over us. We also stop being rational and operate out of the logic of selfishness. And, of course, some of the thief's bad habits developed just as a plain act of rebellion against someone to show his independence. Neither did the thief choose to make use of any of his Scripture Bible training he had received as a youth. He couldn't depart from the training of his youth. He remembered it. But he didn't choose to use it. To the thief's parents, he was what the Bible New Testament would describe as what we call the prodigal son -- some of whom straighten up and come home and some who don't -- much to the pain and hurt of their parents. The thief didn't look like he was coming home since he was on his way to be executed. The thief was not one who would listen to anyone showing him his errors and the consequences they could bring him. He was hooked on his bad habits. And, he refused to take the responsibility for making changes that would lead to the control of his bad habits and would lead to breaking the power his bad habits had over him. Much less would he acknowledge that he might need God's help to do this. The thief never considered himself to be a part of a problem.

As the group moved down the road, the thief was very reluctant to carry his cross -- dragging it down the road. The thief paused under the heavy weight of the cross. A soldier gently nudged him with his spear to encourage him to move along.

The Thief Meets Jesus Of Nazareth

The thief has company that morning on the road. The Roman soldiers are taking two others along with him that morning to be executed on a cross. One is another thief. The other person dragging a cross, the thief is surprised to find out, is the famous Jesus of Nazareth. The thief had heard many things about Jesus. And, he knew that there was a close group of disciples that followed Jesus. The thief had also heard that the best friend of Jesus was the disciple John. The thief was surprised when he saw Jesus. He thought that the famous Jesus would be more distinguished looking. The thief thought to himself, "He looks like one of us."

Is Jesus The Messiah, The Christ?

Jesus is the One that many people think will be the great Messiah or Christ that Moses and the prophets predicted would come to deliver Israel from all enemies. Messianic type thinking for the Jews went all the way back to the ancient Father Abraham who was told by God that in him all of the families of the earth would be blessed. In the prophecy in the Jewish Holy Scriptures, Moses spoke of a great Prophet like himself to come. When this great Prophet comes, people are supposed to listen to Him or be destroyed. Some people thought that they should therefore listen to Jesus based on the words of Moses in the Scriptures. Listening here is used in the sense of submitting and obeying -- not just hearing and then ignoring what you heard.

But, Jesus looked kind of silly and pitiful to the thief. Jesus was struggling greatly to drag His cross along. And, He looked kind of silly because He was wearing some sticks in His

hair. The sticks were twisted and woven together to make a ring that encircled the top of Jesus' head. The sticks were some kind of thorny material. The picture of Jesus certainly didn't look like a great Deliverer or great anything else to the thief.

However, the people had believed that Jesus would rise up like the great Jewish military leader King David and free Israel from the oppressive Roman occupation. When Jesus had arrived at Jerusalem a few days ago, a large throng of people gave Him a King-like, triumphant procession as Jesus rode into the city on the colt of a donkey. (The disciples of Jesus realized when He was glorified that this procession into the city by Jesus fulfilled an Old Testament Scripture about the Christ Messiah to come. The Scripture said, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, your King comes to you: He is just, and having Salvation; lowly, and riding on a donkey, and on a colt the foal of a donkey.") The whole city was moved with the arrival of Jesus and the throng was especially large because of what Jesus had recently done for Lazarus which we will talk about in a moment. There was even talk that Jesus was the Son of God! The recent John the Baptizer prophet with supportive signs had said some great things about this Man Jesus. And, Jesus had said many profound things and done many wonderful and unusual things which gave the people great hope that indeed Jesus was the long awaited Messiah or Christ. But He sure didn't look like anything great now. He looked kind of stupid to the thief.

The Works Of Jesus

The thief with all of his strength kicked another small stone out of the road. Seeing Jesus dragging a cross to be killed made the thief even more angry. How can this Guy save us from the Romans if He is going to let the Romans kill Him? He has the ability to save us from the Romans! He has made the blind see, made the lame walk, cleansed the hopeless lepers, made the deaf hear and the dumb speak, even raised people from the dead, and has done other amazing miracles. The close disciples of Jesus were sometimes fearful in His presence after some of the powerful miracles of Jesus. The disciples once said to each other, "What kind of Man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" Of course, the thief didn't know about all of the works of Jesus. But in the last several days the whole city of Jerusalem seemed to be a buzz about Jesus and His recent raising of Lazarus from the dead after Lazarus had been well witnessed to have been dead for several days. The thief angrily glanced over at Jesus as they both dragged their crosses down the road. If Jesus would have acted as He could have, thought the thief, the Romans would be gone and would not be putting Jesus or me to death today! But no more can this Jesus be the Messiah for us. How can He be the Christ if He is going to be dead in a few days? (It usually takes about three days for someone to die the torturous death of painfully hanging nailed to a cross.) How can Jesus be our Messiah if He is going to die?

The thief paused again to rest from dragging the heavy cross. Several of the soldiers hollered and fussed at him to get moving.

Jesus Falls Under The Cross

Just then Jesus stumbled and fell completely to the ground. He was worn down from being harshly beaten by the Roman soldiers and from dragging the heavy weight of the cross. The thief saw that the Roman soldiers had really excessively beaten Jesus to a pulp. The beating, which is also called a scourging or flogging, had been severe. The whips they used to beat you had metal and chips of bones in the tips of the whips to rip and tear at your flesh. What cringing, shocking pain it was -- hammering and digging at your flesh leaving large bleeding, stinging whelps. It took your breath away. Most people fainted from the beatings. Many died while being beaten. With selfish aggravation the thief thought to himself, "It serves Him right. If that Jesus would have used His powers to free Israel from the Romans, the Romans would not be putting either of us to death today. We would all be free!"

Scriptures Fulfilled

The thief didn't know it but many Old Covenant Scriptures from the Old Testament part of the Bible were being fulfilled that day. The Old Testament Scriptures of our complete Bible containing a New Testament and Old Testament are what made up the complete Jewish Holy Scriptures in the days of Jesus and the thief. Much of the Old Testament part of the Bible is a detailed description of the life of Jesus.

The striping of the body of Jesus with whips to begin the crucifixion experience fulfilled the Isaiah Scripture that said, "With His stripes we are healed." Jesus didn't receive the usual crucifixion beating given to those who were going to be crucified because He had just received a very severe beating in a political maneuver by Pilate, the local Roman governor. Pilate had Jesus beaten, striping His body with whips, hoping to get pity for Jesus from the curious mob that was with those who wanted to get Jesus killed at the trial of Jesus. Pilate hoped that the mob would exert pressure for freeing Jesus and Pilate would get out of this hot, political situation. This beating hopefully would also satisfy the religious leaders with the fact that Jesus had received some severe punishment. A crowd earlier in the week heaped great praise on Jesus. Pilate saw the envy of the religious leaders who brought charges against Jesus and Pilate hoped that he could use today's crowd to help free Jesus so that Pilate would not be in this hot, political controversy over Jesus. Pilate struggled greatly not to have anything to do with Jesus. But his own sinful desires trapped him in. Pilate had a tradition of freeing a prisoner and he gave the crowd a choice of freeing the notable Barabbas or the pitiful, severely beaten Jesus called the Christ. But with mob psychology the religious leaders stirred up the crowd to ask to free Barabbas and ask for Jesus to be crucified. After the political maneuver of beating Jesus by Pilate didn't work, Jesus didn't receive a second beating when He was sent to be crucified since He was already just severely beaten. But His beating was still a part of the crucifixion experience. The beating took place in the middle of the Barabbas episode we can see when we harmonize the three Bible accounts of the beating of Jesus using the most detailed account in the book of John which expands on the briefly summarized account in the other two accounts.

Much of Isaiah chapter 53 is a great prophetic description of the earthly end of Jesus of Nazareth such as, “He is despised and rejected of men; a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. Surely He has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

Also, see the Old Testament Psalm 22 for another prophetic picture of the end of the earthly life of Jesus. Furthermore, the Christ symbols in the Old Testament book of Leviticus were especially being fulfilled in Jesus that day as described in the New Testament part of the Bible in the book of Hebrews. And, see the prophecies from the Old Testament books of Isaiah and Psalms in the four New Testament biographies about Jesus that tell us about the significance of Jesus for us.

The Case Against Jesus

Now let's return to our scene. A large crowd was following the three condemned men to their place of execution. It was the Passover and many people were in Jerusalem for the Passover. These Jewish visitors to Jerusalem had heard about Jesus of Nazareth which added to the crowd on the way to the crucifixion of Jesus. After Jesus had great difficulty carrying His cross, the Roman soldiers grabbed one Simeon, a Cyrenian visitor to Jerusalem, out of the crowd. The soldiers forced Simeon to walk along with Jesus and carry His cross for Him. At this point, the thief realized that maybe these severe beatings that Jesus and the thief received would make them die quicker on the cross and they wouldn't have to suffer as much. He certainly wanted this ordeal to hurry up and be over.

In the crowd were some of the Jewish religious leaders that had convinced the Romans to put Jesus to death. This happened in the manner that it was prophesied in Psalm 2 in the Bible when it states, “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His Anointed.” Really the religious leaders politically maneuvered the morally weak Roman leader Pilate to have Jesus crucified. The thief overheard what was being said by the religious leaders who were waving their arms and talking heatedly. It seems as though the religious leaders wanted Jesus dead because He claimed to be to Son of God. This was a terrible thing for a man to make himself equal with God and it was blasphemous in the Jewish religion. In the Jewish religious Law it deserved death but the religious leaders didn't have the authority to crucify someone under the Roman occupation. For the religious leaders to conduct a sometimes used stoning to death of this famous person would have gotten them into trouble with the masses. In many ways they feared the masses. So, the religious leaders needed the help of the Romans to put Jesus to death.

Capital punishment is in the Jewish Scriptures, which is our Bible Old Testament, listed with the Ten Commandments. For whatever reasons, which may have been unique to His

case, Jesus submitted to capital punishment even when the law made a mistake. There are different opinions about the earlier statements of Jesus at the stoning of the woman caught in adultery. Some think the remarks of Jesus at that incident opposed capital punishment. Others think that Jesus came to save the world not to condemn the world so He avoided discussing the merits of a capital punishment case. Instead, His remarks at that incident were directed to people who were not looking at their own sins and who were not being forgiving even when it might be necessary to carry out the law.

Now, back to the case against Jesus. Besides the blasphemy, Jesus had done many profound miracles and had said many wise things all of which appealed to the masses. The Jewish leaders didn't want the Israel masses following this blasphemous Jesus Person. The recent well-witnessed raising of Lazarus from the dead by Jesus had really caught the attention of the masses. Many Jews were believing in Jesus because of Lazarus. So, the religious leaders plan to kill Lazarus, too. The religious leaders thought that the whole world was going after Jesus. If Jesus would get the masses too stirred up, the Nation Israel could conceivably get into trouble with the Romans. The religious leaders possibly used this fear of the Romans to turn the crowd against Jesus at the trial of Jesus and then the crowd asked to free Barabbas instead of Jesus. The religious leaders at the trial may have gotten some rebellious drunks in the crowd at the trial to lead the verbal charge against Jesus and the rest of the crowd followed along in mob psychology in fear of the Romans. Note that Psalm 69 in the Bible talks about, "I was the song of drunkards." Pilate didn't want Rome to hear that he couldn't control the situation. The mob at the trial may not have been the mob that gave Jesus the triumphant entry into Jerusalem a few days before the trial. Because the masses were flocking to Jesus and to keep the Nation Israel from being totally destroyed by the Romans, the Jewish high priest unknowingly prophesied that let Jesus die for the whole nation. (This prophecy also applies to the children of God scattered abroad we now know from the Bible.) So, the religious leaders had looked for a way to get rid of Jesus.

Deep down they considered Jesus to be a threatening irritation, too. Jesus had said some rather pointed things about the religious leaders to shake them up and as a warning for us. And, they had not forgotten how Jesus once or twice earlier had violently come in and turned the Temple of the Jews upside down running out questionable activities saying that God's House should be a place of prayer instead of a den of thieves. (Of course, Jesus was operating under the guidance of God and spoke these stinging words to give them an opportunity to be shaken out of their complacency and also as a warning to others.) The disciples of Jesus found out that a place in the Scriptures described this action of Jesus. It talked about the zeal for God's house has eaten Me up.

So, with all of these things against Jesus in the minds of the religious leaders, they were intent in their mission to snare Jesus. They were so intent on their mission that earlier they had stirred up a mob to demand to the reluctant local government leader Pilate that Jesus be crucified as we just mentioned. But the thief was puzzled. The Romans don't care in the least about the Jewish religion. The Romans have no law for executing someone for Jewish religious reasons. Why then were the Romans executing Jesus for this kind of religious reason?

Jesus Speaks To The Women

The thief had a hard time thinking about this puzzling question with all of the weeping and wailing for Jesus by the women in the crowd. Jesus became very troubled by the sight of the women. He turned to the weeping women and, with considerable emotion in His voice and face, frowning passionately He said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in which they should say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck.’ Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us;’ and to the hills, ‘cover us’. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?”

The prediction Jesus had just made paralleled a statement in the Scriptures in the book of Hosea saying the same idea. However, these words of Jesus didn’t make much sense to a thief who was tired and in great pain. He did think, however, that it was rather strange that Jesus was more concerned about these weeping women than He was about Himself. Jesus was the One being put to death -- not these women. This unusual concern for others by Jesus made the thief think about this Man Jesus for a moment. The thief realized that he had never heard of Jesus doing anything wrong. There were some religious arguments with the Jewish religious leaders over such things as the application of Scripture requirements about the Sabbath and whether Jesus had the authority to make a new and different set of Scripture level requirements about the Sabbath which, among other things, is a gift of rest for us. But, the thief never really knew of Jesus doing anything wrong. But with what he was seeing happening today, though, the thief was beginning to think that maybe this Jesus was some kind of a nut after all. Then the thief got angrier at Jesus and thought, “Come on Man. Don’t stop and talk and hold us up. Let’s get these terrible crucifixions over!”

The Thief Resists The Cross

The thief was thinking angry thoughts again. Being angry, he stomped his foot on a clod of dirt in the road exploding the clod into small bits of flying dirt. One of the soldiers saw this display of anger and began to keep an eye on the thief.

Now that the thief was more aggravated with Jesus, the thief began to think, “Why is it that this Jesus doesn’t have to carry His cross but I have to drag mine up the road? I’ve been beaten just like He has and my body hurts, too! No fair!”

Because of our human weaknesses we all do things we shouldn’t and then hopefully deal with them. But the thief was especially prone to not staying out of situations that would get him deeper and deeper into something. And, then, he would be in trouble or be doing something wrong. He would not get out of the situation before it was too late. The thief would even get into mental situations like this. And, he wouldn’t get out of the mental situation by forgetting about it, or thinking about something else, or by being merciful and forgiving to release the grip the situation had on him, or by seeing the falseness of

enjoying being in the situation and feeling sorry for himself because of the mess he was in, or by turning the situation over to God which we now know can be done through His Christ. Instead the thief would just bitterly dwell on the mental situation as it sucked him in deeper and deeper.

Also, the thief did not know that bad thoughts about people or subjects might really be Satan, the Devil, giving us bad information. And, of course, Satan gives us an intellectual, educated, professional, or whatever sounding rationale that helps us accept these lies so that we feel justified in being upset and displeased with people or subjects. The thief did not know that when we have bad thoughts about someone or some subject, it is always wise to examine those bad thoughts with God and Christ to get Their interpretation on the people or subject at hand. This type of examination may save us and others much misery and lead to things like examining ourselves for sin with God and Christ and extending forgiveness. We will talk more about the deceptions of Satan later. Meanwhile we will continue with the thief.

Honor Me And I Will Honor You

The thief did not recognize that life can be divided into two choices as we face each moment. We can do things as God tells us to do things in the Bible Word of God Scriptures correctly interpreted while seeking the guidance of God and His Christ. Then we wait to see what God does and plan accordingly as guided. Or, we can do things our way. With either choice, we don't control the world or eternity or usually not even our level of suffering.

However, when we do things God's way using all of God's Word in the Bible and wait to see what God will do, then the Bible prophet Samuel tells us that God promises to honor those who honor Him by obeying all of His Word. Samuel quoting the Lord God of Israel said, "Them that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me will be lightly esteemed." It's a total commitment as Samuel points out in the context of this verse. It uses the total Bible as the context shows.

This honor for God is focused on our obedience not our works that we do in obedience. This honor for us may come in this life or be rewards of treasures in heaven in the next life. It may require sacrifice and suffering as guided with the help of God and His Christ. It may involve tribulation. But now we know that Jesus said in regard to tribulation, "In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." It may require giving up something. But, often it may require no more than giving up our way to do something and instead do it someone else's way -- even their silly way when required by the Bible. Admittedly, though, there are times that the Bible statement applies, with costs, that says we are to obey God and not men. We need to be willing to give up anything for God and Christ. Jesus tells us in the Bible that some things need prayer and private, not-for-show fasting. We are to enjoy God's blessings in this world. But, we are told in the Bible that, "the world passes away, and the lusts thereof: but the person that does the Will of God abides for ever."

It is easy to look for false exceptions to the Bible to give us reasons to excuse ourselves so that we can do our own way. Remember the Bible story of Adam and Eve in the Paradise Garden Of Eden in the Bible and the wrong kind of doubt they had of God's Word. Jesus chose to do God's way rather than His way own even though it was costly. But the Bible tells us that for His obedience Jesus is now forever greatly rewarded for His obedience with great joy and sits at the right hand of God. Jesus let the Bible Scriptures thoroughly shine in all facets of His life.

It should furthermore be noted that God has provided a Bible way, which we also need to obey, for us to deal with our mistakes, our wrongs, and our sins in all aspects of our being -- physical and spiritual. The Bible tells us that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit so we are not to sin with or against our bodies or our minds. Indeed it says that we are not our own; we have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. We are bought with the price that Jesus Christ has paid for us.

This dealing with sin means that we also have to watch our mouth and stand by our word since the Bible talks about, "Put off ... filthy communication out of your mouth." and "Let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay." and "He that swears to his own hurt, and changes not" (except for something like sickness preventing him from doing what he says but not for something like he got a better offer so he breaks his word) and "You shall not bear false witness." and "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by words you shall be justified, and by words you shall be condemned." (That was Jesus talking and should be taken knowing about repentance, forgiveness, and salvation.) and "Out of the same mouth proceeds blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Does a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?"

This dealing with sin also includes dealing effectively with the sins of others for whom we are responsible. In the Bible book of Joshua, one sin by a person affected the whole group in their relationship to God and in their effectiveness in the world for God until those responsible for leadership took charge decisively and did not misuse mercy as an escape from executing their responsibility. It might be mentioned that when the sins of Church leaders and the Church hired help are not dealt with effectively, decisively, and timely but waiting on the Lord, then it is especially destructive to the Church. Dealing effectively here means "as opposed to dealing but with no real effect". Mercy, love, and other such concepts should not be used as an escape from taking needed immediate action based on the untwisted facts of the situation.

The Bible is a unique Book that God says He will honor when correctly used. Why? This is not surprising when you think about it because the Bible is considered to be "God's Word". The Bible of Holy Scriptures claims to be the Word of God in ways like this: "No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." And, God says in the Bible about His Word, "So shall My Word be that goes forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which

I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I send it.” It is no wonder that God considers His Word to be so powerful when circumstances are looked at in the right way. The Bible makes this statement about the power of God’s Word: “‘Is not My Word like a fire?’ says the Lord; ‘and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?’”

Using the Bible as a total way of life, then, comes to us with a new possibility for life: [slowly and deliberately] “Them that honor Me I will honor.”

The Thief Rejects The Cross

Now let’s get back to our thief and his latest anger. The thief continued to dwell on his angry thoughts in this mental situation about the cross dragging. He fumed to himself. “How come that Jesus goes up the road free of His cross but I have to lug my cross along. It’s not fair!” The more the thief thought about it the more worked up he got. “It’s just not right that I should have to carry my cross and He doesn’t. My back hurts. I can hardly make it another step. It’s just not fair!” The thief chose to dwell on the situation instead of getting his mind off of it. The thief chose to continue to let himself get angrier and angrier as he thought about this situation. Now there was an incline in the road and the cross dragging got harder. As the thief strained more and more under the weight of dragging the cross, he let himself get angrier and angrier at the fact that Jesus wasn’t dragging his cross while the thief was. By now he was in a rage. The thief viscously kicked his right foot backwards while scraping it in the dirty road to kick up some dust and dirt. “He didn’t care anymore,” he thought to himself; “he was going to die anyway. What did it matter?”

This outburst of anger also caught the attention of one of the soldiers who was becoming increasingly alarmed at the thief and the soldier’s patience was running out. The soldier’s ire was up. He began to be infuriated at the thief’s behavior.

By now the thief had convinced himself that he was totally justified in feeling self-righteous about his cross dragging situation. He was boiling. And he was ready to argue mercilessly with anyone who would dare contradict his thinking -- even the soldiers. He was [lengthy “i”] i-rate!

Meanwhile, the soldier who was glaring at the thief was getting some thoughts and ideas of his own about the behavior of the thief. The soldier moved closer to the thief as they walked along.

Finally the thief was so angry he could take it no more. With all his might the thief angrily slammed his cross down to the ground! But before he could bellow out, “I’m not going to carry this cross any further!” the soldier who had been watching the thief ferociously swung his spear around and hit the thief up beside the head with the pole of his spear with a crushing blow! “BANG!” The thief let out a scream. His ears rang, his teeth rattled, and for a moment his brain felt like it was going to explode and dissolve! Immediately a huge knot swelled up on the side of his head where he had gotten hit with the spear. Shortly the eye on the same side of the head became black and blue. At the

same time the soldier gave the thief some very clear instructions in rather colorful terms about how to carry a cross!

In a moment, after the little birdies in the thief's head stopped singing, the thief shook his head, regained his composure, picked up his cross, and struggled on up the road. The thief thought to himself, "I'll never try that trick again."

We have not been paying too much attention to the other thief. Soldier tempers had been flaring at him, too, because he has been being unruly, angry, and rebellious all morning long. Even the appearance he chose looked rebellious. If someone would have told him that he had to make his appearance look that way, he would have screamed, "Bloody murder!" This episode which we just talked about had somewhat of an educational value for him, too.

The Place Of The Crucifixion

Around nine o'clock in the morning the noisy throng came to the place called the Skull just outside of the holy city of Jerusalem. It was also called Calvary and Golgotha. We don't know much about this place, whether it was a hill or valley, except that we do know that people passed by there so the Romans could get their scare value out of the crucifixions. Looking back in the distance you could see Jerusalem where life is going on with its chores about like any other Friday morning for a city under the rule of the Roman conquerors except that today there were extra crowds and extra work because of the Jewish Passover that weekend in the Holy City. Here at this place called names like the Skull, Golgotha, or Calvary outside of Jerusalem the Roman government crucified on a cross this man called Jesus of Nazareth who many people had thought would be the long awaited Messiah, the Christ, the Great Prophet, the Great King, the Deliverer! All ideas about Jesus being the Messiah Deliverer were dismissed that morning by the people since Jesus was going to die shortly. The friends and the close inner circle of followers of Jesus called disciples or apostles were bewildered. How can a dead man be the Christ Messiah Deliverer?

Actually these disciples were scattered and standing in the shadows at the moment for fear of their skins as Scripture had predicted. "'Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the Man that is My Fellow,' says the Lord of hosts: 'smite the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered: and I will turn My hand upon the little ones.'" Even the sword mentioned in this prediction came true at the arrest of Jesus. It was puzzling to the disciples as to how death could even happen to Jesus since Jesus seemed to be leading a great cause, but the disciples knew that Jesus going to Jerusalem might get Him killed. However, the disciple Thomas told the disciples that they should go with Jesus and die with Him. And, of course, when death to Jesus was likely, the disciples fled. We know from later developments in the story on that first Easter morning that all of the close acquaintances of Jesus expected Jesus to be dead and gone soon now as a living Person since He was being crucified. The detailed things He had told them about His future somehow didn't register yet -- more precisely they did not believe it, particularly the disciples -- the results being a lower level of existence due to a weak view of what is the

Bible Message concerning God and Christ -- this is comparable to the lower level of existence of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden Paradise when they had a weak view of God's Word correctly interpreted -- Adam and Eve and particularly the disciples did not believe it could happen. At the time of the resurrection and in their low spiritual existence, those close to Jesus still wondered about what Jesus had said but they did not see how it could come about now that Jesus was facing inescapable death and He had not accomplished what He said He would do. There was something about God could send angels to deliver Jesus if God wanted to but they realistically didn't expect any rare appearance of angels from the way Jesus talked.

Mary's Difficult Morning

This morning was particularly difficult for Mary the Mother of Jesus. She repeatedly wiped tears from her eyes. She was in grief and heartbroken. She thought, "Look at what they are doing to my Boy." Here her innocent Son was being killed like a common criminal. She knew that they were making a big mistake but she couldn't do anything about it! And, she knew that this couldn't be the end for her Son Jesus based on things she knew that had come to her from God. She wondered at what God was doing. Jesus had been such a good boy. Even as a youth Jesus had impressed the Temple religious leaders with His knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures. Jesus had been such a fun Child. He had enjoyed life so much. Mary remembered when Jesus was a small Child how she would hold that joyful Child on her lap, put her arms around Him, and hug Him tightly against her bosom.

Mary had hid in her heart many things she had treasured about living with her "little" Boy Jesus in her life. She remembered the unusual way Jesus had been born which made it believable that Jesus may well be the Son of God. At first she did not see how she could physically give birth to this Child but she understood and believed after it was explained to her from heaven about the unusual way that the Child would be born. She was told that there would be no earthly father involved in the birth of Jesus -- only God! Her Child had been born with no earthly father involved in His creation.

Mary remembered the experience she had with her cousin Elizabeth shortly before the birth of Jesus. At that experience when Elizabeth saw Mary, she called her "the Mother of her Lord." Elizabeth's unborn child, John the Baptizer, had leaped for joy at the sound of Mary's voice while he was yet an unborn child still in his Mother's body. John the Baptizer lived to fulfill the Scripture that said of him, "You prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight." Jesus considered John the Baptizer to be the Elijah-like one who was to come preceding the Christ as prophesied in the Scriptures.

Mary remembered the strange and difficult way that she and her husband Joseph were required by circumstances to make a trip to Bethlehem from Nazareth when Mary was about to give birth to her Son Jesus. Jesus was born there in Bethlehem. Jesus was not born in Nazareth where He grew up. Mary knew from the Jewish Holy Scriptures that the Christ the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. This point about the birthplace of Jesus was missed by many of the Jewish people as they placed too much trust in their scholarly

but limited intellect. Many of the Jewish people had dismissed Jesus as being the Christ Messiah because He was from an insignificant place called Nazareth and the Christ Messiah was to come from Bethlehem, the city of David, according to the prophecy in the Jewish Scriptures. They never allowed for the fact of their possible error in thinking and knowledge because by a strange twist of events the Nazareth family of Joseph and Mary were spending a few nights in Bethlehem the night that Jesus was born! Mary remembered that night when Jesus was born. It was a crowded night in Bethlehem because of the big government event that required them to be in town. Mary had to give Jesus birth in a stable there because they could not find an inn for out-of-towners in which to stay that crowded night in Bethlehem. They fashioned a room there in the hay with all of the outdoor smells of a stable. What an atmosphere! She thought that with a birth this lowly there shouldn't be anybody that couldn't identify with this Kid.

Mary remembered all the other unusual events that had taken place at the birth of her Child Jesus and the great things said with supportive signs about her Child at His birth. She remembered the heavenly Hosts, the shepherds, and the miraculous appearance of the Star and the Wise Men from the east who came to worship and give gifts to her Baby Jesus. At the birth of Jesus, the Wise Men appeared with such dignity, great grace, humility, composure, and sophistication. But those rather rough shepherds from the field country were quite another story. Mary remembered how abruptly and hastily, with little social graces, the shepherds had blundered in on her family the night that Jesus was born. The shepherds looked like a herd of sheep themselves -- the way they moved around rapidly, weaving in and out of each other, darting around quickly to get a better view of what was happening. Perhaps the animals there in the stable recognized that the shepherds were animal lovers because one old cow turned her head towards the shepherds, stuck out her chin and gently mooed. Mary remembered how excited and exuberant those shy, lowly shepherds were as they came in from hastily going around Bethlehem looking in stables for a Baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. The unlikelihood of finding a baby in a manger was a sign to the shepherds from the Angel that the shepherds had found the right Baby. You see, a short time ago out in the fields near Bethlehem the Angel Of The Lord and heavenly hosts with God's glory had appeared to the shepherds and for a moment the shepherds were scared and greatly afraid. But the Angel calmed them down and told them about the good tidings of great joy for all people which was the fact that a newborn Savior had been born in Bethlehem bringing God's peace and good will for all people. The Angel gave the Baby in a manger sign to support what was said. The shepherds then hastily went to Bethlehem to look for this Baby and found Him! Mary remembered that the shepherds were kind of noisy and loud when they arrived. But, when they came near to the manger to gaze on the Baby, they stood motionless and spoke ever so softly with eyes wide with amazement. She remembered how overwhelmed the shepherds were by all that the Angel said with supportive signs and that they had found things to be really true just as the Angel had said. And, here they were -- seeing this Baby! The shepherds left the manger scene glorifying and praising God in a way that befit the style of those country shepherds. The shepherds made known to many people to their wonder, what had been told to the shepherds. But Mary kept the things the shepherds told her and pondered them in her

heart through the years as she watched this Child, which came out of her body, grow and become a Man.

Mary remembered the God guided escape to Egypt that she and Joseph and the Baby had to take to save the Baby Jesus when king Herod massacred all the little children in order to make sure he had killed this newborn King. Although Mary did not know it at the time, the escape to Egypt fulfilled two Bible Scriptures. One had God saying, “Out of Egypt have I called My Son.” A Jeremiah prophecy which called the mother of the area by the name Rachel, the ancient tribal grandmother, stated, “In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted because they were not.” After Egypt, Mary saw God guide her husband Joseph repeatedly, changing their plans until they eventually settled back in Nazareth to raise the Boy Jesus. This, too, fulfilled a Bible prophecy that the Christ would be called a Nazarene.

Mary remembered how she herself had been visited by an angel before Jesus was born. It was the angel Gabriel and he told her that Jesus would be great and called the Son of the Highest. And, God would make Him heir to the throne of His ancestor King David and of the Kingdom of Jesus there would be no end!

Mary remembered Simeon and Anna at the Jewish presentation ceremony for the Baby Jesus. Anna prophesied about the redemption that would be in Jesus. And, it had been revealed to Simeon by the Holy Spirit of God that Simeon would not die until he saw the Lord’s Christ. When Simeon saw the Baby Jesus, Simeon said that he could now die in peace. He said that Jesus was the Light of the Gentiles (which are the people outside of Israel) and that Jesus was the Glory of Israel (which are the Jewish people inside of Israel). It wasn’t known at the time but this Light of the Gentiles statement would fulfill a statement with these words by the Bible prophet Isaiah.

Even though Mary’s Scripture based faith in God was strong and God had blessed her throughout her life, Mary had been no stranger to adversity in her life like the lowly birthplace of Jesus and the difficult trip to Bethlehem at His birth. Can you imagine the difficulty Mary faced at the unusual birth of Jesus when she had to explain to Joseph who was about to marry her that she was carrying a Child in her body and it was not his which, of course, Joseph would know that it was not his. Joseph understandably made plans to dump Mary. Joseph was a just man and didn’t want to unduly embarrass Mary, so he planned to get rid of her quietly. But Mary’s faith in God saw God convince Joseph to marry her and God explained the situation to Joseph. God explained by having the Angel of the Lord appear to Joseph in a dream. It was at this time that Joseph was told to call the Child’s name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins. Joseph was a righteous man who in his love for Mary went beyond the requirements for spouses in the Old Covenant Old Testament and beyond what was to become the New Covenant New Testament requirements for spouses even in the face of what could look like possible sin. Joseph married Mary and helped her raise this Child Jesus as his own. Later Joseph and Jesus had a carpentry business together. Now Mary’s husband Joseph was dead and Jesus had become the man of the family. There had been family tension and conflict with the

beginning of the ministry of Jesus. At times in His ministry Jesus had seemed brilliant and amazing. But, quite frankly, there were times that the rest of Mary's children thought that Jesus had a condition in which He was losing touch with reality and was an embarrassment to the family. When Jesus was off on what seemed like a tangent to them, they would have to go out to get Him and try to bring Him home to hopefully get Him to settle down and regroup. They were not successful in their efforts. And, now Mary's head of the family and man of the family, her Son Jesus, was being killed. Who would take care of her now that the family was somewhat torn apart?

In a strange way, though, the heartbreak and seeming despair of that morning when they crucified her Son Jesus assured Mary's faith in God that somehow God was still not done with Jesus. You see, Mary was told by Simeon at the birth of Jesus that before it was all over a sword would pierce Mary's heart also. Today at the crucifixion of Jesus a figurative sword was piercing Mary's heart which assured her in her sorrow that if this sword prediction had come true and was now being fulfilled in her life, then God would make the other things said about Jesus come true and be fulfilled, too. But she was bewildered as to how? They were killing her Boy and He was not finished with what He was supposed to do. Some kind of a spiritualized conclusion based on an admiration of Jesus and His teaching after His death didn't seem like a plausible fulfillment of what Jesus was supposed to be. What good would these things that Jesus was supposed to do be in poetic, spiritualized form? They might be a little inspiring -- but otherwise they would be useless! Some things Jesus had predicted about Himself really would not yield to just a poetic, spiritualized fulfillment. Mary wiped more tears. "Jesus would always be her little Boy," she thought. Mary had been told at the birth of Jesus that Jesus would be called Emmanuel which means "God with us". Not lacking faith but rather to seek more information -- Mary asked God how "God was with us" since Jesus was now to be dead and despised? When the coming birth of Jesus was announced to Mary, she asked in faith for more information then and she received more information. But, now she was given no more information on how "God was with us in Jesus" in this bewildering crucifixion. However, Mary knew the Isaiah Scripture from the Bible that said, "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." So, in her weakness and grief, Mary kept the faith and waited on God to see what He would do.

Mary breathed a deep sigh and sobbed to herself -- "Today they are crucifying my little Boy Jesus and I can't stop them. This is horrible!"

Mary and others dear to Jesus did not yet understand all that Jesus had taught about Himself. They all had been told something but they did not yet understand for some reason. For instance, they didn't understand what Jesus had said about Himself needing to be lifted up (which was on a cross) like Moses lifted up the serpent on a pole in the wilderness. Jesus further said, "When you have lifted up the Son Of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father has taught Me, I speak these things." He also said, "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto Me." The Bible Psalmist had a description that fit Jesus on the cross, "Because of Your indignation and Your wrath: for You have lifted Me up, and cast Me down." After

the death of Jesus as those close to Him collected and compared notes with the help of God's and Christ's Spirit, then they understood. Later, in a related matter, Jesus upbraided His disciples for their unbelief and hardness of heart at the crucifixion. They were slower than the women to catch on and they should have been quicker than the women or the thief, too, because they had been with Jesus and received His instruction.

Jesus Refuses Drugs

The two thieves were also crucified that morning with Jesus -- one on each side of Jesus. Our thief did not know it, but this, too, we now know, fulfilled one of the Jewish Holy Scripture prophecies about the One who would be the great Jewish Messiah Christ Deliverer. The Scripture said, "And He was numbered with the transgressors." According to the Bible, Jesus was crucified with sinners and in His crucifixion Jesus represented all sinners which we will examine more later.

They crucified Jesus first.

Our thief saw the soldiers give Jesus something to drink before they nailed Him to the cross. Jesus was in a terrible shape. Did one of the soldiers have some compassion and offered Jesus something to dull the pain? But after Jesus had tasted it, He wouldn't drink it. The thief heard the soldiers talking among themselves about the drink that Jesus had refused. The drink was some kind of drug mixture made of such things as vinegar, wine, gall, and myrrh to help deaden the pain of the suffering on the cross. The thief thought, "Why did Jesus refuse this drink? What kind of a man is He? Is He some kind of a glutton for punishment? Does He want to be conscious of this whole gory, horrible execution experience?"

The Crucifixions Begin

Then the soldiers stripped Jesus of His shoes and clothes. They lay Jesus down on His back on the cross of wood which was lying on the ground. They rather roughly jerked and pulled the arms of Jesus to an outstretched position and nailed His hands to the crossbeam of the cross. The feet of Jesus were nailed to the vertical pole of the cross.

The Thief Ponders His Own Death

As the thief watched with a frown on his face, the sound of the hammer loudly striking the nails pierced his ears. He saw the nails going into the flesh of Jesus. Cold chills went up and down his spine. He just thought, "I am next," because, as he watched Jesus, the thief really didn't have much feeling for Jesus and his suffering on the cross. He didn't [make "care" a slightly stretched out, emphasized long word] care about Jesus. Instead, the thief was really just feeling for the fact that this was going to happen to him next. He was imagining what it would be like to him personally. In the sense of that selfish way, he really had no feeling for the pain of Jesus.

The thief thought that Jesus must have been missing His Daddy as He went to His death because the thief heard Jesus say something as if Jesus was speaking to His Father when they drove the nails into his body. But in all the fracas the thief couldn't tell exactly what Jesus was saying.

More Old Testament Scripture describes this episode in the life of Jesus on this day. The piercing of the hands and feet is mentioned. The shortening of days in the life of a person and being cut off from the land of the living are also mentioned.

As blood oozed out of the hands and feet of Jesus, the thief's eyes were in a blank stare. The thief's whole body did a quick shutter shake. He wished that the soldiers would hurry up and get all of these crucifixions over so that he could die and be done with it. His heart pounded. His stomach seemed bottomless and empty. He was already in a lot of pain as the whip sores from the beating by the Romans were beginning to really swell and throb with dull infection.

The thief thought to himself, "How would he himself be able to endure the several days of being crucified before he would finally die?" Remember, it takes about three days for a crucified person to die.

(The Romans ruled by force. The humiliating, public example of the horrible, torturous, shameful looking death of crucifying people on a cross by the side of the road so that those passing by would see the victims and then live in fear was certainly a way to help the Romans keep their conquered people and slaves in line. Even to make it more gruesome, the Romans would leave the dead bodies on the crosses to rot and be eaten by the birds or the Romans might take the bodies down and throw them onto the garbage heap. It was hard for anybody to beg the Romans for the dead body of someone crucified to give that person a decent burial.)

But back to the thief. The thief was already in great pain. The thief continued thinking, "Then there would be the nails, the blood, and soon the terrible, raging burns of infection in the wounds." He knew that some people went mad before they died on the cross. "How could he take it?" On top of the humiliation of being crucified, the thief did not want to end his life on earth by looking silly to those who knew him because he had gone mad on the cross!

He wished the soldiers would hurry up and get this over. They seemed to be really taking their time. The thief dreaded the actual process of dying on a cross and wanted it to be over. The usual torturous death on a cross was not a passive experience in which you died from exposure, hunger, and thirst although some of this was part of it. Death on a cross was an active, continuous, involuntary struggle with breathing that was generally sleepless and definitely exhausting. To get each normal breath while hanging down on the cross and leaning forward with your arms outstretched, you had to push your body up with your legs so that your lungs would adequately fill with air as you felt the excruciating, nerve-racking, fierce pain of the nails tearing at your hands and feet from the weight of your body. After days of this, you reached total exhaustion and could no

longer make the effort to get your breath and you died from what amounted to suffocation from a lack of strength to breathe. The thief wanted this horrible process to be over and behind him quickly. He couldn't stand the thoughts of going through it! Again the thief thought, "Hurry up you brutal Romans. They seem to be taking forever. Let's get this over!"

The thief shifted nervously from foot to foot as he waited while they crucified Jesus. Eerie cold chills shot up the back of the thief's neck as he felt isolated and totally empty - - floating helplessly and lost somewhere in eternity and meaninglessness. It had been a long and grueling morning. The thief could smell the strong odor of sweat from the soldiers as they passed back and forth before him while doing their work. The thief's head hurt. The eye on the side of the head where the soldier had hit him with a spear hurt. It felt like someone had stuck a dagger in it. His whole body felt shredded with pain. He was scared. Right this moment the thief was kind of numb toward Jesus and the world. The thief was engrossed in thinking about himself. The palms of his hands got cold and began to sweat.

It was a pretty day in Jerusalem -- but a pretty day seemed kind of distant to the thief. It didn't matter anymore since he knew that he was going to die. There were some early spring wildflowers in the grass by the roadside at arm's length from the thief. The color of the wildflowers seemed more brilliant than ever that morning to the thief. But reality looked different now to the thief -- now that he was going to die. There seemed to be an invisible wall between him and the wildflowers. He felt like he could reach out to touch these pretty flowers and the nice things he had enjoyed in life -- but he could no longer really touch them. These things were not for him anymore. They would now be for others to enjoy. The pleasures and experiences of life for the thief -- the things he liked and enjoyed -- would be no more. He would not be here or anywhere on earth anymore -- forever gone.

Then the thief thought that maybe he could run far away and make a fresh start. But there was no escape. He was surrounded by soldiers.

The thief thought about how his life could have been in the future if it would have worked out the way he wanted it to. But that will never be in this life. It can't happen now. And, there were things he wished he had done in life -- but he couldn't now. There were things he wished he had taken time to do for those he loved. He hadn't done them because he was always too busy doing his things. Now he could not do things he wished he had done for those he loved. It was too late. There was no more time. The thief had missed so much joy and happiness and good times in life because of his lack of cooperation with others and his lack of giving time to others. The thief didn't know it but he had also missed doing many things for others that would have made their life nicer and his life better plus laid a few treasurers in heaven. He didn't know about these things because He consulted with God very little and he made little use of God's Holy Scriptures -- the Bible.

God flooded the thief's mind with his life and the good times he had enjoyed. In his mind he could vividly smell the aroma of that good Jewish bread baking which he had enjoyed so much in life. He remembered the gentle, glowing anticipation of pleasure to your taste buds you get from a newly baked soft, warm loaf of bread. But there would no longer be anymore of that tasty, good Jewish bread. He was now stripped of all worldly possessions. He would no longer hear the laughter of people having a good time together. He would miss those who knew him. He would miss the early morning hunting he so much liked to do. The world suddenly looked different to the thief. His head dropped lower and lower as the gloom and doom of the situation set in. All hope was gone. It was [make "all" a long word] ALL over.

Movement II - Jesus Of Nazareth Crucified

Part I - The Morning

The Cross Of Jesus Raised

[Beginning of “Session Two” of “Study for Lent” presentation.]

[Break for ten minutes in “entire reading all on one occasion” presentation.]

[For the “entire reading all on one occasion” presentation: This heading needs to be started by 1 hour and 56 minutes after the beginning of the session (10:26 A.M. if you started at 8:30 A.M.)]

The thief stood quietly in his own little world lost in his thoughts, shutting out the sounds of the crowd. He was absorbed in thinking about himself. But the rising crescendo of the noise of the crowd getting louder and louder got the thief’s attention and he raised his head. The Roman soldiers were lifting up the cross of Jesus to an upright position with the body of Jesus banging around and dangling from the nails. The crowd grew noisier. The soldiers were noisily making jokes about Jesus. The religious leaders grew more heated and were shouting at Jesus and jeering at Him.

The weeping increased at the sight of Jesus crucified on a raised cross. A few of the women were weeping uncontrollably. “What an uproar!” the thief thought. “Has the whole world gone mad?” Then the soldiers rather unceremoniously roughly dropped the cross of Jesus into the ground with a thud. Jesus winced. Remember the pain that planting the cross caused? The cross was dropped into a three-foot hole which is an action that can jar the body of the crucified person with enough jerking power to sometimes rip joints apart! The thief thought that the soldiers seemed to be moving in slow motion while they raised the cross of Jesus and dropped it into the ground. The thief thought, “Will these soldiers ever get us crucified so that we can die and this horrible experience will all be over. Come on soldiers. Come on!” The waiting seemed like an eternity. He was just standing around waiting to die. He thought, “Is life unreal? Am I dreaming? What in the world is going on? Is this really happening to me? Things are going so slow. When will this ordeal be over?” Time seemed to almost stand still. “Come on soldiers. Come on, come on, come on!”

Jesus Makes A Striking Statement

Then, the thief rather deliberately raised his head and raised his eyebrows to open his eyes wide to look up at Jesus on the cross. The thief could not believe his ears. Above all the racket Jesus, high above the crowd, had uttered something that really struck the thief. Some translators believe that these words of Jesus as recorded in the historical record suggest that Jesus uttered these words many times at the crucifixion. As the cross of Jesus was dropped into the ground, this is what the thief heard Jesus utter.

[Soft grunt] “Oouh!” [Regular voice] “Father, forgive them [very slight pause] for they know not what they do.”

“What kind of a stupid man is this?” thought the thief. “Has He gone completely crazy? They are killing Him and cutting Him down in the prime of His life. And, He forgives them! I would like to stomp their insides out! They’re killing us and killing us by torture.”

Jesus Talks To God

The thief was also struck by the fact that Jesus was talking to God as He faced disaster. It was then that the thief realized that the Father Jesus was continually talking to was not a reference to an earthly Father as the thief had thought earlier but it was a reference to God whom Jesus felt close to. The thief said to himself, “And listen to Him talk to God as if He were His Father!” But then the thief dared to begin to think a little bit, “Is this man talking this way to God because He really is the unique Son of God as some people say? No, He could not be the Son of God. Why would He let them kill Him if He were? But is He really that mixed up to be talking to God that way? We human beings are not supposed to address the high, heavenly God in such a close personal way, are we?” The thief had a hard time understanding the behavior of Jesus. The thief just looked at Jesus a moment and kind of shook his head. This event here of Jesus talking to God fulfilled the Scripture in the book of Psalms that said, “For My love they are My adversaries: but I give Myself unto prayer.”

It might be noted that if Jesus had not forgiven them for crucifying Him, He would have cut them off from Him to no hope and they could not have later then had the opportunity to come to Him as Savior. Jesus came to save the world not to condemn the world the Bible tells us. Jesus does not cut us off. We cut ourselves off. Someone might make the point that Jesus asked “God” to forgive them -- He did not say “I forgive.” But this asking of God definitely implies that Jesus forgave them, too. Furthermore, Jesus personally forgiving them of this act does not preclude them from being subjected to any governmental action to bring the perpetrators to justice by a just government which there wasn’t at the time but the point is still valid. Also, it should be noted that Jesus forgave them of this particular offense against Him and not for their general condition of sin against God’s religious Law in Scripture. We have to ask for God’s Salvation of total, forgiving cleansing of sin that God has for us through Jesus Christ. We can then be in the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of Jesus Christ is not forced on anyone so that they have to enter it against their will. But we can’t fix and erase our sin problem so that we are qualified to enter the Kingdom of Jesus Christ and live with a perfect, holy God. Neither can we earn our way into the Kingdom of Christ. But now, those that killed Jesus were personally forgiven by Jesus of the grounds for separation between them and Jesus - - and they still then had the opportunity to come to Jesus for Salvation.

They Gamble For His Clothes

As the thief fumed to himself, he saw the soldiers divide up the clothes of Jesus among themselves. They did a little gambling game for one piece of clothing because it was without a seam for dividing. The thief did not know it but this also fulfilled a Scripture prophecy about the One who would be the great Messiah, the Christ. The prophet spoke in Scripture in the book of Psalms and said, “They parted My garments among them, and upon My vesture did they cast lots.” Seeing that the soldiers were taking the clothes of Jesus, the thief scratched his head nervously and said to himself, “Those dumb soldiers are even going to take the clothes from off my back.”

Jesus Of Nazareth King Of The Jews

Then the thief saw the answer to his earlier puzzle as to why the Romans would execute someone for Jewish religious reasons. They put a sign over the head of Jesus written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin that read, “Jesus Of Nazareth The King Of The Jews.” There was a political maneuver by the Jewish religious leaders to get the sign over the head of Jesus changed. But, it failed. The crucifixion of Jesus was a very politically and religiously charged event. And, also, Jesus was put to death after some very questionable proceedings by both the Romans and the Jewish religious leaders. Pilate, the local Roman authority, wanted to calm down the Jewish religious leaders so that they wouldn’t make trouble for him with his superiors or with Caesar which is why Pilate agreed to have Jesus crucified. Pilate tried to use the severely beaten Jesus and Barabbas to sway the crowd to help his cause at the moment but it did not work as we mentioned earlier. Pilate found no fault in Jesus. Pilate’s wife had a dream and she warned Pilate not to have anything to do with the Jesus case. But guys don’t listen to their wives sometimes when they should. Pilate wanted to solve the threat of a problem for him at any cost. Pilate even tried to pass the Jesus case off to the ruler Herod to get rid of the Jews but Herod wouldn’t take the case. Morally weak Pilate felt politically trapped by the Jewish religious leaders to make Him have Jesus crucified. (The whole trial of Jesus was a catastrophe of multiple human shortcomings and this oppression as well as Jesus offering no defense was prophesied in the Bible in Isaiah chapter 53.) Now, Pilate was aggravated by being trapped by the Jews and he was not about to crucify a man without a charge that would justify Roman crucifixion which is why Pilate put the sign over the head of Jesus. Pilate was sick of the religious leaders. So, the sign was not changed. Plus, the sign and the king crown made out of thorns had a little bit of mocking farce cultural slur to it by Pilate and the Romans to smear, disgrace, and shame the Jews.

The thief didn’t know it but in these events that led to the crucifixion of Jesus, the Roman soldiers gathered the whole band of soldiers together and took time to dress Jesus up like a king with a purple robe and so on. Then, they mocked Him, they spit on Him, and they hit Him with a stick to make fun of Jesus a despised Jew to the Romans. They jokingly bowed down to Jesus while saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” When the soldiers led Jesus off to be crucified, they took off the purple robe and put His own clothes back on Him. The thief also didn’t know that when Jesus had appeared before Pilate, Jesus told Pilate that His Kingdom was not of this world which was even more of a reason for Pilate not to

have Jesus killed because of threatening power with Rome as the sign over the head of Jesus implied. When Pilate heard that Jesus had earlier called Himself the Son of God he really got scared and wanted to release Jesus. But in his weakness, Pilate still let Jesus be crucified because the Jewish leaders leading the crowd threatened Pilate with the appearance of a fact that if Jesus was a King, He was in conflict with Caesar. Pilate feared for his job with Rome and gave in to the religious leaders. So, from the sign over the head of Jesus the thief saw that the Roman reason for the crucifixion of Jesus was treason. There can be no king but Caesar. So, the thief thought, "that must be the reason that the Jewish leaders got the Romans to kill Jesus."

The sign also explained to the thief about the sticks Jesus had in His hair. Earlier, during that crude, demeaning ceremony of ridicule, the Romans had mockingly made a crude crown of thorns and jammed it down over the head of Jesus to make a joke out of the idea that Jesus is some kind of a King. Poor Jesus -- plus everything else, the thorns were pressing down relentlessly, gouging with no relief -- gouging and sticking into the forehead and scalp of Jesus like so many throbbing splinters. The thorns pressing into the head of Jesus made bleeding scratches which by now were covered over with sore, stinging, throbbing scabs.

Then the thief thought, "I wonder if Jesus would have lived, would He really have become a King? He would have been a great King! He was a wonderful person and a very kind man."

The Two Thieves Crucified

But there was no time to think about Jesus being a King because next the Romans crucified the two thieves -- one on each side of Jesus. The horrible, dreaded moment was here!

Now it was the thief on the ground flat on his back with arms stretched out being nailed to a cross. My, how it hurt! The thief felt cold and his face was white as they nailed him to the cross. He felt full of fear but tried not to show it. Now it was his body that the nails were going in to and it was his blood that was running down. The amount and intensity of the pain was surprising to the thief. "How would he be able to stand it all?" It was a gory, gross, gruesome scene and it was getting worse. The thief felt a weird tingling in the back of his neck.

Life has a way of suddenly taking on new meaning when you realize that you personally are having the real life experience of being nailed to a cross with no escape from rather immediate, torturous, painful, pending death. It hits you that this is it, forever! This is your life that is being cut off from human existence never to be again. This is you and you have had it! And, it is going to hurt something terribly! The thief's eyes started to water from the pain. He blinked his eyes tightly a couple of times. The soldiers lifted the top of the thief's cross off the ground in preparation to raise the cross. The thief felt his restrained body slide down the cross a little bit and rest on a tiny support which keeps your body from ripping off the cross as it is dropped into the hole and as it hangs there

for days. The soldiers pause a moment holding the top of the cross at waist high off the ground. Then with a shout they quickly stretched their arms up with a burst of power to raise the cross. The thief felt the wobbly motion of his cross being raised up and he felt the fact that it was his body that was banging around and painfully dangling from the nails. The soldiers dropped the cross in the ground with a hard thud. The thief let out a loud, long, piercing, “Owww!” as he screamed from the sharp pain and jar of his body pulling against the nails and from his joints trying to pull apart as they banged his cross into the hole in the ground. At the same time there was a tremendous sting as he felt something pull and rip in his right shoulder. He could hardly get his breath for a moment from the fierce trauma of the cross being dropped into the hole. The thief briefly closed his eyes as tight as he could and he saw black with colored spots and stars. He swallowed hard waiting for his nerves and the pain to settle a little bit so that he could bear it. Oh, my ... , how it hurt!

It was at this moment that God’s Holy Spirit chose to flood the thief’s mind with the kind of life he had lived -- giving him the opportunity to choose to examine his life to deal with sins. The thief did choose to examine his life. However, he did not choose to be concerned with what he saw. He rationalized things away and excused himself. He just muttered some more bad words under his breath about the kind of luck he was having. During his life the thief would pretend to be concerned about what he saw when someone caught him doing something he shouldn’t be doing and confronted him. But he just did this remorseful act to get them off his back -- he was not really concerned. And, today with the helping confrontation of the Holy Spirit, the thief still did not take this opportunity to choose to be responsible for the possibility that his choice of responses to life and his choice of interpretation of life might be the problem. However, the thief still couldn’t get it out of his mind how that Jesus character forgave them for crucifying Him.

Now that the thief was hanging on the cross, the hurting and suffering greatly increased. He cursed at the pain. His body was wreathing and wiggling and gasping to involuntarily stay alive. With poisonous anger and hate he thought, “How can that crazy Nazarene forgive them for doing this to us?”

As the thief suffered and struggled on the cross, his tight, angry, beady eyes stared straight ahead into space. Occasionally he would give a quick, embarrassed glance down at the crowd and immediately continue his angry stare straight ahead into space. Here he was: stripped down and humiliated, hanging high above the crowd with no clothes on. The people were staring up at him and talking about him. They were pointing at him. It was embarrassing. The thief was painfully realizing how often really nobody cares about you so to speak. His yet undiscovered hope was to find out how much God cared about him. The people at the cross also made the thief angry. He recognized some of the people in the crowd. He thought about some of the people he recognized, “Those people wouldn’t even speak to me when they passed me on the streets of Jerusalem. Now they are down there talking about me and making fun of me.” The thief rather casually said to himself in a flippant manner, “Thank you God that I am not like some of those people down there looking up at me.” Jesus in the Bible taught just the opposite of this kind of

exalting ourselves above others and said that we should rather humbly say, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

The thief’s mind wandered. He let himself drift into self-pity. He felt sorry for himself. He thought, “Why do these things always have to be happening to me? Life never seems to work out.” He thought, “How unfortunate and unfair life has been to him. There were plenty of people out there worse than him and they weren’t being crucified. What about that Barabbas? I’m no worse than Barabbas. It’s unfair!” The thief had heard that they released Barabbas because of a mob scene. The thief moaned to himself, “Barabbas got to go free and he was a notorious robber and murderer!” The thief was beginning to be irrational with life and was twisting everything in his mind to his benefit. He continued thinking, “People didn’t appreciate the good things he did do in life. And what little bit of stealing he did do wasn’t really his fault,” he thought to himself. “He had revolutionary ideas against the Romans and people were too coward to give him a job. They didn’t want to be associated with him for fear of the Romans. And with the excessive, heavy Roman taxes and with all the Roman oppression that kept people all stirred up, the thief had to steal to make ends meet -- he couldn’t help it, he had no choice. Anyway, he stole selectively. He didn’t hurt anybody -- except those that deserved it,” was the thief’s train of thought. The thief didn’t choose to notice that others in situations similar to his didn’t choose to steal.

Our thief was justifying himself and resisting making a change of heart like the thief Zacchaeus did in the Bible. There are many kinds of thieves. Zacchaeus was a thief of a different sort. Zacchaeus was a rich person who got away with cleverly and legally taking things that were really other people’s things even though it was commonly known what a sinner he was. When Zacchaeus finally took responsibility for his actions he said, “If I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.” He also then gave some of his goods to the poor. Zacchaeus made his change of heart under the influence of this Jesus of Nazareth.

The Mocking Of Jesus

As time painfully dragged on for our thief struggling on the cross, the thief grew violently angry at Jesus. His eyes almost popped out looking at Jesus in anger. “Why had this powerful man not acted? If Jesus, who has the ability and who could have been the Messiah, if He would have run the Romans off, the thief and Jesus would not be in this exceedingly painful situation facing death.” Also, the thief’s idea of a revolution against the Romans would have easily succeeded if Jesus would have come through.

The thief was not the only one thinking bad thoughts about Jesus that day -- each for their own reasons. Many people had been taunting Jesus all morning long and continued to mock Him during the day. The thief was so furious at Jesus that he angrily joined right in with the religious leaders, the soldiers, and those that passed by in making fun of Jesus by mocking and reviling Him. Some did so in a very colorful manner which I will leave to your imagination. They shook their heads at Jesus. This mocking fulfilled many Scriptures. This is the gist of what they were saying to mock Jesus.

“He trusted God. He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’ Let God deliver Him now if He will have Him.” “He saved others, let Him save Himself -- if You are the Christ, the Chosen of God,” they taunted. “He saved others but He cannot save Himself.” In ridicule of this questionable, beaten down king they offered Him a drink. “If you are the Christ the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, save Yourself, that we may see and believe,” they said in sarcasm. The crowds a week ago had treated Jesus like a King. Now look at Him was their attitude. “What a fix He is in. And, how can He overthrow the Romans now? Where is His army?”

The Ultimate Proof Of The Resurrection

And, one of the biggest things they sarcastically threw at Jesus was, “He said, ‘Destroy this Temple and I will raise it up in three days.’ Save yourself and come down from the cross.” However, the religious leaders took no chance at burial of Jesus that He might be the Temple Jesus was talking about and raise Himself up from the dead. Of course they didn’t really realize and believe that the Temple Jesus was talking about was the Temple of His body. Jesus used the account of Jonah in the big fish for another example as a parallel to Jesus being in the grave and coming out again. For some reason the rising from the dead idea did not yet properly register even with the close followers and disciples of Jesus. Jesus had said that He had the power to lay down His life and take it up again. And, Jesus after His death in three days would raise Himself from the dead as the ultimate proof of who He is!

Both of the thieves threw the same mocking things into the teeth of Jesus.

God Loved The Thief

But God loved the despicable thief and God was still working on him. After the thief had mockingly verbalized the fact that Jesus might be the Son of God, the Christ Messiah, God gave the thief a chance to choose to consider the fact that the possibility that this Man was the Son of God might really be true. As the endless-seeming morning hours dragged on, the thief did choose to consider the possibility that Jesus might be the Son of God. And, when the thief stopped to think about it, it bothered him that he may have said something derogatory to the face of the very Son of God.

The Thief Does An Important Thing

And, based on the information he had, the thief ended up choosing to do something very important as a result of considering that possibility that this Man Jesus might indeed really be the Son of God. This important thing that the thief did we will talk about later.

The important thing that the thief chose to do -- now had an impact on his feelings toward Jesus. He was now concerned about the suffering of this righteous man. His concern was so deep that he could in empathy feel the pains of Jesus more than his own pains. The thief also began to feel the emotional pain that Jesus must have been feeling. Jesus had to

be hurt by the cruel, unjust treatment He was receiving from these people. The thief wished that somehow he could go over and substitute for Jesus to take His pain and let Jesus go free. Little did the thief know that something somewhat just the opposite was what was happening. Jesus was substituting for the judgment against the thief and really for the judgment against all of us since we are all sinners. God by His wisdom was letting Jesus dying on the cross be theologically representing the death penalty for all of us for all of our sins. Note that this is different from pagan religions who tried hopelessly with sacrifices to persuade God and earn their way to God as sinners. The Bible approach to God is unearned and given by the grace of God. This idea of substitute atonement for sin given freely for us had been introduced in the Old Testament Old Covenant Scriptures in the Tabernacle in which an animal substituted for us to take the judgment of our sin so that we could then be cleansed and dwell with a holy God. This Old Testament pattern for cleansing of sin was symbolic of Jesus the Christ who was to come. We will talk more about these ideas a little later. Jesus was tempted like all of us yet did not sin which makes Him able to help us with our temptations. But the point for here is that Jesus is the only sinless human being ever to live so there was no judgment against Him. Thus, He was free and worthy to take the judgment against the thief and us in place of us. It is true that the Bible has Jesus saying that there is none good but God. But He said this to show the source of His perfection. The Bible states that, "God has made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. ... God commended His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

The Noisy, Milling Around Crowd

After the core of religious leaders had thrown it up to Jesus all they had to say, they left. They essentially said that this is what you get and rubbed it in. They returned to Jerusalem to their religious duties and left Jesus there to suffer and die under the guard of the Roman soldiers. They expected Jesus to take several days to die. That day the religious leaders had to leave to talk to Pilate about the name he had put on the sign over the head of Jesus. Then the religious leaders realized that Jesus could not be left on the cross for three days to die because of the timing of this event in relation to their Jewish religious Law. So, they also had to talk to Pilate later in the day about killing the victims that were on the crosses so that they could be removed and they would not be on the crosses for the high Sabbath in accordance with Jewish religious Law. Pilate was fearful for his job. The threat of Jewish unrest and that fact reaching Rome caused Pilate to consider doing things for the Jews that were Jewish Law and not Roman law. Thus the religious leaders were now busy back in Jerusalem. But, when the religious leaders left the scene of the cross, a crowd stayed, though, and many people were passing by the scene. There was a continual, often noisy, milling around.

Mary And John Bid Jesus Farewell

Later in the morning, two curious onlookers stopped by the crosses. They stopped right beneath the thief's cross to look over the scene. They were not caught up in the viciousness of the crowd. The thief also noticed two people, a man and a woman arm in arm, hunched over in sorrow, slowly approach the cross of Jesus. They were

accompanied by a couple of other women who we now know were close to Jesus. They came right up to the foot of the cross -- close enough to reach up and touch Jesus. The two curious onlookers began whispering both in astonishment and in a seeming attempt to keep the facts hidden from the crowd as they watched the small group approach the cross. But the thief could hear the two onlookers whispering since they were right beneath him. The thief gathered from overhearing the two curious onlookers whispering that the woman was Mary the Mother of Jesus and the man was the disciple John, the disciple that Jesus loved -- the best friend of Jesus while He lived on earth. The thief realized how brave John was to approach the cross since he might be identified by the authorities and grabbed as a close associate of Jesus to be put to death also. But John had laid aside his fear of death to bring the Mother of his good Friend Jesus to the cross to see her Son Jesus. Mary and John had come to tell Jesus, "Goodbye." Tears were streaming down the face of Mary. Jesus looked down from the cross at His widowed, heartbroken Mother standing there weeping for her dying Son who was being put to death unjustly as a criminal. The ladies with her were quietly weeping and lamenting. Again, Mary recalled those conflicting thoughts and precious memories that were in her mind which we spoke about earlier. That sword we spoke about was piercing Mary's heart deeply now. John's eyes were red and moist with emotion. He remembered vividly all the good times he had had with his fantastic best friend Jesus. He would miss Him very much. John wanted to tell Jesus, "Thanks for everything," but was too choked up at the moment to do so. Mary and John loved Jesus. Jesus loved Mary and John. The thief could see the deep devotion these three had for each other.

Jesus Provides

Before Mary and John could get any words out, Jesus spoke to them. Jesus looked at Mary and said while nodding His head toward John, "Great lady woman; look, this is your son now". The center of John's chin quivered for just an instant. And, Jesus looked at John and said, "Look, your Mother." Then John took the back of his hand and wiped the corner of one eye. The thief had moist eyes, too. He was greatly touched and deeply moved by this tender scene. He thought, "This Man Jesus takes care of those who love Him. He seems to have boundless compassion for everyone."

The crowd did not know what had just transpired. The thief continued his thinking, "And, how smart, thoughtful, and compassionate it was of Jesus not to call Mary 'Mother' in front of that bunch of people which would reveal her identity and subject her to the harassment, ridicule, and abuse by this angry, bloodthirsty, vicious, hostile, antagonistic crowd." But Jesus did honor His earthly Mother. Mary as a human sinner didn't realize it yet but she was looking at Jesus both as her Boy and now as her needed eternal Savior who was to receive her human worship. Mary could see that Jesus was somehow strangely in control of the situation better than she thought He would be even though the severe suffering He was undergoing was fiercely shocking to her. The trauma of seeing her little Boy suffer so terribly and being in the presence of His imminent death was devastating to Mary!

Mary and John had planned to make several trips to the cross during the time Jesus would be hanging there to try to comfort Jesus as He died. But Mary had all she could take this morning seeing this gruesome Roman outdoor human slaughterhouse and seeing Jesus vividly suffering before her eyes.

So, Mary and John left to go to John's home planning to return later. John took his new Mother to his home that hour. All of us have much we don't understand about death and many "whys" which make it hard for all of us to deal with the pain and hurt and grief of death. Mary and John gave Jesus back to God as Job had taught in Scriptures. Jesus would soon be going to be with God and Abraham as Jesus Himself had taught. They were thankful that God had given Jesus to them for the time that they had known Him. But now there would be a hole in their lives as they waited for God to restore their souls as David promised God would do in one of his Psalms. We endure evil, hurt, pain, grief, and tears in this life because of Satan and sin in the world. But the Bible New Testament tells us that in the heavenly Paradise with God where Jesus and Abraham are there are no more tears, no more death, nor sorrow, or crying, and there will be no more pain.

So, Mary and John planned to return to Jesus soon. But Jesus died before John could bring Mary back to visit Jesus and comfort Him again on the cross. Mary the Mother of Jesus was spared seeing her Son die on a cross. She was also spared being at the traumatic crucifixion scene during the terrible darkness that was going to happen which we will talk about shortly. The thief had witnessed great compassion and powerful provisions -- such that he had never seen before. Because of the important thing the thief had done earlier that morning, God filled the thief's heart with gladness after the thief saw the scene of Mary, Jesus, and John.

The Thief And His Thinking

Meanwhile, deep down there had still been a cautious thought by the thief that it was not a wild stretch of the imagination that this miracle worker Jesus really had the power to come down from the cross and save Himself and save the thief, too. You know He didn't drink the drugs. Maybe His followers were wisely, prudently making themselves scarce in the face of real danger and were secretly plotting something. But it didn't take one of the Wise Men from the east to realize now that if Jesus had made final arrangements for His Mother, He obviously had no plans for coming down from the cross. But, thinking that Jesus may come down from the cross was not the reason that the thief chose to do the important thing that he did earlier that morning.

The Second Coming Of The Christ

The thief also realized that if this Man Jesus had the power to raise people from the dead, then Jesus may well have the power to raise Himself from the dead and come back with spiritual forces to defeat His enemies and set things straight. His enemies would no longer have the threat of death over Jesus then. The thief didn't know it, but this is as the Psalms say in Scripture, "The Lord said unto my Lord, 'You sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" And, also, the thief didn't know it but the Bible

New Testament teaches a doctrine somewhat like this whole idea. It's about the Second Coming of Jesus to Earth in all of His Glory in awesome power as King of Kings and Lord of Lords to make a New Heaven and a New Earth.

The Thief And His Thinking

But this was not the prime motivating factor for the thief -- the thief just wanted to be with Jesus whether they were dead or alive. The thief knew that Jesus was deeply concerned about others. He knew of the miracles by this Man. He knew of His works. He had heard some of the words of Jesus. He knew that this phenomenal, forgiving Man had a Kingdom somewhere with God and it would never be stopped. The thief wanted to be a part of that Kingdom.

Part II - The Afternoon

Darkness

[Beginning of “Session Three” of “Study for Lent” presentation.]

[Break for one hour for Lunch in “entire reading all on one occasion” presentation.]

[For the “entire reading all on one occasion” presentation: This heading needs to be started by 3 hours and 44 minutes after the beginning of the session (12:14 P.M. if you started at 8:30 A.M.)]

The early morning spring breeze had been chilly to the unclothed bodies of the three crucified victims. It had been cold enough last night that people built a fire to keep warm. But later in the morning, as noon approached, it got very warm. The hot sun boiled down to earth. The unclothed bodies of Jesus and the two thieves were by now already severely sunburned to add to their extreme discomfort.

Then, around noon, it became very dark. It was the darkest darkness the world had ever known since the days of Creation. It was in parallel to the spiritual darkness of the moment. Also, Jesus, who called Himself The Light Of The World, is just the opposite of spiritual darkness. The Bible prophet Isaiah described the Christ Who is the Light by saying, “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great Light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them has the Light shined.” The arrest of Jesus was made in the cover of the power of darkness. God had to be hurt and having a dark time, too, because they were killing His Son. Furthermore, there was a thick darkness in the Old Covenant of the Bible at the time of the first Passover Lamb who is symbolic of the Christ, the Lamb of God, to come in the New Covenant of the Bible.

As the darkness started happening, the rather frantic soldiers, who were unprepared for darkness at this time of day, rose to carry out their duties of guarding their victims on the crosses so that friends of the victims would not come take them down in the cover of darkness and carry off the victims to revive them. The soldier’s eyes quickly glanced up at the sky while watching the crowds. The perplexed soldiers jerked and turned their heads from one side, looking to see what might be happening, and then jerked and turned their heads quickly to the other side, looking all around and seeing nothing plausible. The atmosphere felt ethereal. The atmosphere looked like a multitude of blackish-gray, very thin, hanging, see-through veils floating through space and streaming down in flowing vertical waves to touch the ground. It almost looked like smoke -- but it was too transparent to be smoke. As the thief gazed through the dense air into the shadow-shaded-gray of the falling darkness, he noticed that it was possible to see a long way from the vantage point of hanging high up on the cross. His mind was doing flip-flops. He was shaken by what was happening. Still gazing far away to try to see what was happening, to him it looked like you could see forever from up on the cross -- all the way to the end of the universe. In the filtered light of the falling darkness, the sun and the heavens and time seem to be all mixed up as if all time and all eternity were converging on that point in time! The thief wondered what eternity is like. What will he be doing

from this time forward into the incomprehensible “forever”? How does life on this earth relate to that long, unending expanse of time that comes after life on this earth? As the thief wondered, the darkness continued to thicken. A couple of dogs began barking and howling in the distance. The noise of the dogs echoed through the valleys and hills outside of Jerusalem and bounced off the city walls with an ominous sound. A bunch of frightened birds shrieked overhead and fluttered noisily as they rapidly flew for cover in a grove of trees. A flock of confused sheep up the road swirled nervously. They held their heads high and bleated. Somewhere a lonely, mystified ox let out a long, deep, empty, hollow moan.

Then, the tremendous darkness totally set in covering all the earth and the sun was darkened. When the darkness fell, the hills were silent. The stillness seemed deafening! The atmosphere was now eerie. It was like what the prophet Amos talked about in Scripture when he said, “‘And it shall come to pass in that day,’ says the Lord God, ‘that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day.’” The thief was not aware of possible causes but this darkness was more than an eclipse of the sun by the moon since it was the time of the Passover that Jesus had just celebrated with the disciples and this is a Old Testament lunar month mid-month celebration we know from the Bible which is the time of the full moon which requires the earth to be between the moon and the sun not the moon between the earth and sun. It was a supernatural event as all of God’s Creation seemed to be commenting on what was going on this day. No wonder it was so dark when we realize what a terrible thing was happening to Jesus who John called God’s Light Of The World and when we realize how Jesus was fighting to defeat the evil forces of darkness in the universe on our behalf. Satan, the Devil, the father of sin and ruler of the evil forces of darkness, probably thought that he had defeated Jesus by getting Him killed. However, the Bible prophet Daniel in his discussion of the Ancient of days said that the Kingdom of Christ will not be destroyed. And we now know from the Bible that Jesus defeated Satan, the Devil, for all time that day even though the end of Satan and his power will not be until the time of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Satan is still on the loose but defeated and His works in our lives can be nullified using the Bible and Christ. Even now this very moment if you are seriously considering actively using correct ideas about Jesus Christ, the defeated Satan is probably desperately trying to give your mind reasons to reject those ideas. But we, too, may have to suffer and sacrifice like Jesus did but also with rewards. According to the Bible, “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the Devil.” ... and in another place ... “That through death Jesus might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil.”

No one really knows or even probably has the ability to understand what Jesus was going through in the darkness that day on our behalf. Because Jesus did it for us, though, we will never have to know our part of that terrible darkness.

The tremendous darkness was a very scary experience for the thief. He was frightened. “Had he somehow gone blind?” No, there were no signs that anything was happening around him. He wondered what was going on. You couldn’t even see the nose on your face. In total, void darkness you look and try to see as hard as you can but there is

absolutely nothing there. It is a scary experience you may know yourself if you have experienced something like a totally dark enclosure. The suffering was bad enough for the thief. But, then, to have to do all of that suffering in total, void darkness was an unbelievably terrible experience for the thief. The thief trembled!

However, the total, void darkness did give the thief a lot of cause and time for self-examination and meditation. This the thief did do. It is interesting to note from this that no matter how bad things get, even hanging on a cross in total darkness, that if God doesn't provide a way out of the situation, He has something for us to do in that situation. Our limited minds acting on their own can clutter up our agendas and mix up our priorities and confuse the level of excellence we are to give to a task. But God has the very thing that we are supposed to do for any situation and it is something that we can handle with the help and guidance of God and His Christ even though it may involve hard work.

What do you think the religious leaders who had returned to Jerusalem were thinking in this supernatural, untimely darkness?

As the horrible, suffering hours went by, though, the thief thought that the total, void darkness would never be over. The darkness lasted about three hours.

Finally --- the darkness ended.

As we mentioned, God still had something for the thief to do during the terrible darkness while dying on a cross. Let's expand that idea to the "them that honor Me I will honor" discussion we had earlier. Things can never get so bad in a conscious situation that we can't do something in a Bible based framework that God will honor. The Bible is for our benefit at all times. The Bible was not written to give us a long list of burdens. It tells how to spend our time in helpful ways. The Bible says that, "All Scripture ... is profitable." Jesus gave the principle of the Bible being for our benefit and not just another burden to hinder us when He said, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

The Bible book of Hebrews defines Biblical faith in terms of rewards when it states, "Without faith it is impossible to please God: for anyone that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." These rewards are both on this earth and treasures in heaven. The Bible book of First Timothy states that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Note that salvation is not an earned reward -- that is a gift for which we could never qualify. The Bible book of Ephesians states that "For by grace you are saved through faith; and that is not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." Although salvation is not a reward, however there are things that have their rewards. [Read the next two sentences slowly and deliberately, with emphasis.] **IN ANY KIND OF CONSCIOUS HUMAN SITUATION THAT WE CAN DESCRIBE, THERE ARE BIBLE BASED THINGS WHICH WE CAN DO TO DILIGENTLY SEEK GOD AND CHRIST AND BE OPEN TO REWARDS. IN THE**

HUMAN AGGRAVATIONS OF LIFE, INSTEAD OF DWELLING ON THE STRESSFULNESS, HEARTACHE, OR EXASPERATION OF THE SITUATION, WE CAN DWELL ON DILIGENTLY SEEKING GOD USING THE BIBLE SEEKING HIS REWARDS FOR NOW AND LATER AS HE SEES FIT.

We have to be diligently seeking God and Christ though. We can not pick and choose what we will do of God's Bible and dismiss the rest to our own peril. We can not do just one or two things that the Bible says to hopefully get a reward and then forget about God and do what we please. We have to be diligently seeking God to get His benefits which in the larger view are better than any benefits in life that we think we can achieve.

Depending on your definitions, it could be said that a correct legalism of things to do and things not to do are a needed part of God giving us all that He has for us even though it is not a needed part for entering into God's salvation which can only happen by faith. Our actions do give evidence of our faith though. However, the Devil may tempt us to make obeying the Bible and diligently seeking God into some kind of self-glory legalism.

Furthermore, in diligently seeking God we will need to deal with our sins so that nothing is blocking God and Christ in their work in our lives and so that we can hear Them properly.

And, also, everything involves the help and guidance of God and Christ. Jesus Christ said that without Him we can do nothing.

The Bible states that we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them. The greatest Bible teacher of all time was probably Ezra. The Bible says of Ezra that "Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." Ezra said in the Bible, "The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him; but His power and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him." The Bible Psalmist in speaking about God and things in the Bible said, "By them is Your servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward." and "Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Your Word." God is a rewarder! Them that honor Me I will honor! The Bible is profitable!

Jesus Feels Forsaken By God

As the darkness ended, Jesus, even though He was certainly drained and obviously weakened by suffering for the sins of the whole world, -- He cried out in strength with a loud voice, not with the voice of a dying Man -- but with a loud voice, and said, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" The voice of Jesus reverberated through the nearby Jerusalem area and surrounding countryside. Jesus seemed to be commenting on His experience in the darkness for He would die shortly as we will see. (Jesus was satisfied with His present state as He died which we will see in a moment.) He cried loudly as if He wanted everybody down through the centuries to hear Him to know how much He had suffered for them in the darkness and to know how much He had

accomplished for them in the darkness! And, no wonder Jesus cried so loudly since He (by the grace of God in the void darkness) tasted real, theological death for every person ever to live on earth.

Some at the cross, who possibly didn't listen too carefully, thought that Jesus was calling for Elijah the great, fiery prophet. Then someone at the cross watching Jesus suffer had compassion on Him because one of these ran and offered Jesus a drink with a soaked sponge on a stick. The rest said, "Let Him be. Let's see whether Elijah will come to save Him." Elijah did not come. Jesus was not calling Elijah. And, Jesus did not drink at this time.

Jesus had to be emotionally hurt that people were killing Him unjustly. And, Jesus dearly loved these people that were killing Him which had to make the hurt even greater. The thief didn't know it but Jesus wept for Jerusalem when He came to town knowing what was going to happen because they wouldn't accept the fact that God was visiting them in Jesus. And, it wasn't strangers that were killing Jesus -- these were His own people! Although He knew it would happen, Jesus had to be also hurt that one of His own close associates, the disciple Judas acting on his own and not guided by Jesus, would unjustly betray Jesus to death possibly hoping that this would cause Jesus to act and finally take control as King. This was predicted in Scripture which said, "Yes, Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who did eat of My bread, has lifted up his heel against Me." For this betrayal the authorities weighed out silver to Judas like it is described in Scripture in Zechariah and Jeremiah. This silver ended up having a strange ending after Judas returned the money when his plan for Jesus did not work and, still not looking to Jesus, Judas then hanged himself. Other Bible prophecy about Judas was fulfilled. But Jesus was suffering something much deeper than hurt feelings and rejection that day -- He was dying for the sins of the whole world!

Also, Jesus surely felt normal human nostalgia from knowingly giving His life back to God at such an early age. He also felt nostalgic along with His unbounded compassion for Jerusalem which He had recently wept for. But the Bible tells us that He pressed on because of the joy set before Him. Jesus used human nostalgia to appreciate what God had done for Him in life. Jesus was not like the thief who was overcome with nostalgia for the things he would miss in this life and who saw no hope. Jesus was not like Lot's wife in the Bible who let Satan use the nostalgia of the past to destroy her. Jesus was not like the faithless and unbelieving children of Israel in the presence of God's power in the wilderness. They feared the giants and the high-walled cities that God sent them to conquer. They didn't trust God. They nostalgically looked back to the good food in the slavery in Egypt rather than look to the joy of the Promise Land which lay ahead -- a land flowing with milk and honey. Normal human nostalgia can shatter us. It leaves holes in our lives that often are never really filled. However, God in His grace can restore the soul and make us whole if we turn to Him and His Christ. The Bible tells us not to love the world which passes away but to do the will of God which lasts forever. It is God, not worldly things, which fills our hearts with gladness. God can use things of this world or things not of this world to fill our hearts with gladness. However, the nostalgia of the moment for Jesus that day was minute compared to mountainous burden that lay ahead.

Jesus foreknew the coming crucifixion and what it represented. He turned to God in the hours before the crucifixion and prayed earnestly and in agony with sweat falling to the ground like great drops of blood. This praying set His heart on obedience unto death.

The human mind of Jesus had normal human questions. Here after the darkness Jesus asked God for information. This is the only time, with great concern, that Jesus spoke about Himself from the cross as He spoke about His experience of His personal suffering on the cross. He did not whine, or express self-pity, or say, "Woe is Me," or say, "How great I am to suffer like this," although his suffering was tremendous.

The Bible tells us that Jesus was a man of sorrows but nowhere did He dwell on it. But, Jesus was surprised at times in His life. Here He likely did not expect the unbelievable, empty feeling as God distanced Himself from Jesus when Jesus became sin for the world. Sin separates a person from God. Jesus may well have been surprised at the indescribable feeling of being totally separated from God when He became sin for us. There is a sense in which God cannot look on sin according to the Bible. Also, even the mind of Jesus Christ may well have been amazed at the great cost of this tormented experience of bearing the heavy burden of all of our sins for ever person ever to live. But if the mind of Christ had questions, then the answers may well be too deep for us and we are adequately supplied without these answers.

Jesus was not aggravated, angry, or bitter at God for His bad treatment from others or for His life situation at the moment. Rather, Jesus obeyed God and left the rest to God. The Bible tells us that Jesus committed Himself to Him that judges righteously meaning God.

It puzzled the thief that Jesus would feel forsaken by God. Why would this righteous man be forsaken by God? It scared the thief a little bit that Jesus would feel forsaken by God. For a moment the thief suddenly felt all alone in a cold, dark, vast universe. The thief wondered if God had deserted the vast universe. But then the thief recalled from his training as a youth that Psalm 22 in the Scriptures starts out with the words that Jesus had just said after the darkness. And, Psalm 22 ends up with a deep trust of God which is what Jesus was doing as He asked God a question -- He was trusting God in His anguish. Jesus in His aloneness and forsaken state was tempted to lose the faith and despair as we are tempted but He kept the faith. Jesus was still calling on God. Jesus said, "My God" twice to emphasize His faith in God. Jesus didn't call God "Father" here perhaps because God is God to sin which is what Jesus was for us at the moment and God is Father to any without sin which is what Jesus is except for that moment. The latter is what we can be also through cleansing in Christ. It might be mentioned again in passing that much of Psalm 22 prophetically describes the end of the earthly, physical existence of Jesus. The New Testament writers used Psalm 22 a lot in their writings about Jesus. So, upon thinking about it in terms of the Bible Scriptures, the thief now knew that God would not forsake this righteous Man even though it may appear that way at the moment. This thinking with the Bible made the thief feel better. Then, the thief thought that maybe Jesus got scared in the darkness just like the thief got scared. The thief kind of missed on that one.

No one then or since then knows what all went on in that darkness with Jesus. And, at that point in time, neither the thief nor anyone else knew all of the theology that was taking place that day. The New Covenant New Testament part of the Bible Scriptures was now beginning.

God Wants To Dwell With Us

By the inspiration of God and Christ, the New Testament Bible writers have revealed to us an understanding of the theology that was going on at the time of the cross. Their message is supported by Christ.

The Bible message tells us that our wrongs of sin separate us from a God who very much wants to dwell with us. This was a message that was clearly stated way back in the Bible book of Exodus with the building of the Tabernacle. Even one sin makes us unholy and separates us from a holy God.

Sin And A Holy God

If God wants to dwell with us, He needs a way to take care of our sin so that unholy people can be in the presence of a holy God. This plan for taking care of sin in people so a holy God can dwell with us has to satisfy all of the relevant theological issues in the Mind of God.

The Bible tells us that in the beginning in the Garden of Eden the first man and woman were in a Paradise in the presence of God and it was good. But the man and woman lost their Paradise existence in the presence of God because they rebelled and sinned in wrongly doubting and disobeying God's Word which made them unholy. No sinful wrongs can be in the presence of a holy God. Satan, the evil, deceiving Devil; sin; and curses entered the human race when the first man and woman disobeyed God's Word. And, to this day we are all prone to think our way and amplify our way rather than do all of God's way in His Bible Word in all aspects of our lives while we seek guidance and correct interpretation from God and His Christ. We are prone to not believe God and instead develop our own plan of salvation for sin which leads to physical death and eternal spiritual death while believing Satan's Garden of Eden lie that we will not die if we do things our way instead of God's way because it seems right to us with our limited minds that a loving, merciful God would not let us face an eternal spiritual death-like existence separated from God. Meanwhile, the Bible position asks us to be like our thief and give serious consideration to God because God is loving and merciful - - therefore He has developed and offered to us a plan to solve the sin problem through the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior so that we will not face an eternal spiritual death-like existence separated from God and our physically dead bodies will be raised to eternal life with God as Christ was raised. And, God's plan also has an impact on our earthly existence.

We are not able to earn holiness by living the perfect life. We can't fix the sin problem we have made. We can't reach back into our past and erase past wrongful sins. Sin separates us from God and is thus death by penalty, punishment, and reality.

But God loves people! He has a plan for us. The Bible tells us that we are made in his image. It talks in term of us being carved on the palms of God's hands.

Jesus And Our Sin

At the very beginning of human history in the Bible in the book of Genesis chapter 3 verse 15 when you understand it, it is prophesied that God will fulfill His plan for taking care of sin with the Christ to come who will overcome Satan. From the very beginning, God has continually made ways for sin to be taken care of so that sinful people can be in the presence of a holy God with a position of being in no sin holiness. All of this taking care of sin by God in the Old Testament part of the Bible was symbolic of the Christ who was to come. In the Old Covenant Old Testament part of the Bible Scripture, consider the Tabernacle (which later became the Temple). The Tabernacle sacrifice substituting in place of the sinner was a good example of how God takes care of sin so that He and people can dwell together. In the New Covenant New Testament part of the Bible in Hebrews 9:11, we are told that we now have a greater, more perfect Tabernacle. Also, in the Bible Jesus, the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world according to John the Baptizer, is the Passover Lamb of atonement sacrifice of the Old Testament books of Exodus and Leviticus. He was one sacrifice for sins forever offered once for all. His blood was shed for many for the remission of sins which starts the New Testament or New Covenant.

Theologically, Jesus dying on the cross in our place took care of the punishment for all sins for all persons ever committed from the beginning of human history to the end of human history -- the sins of the whole world! Now a person in the Name of Jesus can accept this gift of having all sin penalties paid and can then be qualified to be in the presence of God with no sin against them. Thus, they are holy to be in the presence of a holy God forever.

On that day of the cross, the period of darkness and the cry of Jesus that day were because of the horrible, hellish human anguish and total separation from God that Jesus felt and experienced as He took the penalty and died for all of our sins and for all sins of all people for all of time. What a massive, heavy, weighty burden that must have been to feel! What agony it must have been! But Jesus kept the faith in this experience as we already mentioned.

Can you imagine yourself taking a small penalty for someone else so that they may be free of that penalty? All in one moment, Jesus took the penalty for every wrong for every person that ever lived in human history.

As this experience approached, Jesus had a natural human dread of this awful experience. Jesus asked God for permission for Himself not to have to go through with this experience of the human horror of having to die for the sins of the whole world. But He told God, "Nevertheless not My will, but Yours be done."

And, Jesus didn't die for our sins just in cold, grudging obedience to God. Jesus cared for us, He wanted to help us, He liked us, He loves us -- so He went through with the plan God in His wisdom had designed to help us with our sins. Listen to this description of the mind of God from the Bible which is the same as the mind of the Christ: "He will feed His flock like a shepherd: He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and will gently lead those that are with young." And now Jesus is reaping His great heavenly, eternal reward and joy because He obeyed God and loved us so much!

And, He now represents us to God. He is our special high priest. The world can see God as Father -- a very personal God -- through Jesus. We don't have to understand all of the implications of the darkness, of Jesus feeling forsaken, and of the burden of all sins of world history. We don't have to understand the terrific force and weight of the judgment for all of the sins ever committed in human history. We just need to sense the weight of our own sin in judgment and properly use the fact that we can do something about it through Jesus Who did something about it for us and Who now represents us to God.

The Thief Couldn't Handle It

Meanwhile, back to the thief. Having the comfort of the presence of Jesus, even though they were both dying, made the thief very glad that he had done the important thing which he had done "earlier" that morning. You see, "earlier" that day when the thief was first crucified, he really didn't do too well. He understandably had a hard time handling it. Enduring the crucifixion was compounded for the thief after he had mocked Jesus that morning, which we talked about earlier. Things really got bad then for the thief when he chose to realize that he may well have mocked the very Son of God! But God was working. God used this evil, bad situation to chasten the thief in love just as a loving parent disciplines and chastens their children that they love. As the thief struggled with the torment of being crucified and the torment of beginning to realize and acknowledge the wrongs he had done toward God, the thief chose to keep his eyes on Jesus who was doing much better than the thief was doing. The thief noticed that the way Jesus was handling the experience of being crucified and the way the thief himself was handling the crucifixion were in great contrast. Jesus was looking to God as He suffered. He was forgiving and concerned about others. In contrast, the thief was mainly concerned about himself and his pains. Then, the thief chose to seriously consider and wonder whether he might be the reason for the difference between himself and Jesus. God really fanned that spark in the thief when the thief seriously considered that he might be a part of the problem.

The crucifixion was becoming unbearable to the thief. It would be easy to give up and go mad like the thief on the other cross was doing. But our thief, as he suffered, chose to keep his eyes on Jesus. As the suffering became more intense for the thief, God's Holy Spirit helped the thief examine his life for the wrongs that would keep the thief out of God's holy presence. God flashed some of the thief's wrongful sins before him. God reminded the thief of the promise for those that are looking to God from the book of Psalms in Scripture that the thief had heard his parents tell him many times as a child. The verse was, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you." Later, when the

Bible New Testament was written, this promise was also expressed: “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon Him; for He cares for you.” The thief didn’t pay much attention to that verse as a youth. But God kept guiding and reminding the thief of that verse now. And, the thief realized that he could choose to trust the Word of God in Scripture and see how God would honor it. Along this line, the thief noticed again that Jesus, who talked to God while facing disaster, was doing pretty good compared to the thief even though they both were suffering terribly.

Just then an insect began to go after some drying blood on the thief’s body. Without thinking the thief angrily jerked to get rid of the insect. Oh! What a mistake! The jerk caused the nails and sores to rip at his raw nerves. Intense pain shot through his body! Any way the thief shifted and turned the gnawing pain was so intense from the jerk. He was so sore already. And, he was getting sick and tired of all that uproar around him -- the shouting, the crying, and all the racket. It was getting on his nerves. The whiplash stings were really throbbing with burning, infected, pulsating pain. His headache pounded. His right shoulder, that was injured when they dropped the cross in the hole, by now was very sore from being further irritated from the struggle to wait for death while dangling from a cross. It felt like someone was trying to rip and twist his arm off. He was so-o-o uncomfortable. The razor-sharp, knife-like cuts in his hands and feet were grinding on him and ripping through his whole body like thundering, flashing lightning bolts. His tired, fatigued body struggled -- pushing up and down with his legs to gasp for air to breathe which right now each time again and again caused shocking pain to bolt through his tired, weary body like steaming zaps! His mouth was dry. It was torture of the worst kind! The horror of it all was getting to him. His face had a haggard look. The thief cursed. The frustrated thief was getting panicky! He didn’t think he could go on. He halfheartedly tried to commit suicide by holding his breath. [Pause.] But he couldn’t do it and this only increased the pain and discomfort. He didn’t think he could make it any longer. Would he go mad so quickly?

As the thief looked at the other thief who was for some time now showing that he was already going mad from the terrible cross experience, our thief became overwhelmed with a helpless feeling and tremendously scared at the direction his life was going. He knew that he was also headed in the direction of going mad. He couldn’t handle it in his own strength. The cross was unbearable. How long would he last before going mad himself? The thief did notice though that he was not yet near the mental state of the other thief. Under the activity of God’s Spirit, the thief thought while looking at the other thief, “There but for the grace of God go I.” This thought captured the attention of our thief for a moment.

Today had somewhat stripped the thief of his ego and selfishness so that he could choose to see his wrongs and sins for what they really were revealing the full guilt to sense without a selfish conscious or unconscious cover-up and inhibitions. The thief, stripped of his unselfishness, now realized with mental pain how many times earlier in his life he had promised people that he was going to stop his stealing and change. He had promised and pretended to be so [make “so” longer] sincere just to get them off his back or just to

get them to do something for him that he wanted. This had been so easy to put over on gullible people or people who were hoping for the best without going through the costs and risks of using Biblical reproof or God and Christ guided speaking the truth in love. But the thief knew even then that he had been lying through his teeth and it pained the thief now to see himself for what he really was. If you've ever done something bad to someone (in ignorance or not), and later realize it without doing a selfish cover-up, then you really can feel the embarrassment, hurt, and separation from the injured person that your bad act has caused. It will be similar to this but greater on the Judgment Day for all of our sins when, stripped of selfishness, we see our sins for what they really are in relation to God. It is like someone's actions when they are drunk or on drugs compared to how they look to sober, normal people seeing the goofy person's actions for what they really are. The Bible writer described how we in sin sometimes look to the eyes of God when he said: "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another." Then, when we are stripped of our sinful selfishness and we see ourselves as God sees us, it is embarrassing until we get forgiveness and accept it. Fortunately we can be forgiven and cleansed in Christ even though scars may remain. Without the insulating cover-up of his unforgiven selfishness, the thief's wrongs and sins seemed like a burning fire to the thief and on his own he could not put it out.

As the thief chose to entertain the kind of thinking he was now doing, his eyes were beginning to be opened to the evil web of the sin of himself and others and how it eats us up. This type of seeing cannot be self-discerned. It is only visible in its clarity by the grace of God to an opening heart. God's Holy Spirit convicts us of sin we find in chapter 16 in the Bible book of John.

Along the same lines the thief's eyes were opening to his own sinful web and how it had held him back, driven others from him, and wasted his life. He was noticing how he used his chosen inhibitions to not look at his sins and see them as God sees them for what they really are. But the thief didn't trust God enough at this point to find out if together with God the thief could change and start giving up sins for a more God like life.

It is ironic that the thief thought that he was doing great things with his life and really he was wasting his life! He thought that God would be behind him since his work was to free God's people the Jews from the Romans and it would help so many people. Little did the thief know God or the Bible. But God's Holy Spirit was still working and the thief was thinking.

The Thief's Only Hope

It is comforting to note that no matter how much the world has done us in or even no matter how much our own selfish sinful web has held us back and has done us in, we can still pick up and go on with God and His Christ. The thief was noticing this possibility. The thief was beginning to see the possibility that he needed to look to God. In guilt and embarrassment the thief was sorry for his wrongs and sins. The thief was scared and overwhelmed with fear and guilt. The thief began to realize his humanity. All the while,

the pain of the crucifixion experience was excruciating and continually grinding down on the mentally and spiritually tired, exhausted, hopeless thief.

The Thief Uses The Bible With God

Finally, the thief could take it no longer! The thief humbled himself in the face of his wrongs and he chose to place his only hope in the Word of God from Scripture which he had learned from his parents -- the verse that said, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you." Following the example of Jesus, who the thief had seen talking to God when facing disaster, the thief turned to God. The thief with remorse sobbed aloud and cried out to God silently in his heart and mind and said, "God, I can't take it anymore. God help me! Out of the depths have I cried unto You, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice; let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. I know I have done things I should not have done and I'm sorry. My thoughts have not been Your thoughts. But, if You Lord should mark wrongs, O Lord, who could stand -- much less me! But I have seen from Jesus asking You to forgive others that there is forgiveness with You; this is true probably so that you may be revered and worshipped. I wait for You Lord, my soul does wait, and in Your Word do I hope. I have cast my burden on You as Your Word says in the Scriptures. My soul waits for You Lord more than a night worker watches for the morning; I say, more than a night worker watches for the morning. God, may everybody hope in You; for I have seen from Jesus that with You there is mercy, and with You there is plenty of redemption. And, certainly You will provide a way to redeem the repentant from all our wrongs and sins. [Slight pause] God, I know I deserve punishment -- unlike Jesus who does not deserve this horrible death. But, Lord, [pause] Lord, [pause] forgive them for punishing me in such a horrible way."

After the thief had prayed to God in his heart and mind, the hurt of the pain was no less intense and he had no less heartache. But, somehow he had the strength to endure each moment. He felt that he could go on by turning to God with his eyes fixed on Jesus, his Hero!

Is Jesus The Great King?
Is Jesus The Son of God?

The thief dealt with his sin. After following the example of Jesus while using the Bible Scriptures and making a turn toward God while looking to God for help and guidance, the thief began his serious thinking about Jesus which we talked about earlier. After the thief did much thinking and reviewed in his mind what he knew about Jesus and what he had seen of Jesus, the thief thought to himself and decided, "I believe that this Man is what the sign over His head on the cross says. He is the Great King. And, more than that, I believe that He truly is the very Son of God."

Why did the thief decide this? The thief chose to believe that Jesus was the Son of God based on the works of Jesus -- all of those phenomenal, well witnessed miracles such as the raising of Lazarus from the dead; and the thief chose to believe that Jesus was the Son of God based on the words of Jesus; and based on the unexpected reactions of Jesus to

things the thief had seen even that day which showed a great heart of love. The thief was beginning to have a heart and mind that God could do something with because the thief was beginning to let God's Word in His Holy Scriptures be a part of his life.

The thief then knew that if Jesus was the Son of God, the Jewish religious leaders really didn't have a case against Jesus for blasphemy by saying He was the Son of God, and they might indeed be really getting their King killed!

Then, the thief thought that maybe he was really just too tired and was all mixed up about this Jesus Person. So, he reviewed the evidence in his mind and still came to the same conclusion about who Jesus really was.

God's Spirit then helped a desire to glow in the thief. The thief decided that dead or alive Jesus really did have a Kingdom somewhere with God and the thief now really wanted to be a part of that Kingdom.

Why Would God Want Me?

But, how could someone like the unholy thief be with Jesus in the presence of a holy God? [Pause.] Then, the thief remembered the words of Jesus that earlier had really struck him. He remembered how Jesus had asked God to forgive them for killing Him. Maybe, just maybe, perhaps Jesus would ask God to forgive the thief so that the thief would have no wrongs against him and, thus, he would be qualified to be with God and Jesus in the Kingdom that Jesus would have.

The thief didn't know it but he had caught a glimpse of something greater. The thief saw the Jesus who today was dying on the cross for the wrongs and sins of the thief in place of the thief. Jesus was suffering the thief's punishment. Jesus was gaining the forgiveness that the thief wanted. This is what Jesus was doing for all of us. Jesus is not only an Advocate for us before God, as the thief was hoping, but Jesus has also paid our fine, our penalty for our sins. At first glance it may seem that a person would not be being a responsible person if he let someone else take care of his sins. But he is being responsible by dealing with his sins and confessing them. Jesus can take the responsible for the judgment against those sins which is something we are unable and unqualified to do. None of us can make it right for our sins with a God of justice. Think about the magnitude of our offense against a holy God and the magnitude of the punishment if it is to be handled in justice. The Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The thief, by letting Jesus take care of his sins, now would have no sins to keep him out of the presence of a holy God or to keep him out of the Kingdom of Jesus which is with God. Jesus took care of this sin on the cross. But the thief had to accept this forgiveness that Jesus got for the thief so that he could be with God in the Kingdom of Jesus! Jesus does not force His Kingdom on anyone!

Why Would Jesus Want Me In His Kingdom?

But, why would God and Jesus want someone like the thief? [Slight pause.] The evil forces of the universe had been struggling with the thief all day with not too much success. The thief's emotions were drained. The thief bowed his head and sighed. He looked up at the sky. He tightened his face. Then he turned his head again and looked at Jesus. The evil forces were really struggling to overcome the power of God for a soul who God loved and for a soul who God allowed to have freewill to hopefully operate out of love. And, the thief was beginning to love Jesus and God for Who They were and what They had done. The thief wanted to be in the Kingdom of Jesus but now the evil forces of the universe made the thief really struggle. The thief thought, "Why would Jesus want him?" The thief struggled with self-doubts.

The Important Thing Is An Important Choice

The situation was brought to a head by an incident with the other thief which helped our thief to do the important thing he did earlier that day. [Read this slowly.] The important thing that the thief did was to make an important choice!

The other thief hollered out to Jesus and railed on Him in a half-mad, shrieking, raging scream, "If you are the Christ, save yourself and us!" But our thief, in his new state of mind, before he could hardly think rebuked the other thief and said, "Don't you fear God, seeing that you are in the same condemnation? And we are indeed being treated justly; for we are receiving the due reward for our deeds -- but this Man has done nothing wrong." With this statement the thief admitted and confessed his sins in the presence of Jesus.

Then our thief could restrain himself no more. He turned to Jesus and blurted out rather timidly, "Hey Jesus --- Jesus, Lord, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom."

Will He Forgive Me?
Will He Love Me?

The mind of our thief flashed and exploded vividly. "What will Jesus say? Will He accept me? Will He even want somebody like me in His Kingdom? Can He learn to like me and even maybe love me like He does His friend John? Will He forgive Me? Will He love Me?"

Jesus slowly turned His head toward the thief. And, with eyes that penetrated to the bottom of the thief's soul, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me [pause slightly] in Paradise."

Jesus And The Thief

God filled the heart of the thief with a moment of great peace and joy. The thief's eyebrows were raised a little bit and his eyes were wide with amazement as he nodded in appreciation at Jesus. Cutting through the pain, a gentle smile came across the face of Jesus. Because of the love too great to comprehend which Jesus has for sinners, this had to be a joyful moment for Jesus. As Jesus smiled, the thief ducked his head slightly and, glancing up out of the corner of his eye, he made a shy, sheepish half-grin. But almost immediately the unrelenting pain and struggle of the cross changed the expression on both men's faces. The thief was very glad he had made the choice that he just made. And, it was like a breath of fresh air when the thief confessed in the presence of Jesus that he was a sinner who needed forgiveness. The thief had sought Jesus publicly in front of an antagonistic crowd and in the face of the peer pressure of the other thief. What a hilarious event this must have been to that antagonistic, curious crowd. Here were two pitiful, stripped down men, One wearing a ring of thorns in His hair, both severely beaten and bleeding, both hanging pathetically nailed to crosses waiting to die, struggling to breathe, suffering tremendously -- and, one says to the Other, "Remember me when You come into Your Kingdom." To which the other One basically says, "O.K." For the snickering people there in the crowd, they must have thought that the torture must be already affecting the minds of these victims. The crowd was wrong though. They didn't realize that they had just seen someone go into the Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Jesus the Christ! Notice that the thief did not earn his way into the Kingdom of Jesus. It was by the grace and mercy of Jesus (and God, too). All the thief did was to confess his sinful need and ask to enter. This gift of God that the thief had just received is what the whole Bible builds up to. The thief's body was restrained to death -- but his mouth, mind, and soul were free!

Evil Forces Attack

We know from the Bible story of the prodigal son that today there was great joy in heaven over the thief who repented. And, by accepting the provisions of God and Christ, the thief now knew something about the love of God and how He provides for ways we cannot handle such as solving the sin problem. The thief had become a living embodiment of what was to become John 3:16 in the Bible New Testament, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

However, the evil forces of the universe were still around. They raised questions in the mind of the thief and tried to tempt the thief to take these normal human questions beyond the point of trying to understand God's Will to the point of faithless doubt that becomes unbelieving and rejection. The thief began to wonder, "How can I be with Jesus 'today' in heavenly Paradise like Jesus said? It is supposed to take about three days to die on a cross and this is still the first day." But, the thief kept his faith in Jesus and decided to wait and see what Jesus would do just like he waited on God earlier today. And, the thief found out later in the day that Jesus was true to His word.

Nature Reacts To Jesus Dying

[Beginning of “Session Four” of “Study for Lent” presentation.]

[Break for ten minutes in “entire reading all on one occasion” presentation.]

[For the “entire reading all on one occasion” presentation: This heading needs to be started by 5 hours and 5 minutes after the beginning of the session (1:35 P.M. if you started at 8:30 A.M.)]

The end happened in the following manner. The Jewish religious leaders did not want Jesus and the two thieves hanging on a cross for the Sabbath which began at sundown because of their Scripture Law which forbids this type of situation. So, they convinced the Romans to send some soldiers to break the legs of the three hanging on the crosses so that they could no longer push their bodies up to fill their lungs with adequate air. With broken legs, they would die rather quickly from lack of air and their bodies could be taken down and gotten rid of. It might be mentioned in passing that Jewish Scripture Bible Old Testament Law also considered hanging on a tree to be a “curse” which at the time the Law was written may primarily have referred to someone killed and then displayed by hanging on a pole. But, the Bible New Testament writers said that Jesus became a “curse” for us on the cross.

The thief did live to see Jesus die. We will talk about the final moments of Jesus in just a moment.

And, the thief saw some of the glory of Jesus as Jesus died. Even nature responded. The thief was thankful that he had met Jesus that day. The events at the death of Jesus were an assurance for the thief as it has been one of the many assurances for believers down through the ages about Jesus, forgiveness, and the cross.

It might be noted in passing that Jesus died at the time of day of the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb and He is ours as we talked about earlier.

Saints Arose

When this awesome, phenomenal Man Jesus of Nazareth died, the earth did quake and the rocks of the earth were torn asunder. Graves were opened. Many saints arose from the dead for a time. They went into the holy city of Jerusalem and appeared to many.

The Temple Veil Is Torn

The thick, heavy veil in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem was torn in two from top to bottom. The veil closed the passageway into the holiest part of the Temple where the seat of God dwelt. The High Priest, after much cleansing, could only go beyond the veil into the holy presence of God once a year. Jesus is our High Priest to take us through the veil into the holy presence of God. The torn veil in the Temple of God is symbolic of the fact that now we can all go into the very presence of God through Jesus Christ because He has

taken the penalty of our sins for us once and for all which makes us thus holy and qualified to be in the presence of a holy God forever!

The Cross Is Important

The reaction of the physical earth to the death of Jesus gave chills to the thief as he wondered what was going on. The reaction of the physical earth and all of nature to the dying and death of Jesus was the basis for the thief to choose to decide that today He must be in the presence of one the greatest things ever to happen in the universe. It confirmed his earlier decision, which we haven't talked about yet, that the cross of Jesus was something very, very important!

A Soldier Says, "Son Of God!"

A Roman centurion soldier guarding over Jesus there at the cross saw some of the things that happened at the death of Jesus and saw the manner in which Jesus died which we will talk about in a moment. After nailing Jesus to the cross to die, the soldier had been going through some of the same mental agony that the thief had gone through. Make no mistake, though, the soldier would gladly execute someone for Rome. He had even executed people who claimed that they were being killed unjustly.

But this famous man Jesus was reacting totally different from all of the others he had executed. What was it with this Jesus? What was He up to? And, the rumors about Jesus continually haunted the soldier to make him think about the implications of everything that day. The soldier knew about some of the rumors about the wonders this Man had done. And, the soldier just couldn't get away from the big question, "Am I killing the very Son of God?" This experience really bothered the soldier all day long. He couldn't get away from that nagging question and put it out of his mind.

Each unusual thing about that day pierced the soldier's conscience and heart -- the unexpected way Jesus reacted to things; asking God to forgive the soldiers for killing Him; the immense darkness; and the reaction of nature to the death of Jesus. Imagine that you were there and saw all of this when Jesus died. The soldier feared greatly! The soldier glorified God and said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!"

The Thief Dies

Then, later, the soldiers sent to do so -- came and broke the legs of our thief and he died. He went directly to be with Jesus in heavenly Paradise that day as Jesus said he would. He was there in Paradise with God and in Father Abraham's bosom with all of God's people of the past. He was in the Kingdom of the Jesus Christ! The other thief was killed at the same time.

Jesus Is Pierced

But when the soldiers came to Jesus and saw that He was dead already, they did not break His legs to hasten His death since He was already dead. The quick death of Jesus after being on the cross for only about six hours showed that He was in control of things. The quick death of Jesus after only about six hours on the cross surprised even the Roman ruler Pilate that sentenced Jesus to death and he made sure that Jesus was dead with the soldiers before he would allow the body to be taken down for burial which we will talk about later. But, one of the soldiers with a spear sadistically stabbed a deep plunge into the side of Jesus piercing the side of Jesus. The soldier certainly did not need to do this. He could see from the naked chest of Jesus not breathing that Jesus was dead already. The soldier may have done this disgraceful, disrespectful, unconscionable act out of his unfortunate hatred of the despised Jews. Immediately after the soldier pierced the side of Jesus blood and water came out. The blood stands for Christ dying for our sins and the water stands for cleansing. Unknowingly this group of soldiers we now know fulfilled a Jewish Scripture prophecy about the One to be the Christ. It said, "A bone of Him shall not be broken." And, again, another Scripture says, "They shall look on Him Whom they pierced." (This piercing of the side of Jesus helps convince us that Jesus really was now a dead Man which will be important a little later.) In the Old Testament the original Passover Lamb which was symbolic of the Christ to come specifically was not to have a bone broken either.

John or someone very trustworthy to John saw this piercing. John may have humbly been speaking about himself when he said in the Bible, "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knows that he said true, that you might believe." A likely interpretation of John's words on this piercing is that John left the Mother of Jesus at his home to rest. Then, John went back to the cross after the terrible darkness to check on his friend Jesus to see how He was doing only to find Him already dead. (Possibly John got there in time to see Jesus die.) Witnessing the piercing of Jesus left no doubt that Jesus was indeed dead! From a distance, others close to Jesus likely also saw this piercing of the corpse of Jesus convincing them that Jesus was dead such as Joseph of Arimathea who then went to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus so that he could give it a proper burial.

Much of the New Testament part of the Bible is devoted to showing how Jesus fulfills Old Testament Bible Scripture. But, at the end of the day of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth there still remained one big Scripture to be fulfilled by Jesus about the One who would be the Christ. This prophecy said that the Christ would not remain in the depths and His flesh would not see corruption. We will look at that prophecy shortly. This prophecy was fulfilled three days later!

Acquaintances Of Jesus

Acquaintances of Jesus and the women who had followed and ministered to Jesus had stood looking at a far off distance from the cross. Everyone associated with Jesus now had a healthy fear that their own life may be taken.

Where were the close disciples of Jesus? To stop the cause of Jesus, would the disciples be killed next because of their very close association with Jesus? We know that the disciple John was briefly at the cross of Jesus. However, the disciples made themselves scarce at the arrest of Jesus and were standing in the shadows. They temporarily fled in fear for their own skins and for the most part they kept their distance. This fulfilled a Bible Old Testament Scripture which also told about the striking of Jesus. We looked at this Scripture earlier. The Scripture said, "Strike the Shepherd and the sheep will be scattered." Also, Jesus asked that the eleven disciples be let go at His arrest at the hands of the twelfth disciple, the betrayer, who never really was one of Jesus'. This incident fulfilled a Scripture speaking about God and Christ which said, "Of them which You gave Me have I lost none." Jesus said about the one who chose to be a betrayer that it would have been better for that man if he would have never been born! The disciple Peter promised to be there for Jesus in His hour of need. He even said that he would die for Jesus. But, as Jesus predicted, when the time came -- three times Peter even denied that he knew Jesus in fear for his own life as a follower of Jesus. Later repentant Peter was forgiven, cleansed, and restored. Several of the close disciples of Jesus boasted that they would do great things for Him in His hour of need. But the disciples even went to sleep when Jesus needed help.

It was the ladies who followed Jesus and ministered to Him that stood by Him. The ladies were also the first to see what happened later on at that first Easter morning. When the ladies told the disciples about the empty tomb at the first Easter, the disciples considered it to be idle tales and did not believe it. The women are an important group of witnesses for us to see that Jesus was indeed dead; they followed the dead body of Jesus to see where He was buried making it a multiwitnessed fact; and they were the first at the tomb to see what happened later that first Easter morning -- except for any soldiers on guard at the tomb that were there when it actually happened. When it happened, the soldiers became so afraid that they were like dead men. But, after the Easter event, the soldiers were heavily bribed by the religious leaders to say that the disciples stole the body of Jesus from the tomb while they slept. The escape of a prisoner would have been a very costly thing to the soldiers to have allowed to happen, even punishable by death, but they were promised plenty of help with the authorities by the religious leaders if they got into hot water over this. And this would have worked because we know how fearful Pilate was of Jewish unrest.

But, back to the disciples that didn't stand by Jesus too well at His hour of need. Jesus talked sternly to the disciples after His return from death about their lack of belief. They sought forgiveness, and were restored -- all except for Judas. Judas never was really "with" Jesus. Judas had his own agenda that Jesus was supposed to serve. In the end Judas chose to cut himself off from Jesus which is the manner in which he lived his life.

People Return Home

After the death of Jesus, people at the cross began returning home. The man they had placed their hopes in to be their Savior from the Romans was dead. Life looked bleak and

empty. But they certainly were surprised by the way things happened and turned out -- even the way nature reacted with the awful darkness and earthquake. For the people who came to see this sight, it certainly didn't turn out the way they expected. It turned out to be a scary, dramatic, fearful and traumatic event that raised a lot of questions. As they returned home, they beat themselves on the chest which was a customary way for people of that time to express the psychological emptiness, anguish, and impact of experiencing such a traumatic, uniquely unusual day in the history of the world.

The Three Crosses

Looking back in the distance at the three men hanging on the crosses, the people leaving the scene of the crosses could see the three crosses boldly stand out against the skyline with the cross of Jesus in the middle dividing the two thieves -- one on the right hand and one on the left hand. The scene was a symbolic picture of how Jesus says in the Bible that He will divide human destiny at the end of world time. The thief on one side will spend his destiny with Christ. The thief on the other side will not spend his destiny with Christ -- they will be separated. Christ said that when He comes again in glory that He will gather the nations and separate the sheep from the goats like a shepherd. The sheep will go on the right hand into the Kingdom. The goats will go on the left hand in a terrible existence away from God and Christ because the goats didn't let Jesus take their punishment for them in a trusting, believing faith that accepts the redeeming that Jesus did for them. The sheep had this accepting faith as evidenced by the following. Jesus said that a trusting faith in the Biblical Christ coupled with the appropriate treatment of even the least of one of those of Christ's that is in need will be the evidence that Christ will use to divide the nations into the sheep and the goats. This faith is described and clarified in the Bible for us with the help of God and Christ. Jesus liked to divide things into two mutually exclusive categories to make His points like the sheep and the goats at the end of time. The two thieves embodied the eternal Heaven and hell existence that Jesus taught about with Jesus standing between them. We all only differ in degree. Both of the thieves were sinners compared to God. One was not better than the other necessarily. They differed in their acceptance or rejection of the needed holiness that God would freely give them through the Christ. What a striking scene the people saw against the skyline as the day was beginning to end. Such is the scene of world even to the end of human history.

Eyewitnesses For Us

Many people were eyewitnesses of this unique day in human history when they crucified Jesus of Nazareth. Some of these people have recorded what they saw for us in the Bible historical record which we will talk about later.

Strength Made Perfect In Weakness

Now let's look at how the end came. Another insect came to irritate the thief. The thief angrily cursed before he thought. Then, he was embarrassed and looked to Jesus for forgiveness. The thief didn't know yet that Christ working in us makes His strength perfect in weakness. But all of us probably have what Paul calls a thorn in the flesh to

keep us humble. We need God's and Christ's help to remove the thorns if They choose to. Some thorns They may leave for our benefit. Some thorns may require much work and suffering changes on our part as we patiently look for God's and Christ's strength. But it is O.K. to realize our human frailty. Christ makes His strength perfect in weakness according to the Bible. In our weakness we better see our need to turn to God and Christ both in our weaknesses and in our strengths.

Not Perfect But Perfectly Holy

The practical goal is not to be perfect but to be perfectly holy while obediently, Biblically following the one perfect Person the best we can with His help and guidance. Our imperfection is made holy because it is gone since we are forgiven in Christ by His death on the cross for us -- thus, we are holy for a holy God when we seek any needed forgiveness and are cleansed.

The following idea might be mentioned as an aside at this point. God and Christ reside in the lives of imperfect people who follow the one perfect Person and deal with their sins to be perfectly holy. Can people look at us and see that Jesus, God's Christ, lives and works in us as imperfect people who follow the one perfect Person? Can people see the group of characteristics associated with the Biblical Christ? Bible Scripture records Christians saying things like, "Fellow Christians, be followers together of me, and notice them that walk likewise for you have us for an example." And, in the Bible book of I Corinthians chapter 11 Christians hold up the example of Christ living in them by saying in effect, "You be followers of me, even as I ... am in Christ." This idea of having God and His Christ residing in imperfect people who are following the one perfect Person to be perfectly holy involves using the Bible. Jesus said in the Bible, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make our dwelling with him." This is the Holy Spirit dwelling in us.

Dealing With Sin

With that aside, let us continue. Believers in Jesus Christ need to keep the faith and seek holiness in their personal lives under the direction of God and His Christ and, of course, believers need to do this while using the Bible. And, when, because of our human condition, we mess up, we need to deal with our sins in Christ so that we will remain ritually holy to keep our relationship uncluttered with God and Christ. The Bible tells us in I Peter 3:7 that even how a man treats his wife can affect his prayers. The same is most likely true for the ladies, too. The Psalmist in the Bible said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." The Bible book of Hebrews states that holiness is something "without which no man shall see the Lord." Sometimes even one sinful act or bad habit can be very destructive to an otherwise perfect life. The Bible tells us to beware of, "the little foxes, that spoil the vines."

One of the great confessions of sin in the Bible is by David in Psalm 51. The Bible pointedly reminds us what God will do for us through Christ. It states that, "If we confess

our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

When sinners seek to change their lives in the strength of God and Christ, it may take routine effort. There may be many setbacks. But, setbacks are something to solve rather than a reason to quit trying. One of the secrets of success is to go beyond your failures. Or, as the Bible states it, “In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening withhold not your hand: for you know not which shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.” It may mean trying lots of things as God and Christ works with us to mold us and transform us. It may take a long time of patience. We need to do our best to live holy and deal with places where we mess up. God and Christ, then, can work through us -- pruning our faults and making us grow from glory to glory to do what God wants done. In this manner, as the Bible says, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

Jesus -- Man And God

Now, let's return to our thief and examine the final moments of Jesus in more detail. The thief, after just embarrassing himself with sin that morning, he began thinking, “I wonder if Jesus was such a good Person and also did better than me on the cross because really He was totally Son of God and not really a man.” Then, the thief got his answer in the following episode. Jesus, the Son of God, was also a man -- He experienced life just like any other man. Jesus is both man and God!

The final scene of the physical, earthly life of Jesus was deteriorating rapidly. The nostalgic, poignant end was near. It looked like Jesus was utterly destroyed and all hope was lost. But, Jesus was about to enter His glory where He would be high and lifted up with a Name exalted above every other name! The Bible tells us that His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince Of Peace.

Is It I?

Insects were buzzing around the death scene. Since the darkness was over, the sun's glare had been boiling down again. Jesus had not had anything to drink since the farewell party He gave for His twelve disciples the night before. It might be mentioned that at this party in an emotional scene Jesus told His disciples that one of them would be the cause of His end on earth. Then, all of the twelve disciples did an admirable thing. They all said, “Is it I?” Eleven of the twelve did so with soul searching. The Bible tells us that Satan, the Devil, the evil force, had entered one of the twelve disciples to betray Jesus which also fulfilled a Scripture. Judas, the betrayer, did what was right in his own eyes like in the days of the Bible book of Judges. Judas did not consult with God and Jesus within a Bible framework to see what They wanted. The Bible tells us that Judas was also an active thief whose blind, unrepentant ways led to his personal destruction. Jesus died for even the betrayer Judas. However, for all practical purposes in the end the choice of action by Judas resulted in refusing the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. But back to the other eleven

disciples. The eleven didn't say, "Is it so and so?" Instead, first they considered themselves to be the problem! What a great example for us! Eleven of the disciples dealt with their possible wrongs at the farewell party. When something was wrong, they first honestly checked to see if they were a part of the problem. They said, "Is it I?" Of course, when with God's help they found nothing wrong, they didn't keep browbeating themselves. Too bad our thief was not this way. Remember, our thief was reluctant to consider the fact that he could be a part of the problem. It could have saved him a lot of grief in life.

Now that we have had that aside, let's return to the thief's question of, "Is Jesus really all Son of God and not really a Man, too?" Let's look at the rest of the episode that gave the thief his answer.

Jesus Thirsts

We now know that there was still one Scripture to be fulfilled by the One to be the Christ while Jesus was still alive. The Scripture said, "In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." This verse was somewhat fulfilled earlier today as they offered Jesus a drink which He did not drink. But, here it is going to be completely fulfilled in response to the thirst of Jesus and He drank it. We just mentioned that Jesus had gone a long time under severe conditions without something to drink. As the end drew near, Jesus knew that all things were accomplished. The thirsty, dry-mouth tongue of Jesus was stuck to His mouth as prophetically described in Psalm 22. So, then, that Scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I thirst." He was thirsty [next phrase a little slower] just like any other "man" in his condition. Jesus had no means to get a drink. His acquaintances were not nearby -- they stood afar. And, you would think that the people near the cross that had been so hostile to Jesus would certainly not likely give Him a drink even if he begged for it although someone had tried to give Him a drink earlier which He didn't drink. But He got a drink. However, at the Passover last supper and farewell party that Jesus gave His disciples the night before, Jesus said that He would not drink of the fruit of the vine again until the Kingdom of God had come and the Passover was fulfilled. But now He drank which could possibly be interpreted that what He drank here was not what He had in mind as a fruit of the vine drink. Probably a better interpretation though would be that the Kingdom of God had come with the work of Christ on the cross. The Old Covenant of the Old Testament part of the Bible was now fulfilled and the New Covenant of the New Testament part of the Bible had now begun.

Other comments can be made about His thirst and the drink. Jesus taught that there are times that there is a reward for giving a drink to one of His. Certainly it would be noted if Jesus Himself was given a drink. Also, Jesus taught that when you give a drink to the least of His in need, you give it to Him. In this sense Jesus is still thirsty! Here on the cross Jesus didn't ask for a drink. He just stated His thirst. Seeing the manner in which Jesus suffered so terribly, some people there felt compassion and almost seemed to welcome the opportunity to do something now for this Man Who was the subject of all this bad treatment. What changes were going on in various people's minds in that crowd who watched Jesus that brought compassion to give Jesus a needed drink? There was a

container of vinegar there. They soaked a sponge in the vinegar, put it on a stick, and put it up to the mouth of Jesus to drink to kill the thirst. Jesus did drink it and the end followed immediately.

Jesus Has Power Over Death

Jesus did not die like any other man. He died in a matter of hours rather than the usual several days that it took for someone to die on a cross. And, at the end as His body was about to collapse and die, instead of collapsing and dying He preceded that moment by simply giving His Spirit back to God. No, He did not commit a type of suicide by giving His Spirit back to God. He gave His Spirit Back to God bringing physical death just before His body gave out and was going to die within the same moment anyway. He said while He was alive that He could lay His life down and take it up again. He laid down His life by letting them kill Him -- He accepted the cross -- and also He laid down His life by dismissing His Spirit just before physical death grabbed it as His body was about to die.

Also, Jesus did not give His Spirit back to God in order to escape two days of torturous suffering on the cross before He would die. He went through the complete suffering unto death on a cross. It was just that He had tremendously more suffering to bear on the cross than others who died on crosses had to endure. Thus, He died quicker than others died on a cross. He was spared none of the suffering. Actually, His suffering on the cross was immeasurably greater than anyone else who had ever died on a cross or would ever die on a cross. We cannot imagine the costs He went through on the cross for us. He went through the suffering for all the crimes and all the sins of all of humanity. That total, awesome penalty was symbolically and physically placed on His body from all of time and it pounded Him all at once!!! Just the emotional drain of Jesus' unique death on the cross was unfathomable and it drained the physical body of energy. You know how stress affects and drains us physically. What a tremendous emotional and physical drain in an ultimate traumatic experience it was. This unimaginable amount of suffering killed the body of Jesus in a matter of hours rather than the usual matter of days.

However, in the face of great, deadly suffering, Jesus did have a certain control as He died. He reserved His physical strength for the things He wanted to do and say from the cross as His human body was rather rapidly succumbing to death. This monitoring of how much physical strength was left before His body would die made it possible for Him to die with an uncanny dignity in the face of a torturous death. Immediately preceding death He was not like He should be for a crucified person Who was just about to die. Although Jesus had suffered greatly, he was not too weak to even barely talk. He was in control of the amount of strength He would need for His final moments. In the minutes that preceded His death, His eyes were not closed or in a blank stare. He was not in a lethargic stupor. He certainly was not one of the many who understandably had gone mad from the torture of being crucified. He did not just collapse and die. He gave His Spirit back to God -- He did not just succumb to death. So, this is how He died on the first day of being crucified rather than several days later. Jesus has power even over death. His work on earth was done. So, He gave His Spirit back to God.

Jesus Finishes His Work

Now that the earthly work of Jesus was done, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, not in the voice of a collapsing, dying man, but in a loud voice He cried, "It is finished!" It was cried loudly so that everybody in eternity could in a sense hear it and would know that it was finished and be sure of what was finished for us! The work of Jesus was thoroughly done to a perfect degree! The death of Jesus was a triumph of satisfied joy. "It is finished!" was a pronouncement filled with ecstasy and glory. The perfect life was complete -- the perfect life that fulfilled and accomplished a total change for all of human history. His work was now finished. His suffering was finished. The Old Covenant of God was finished! The New Covenant of God in Christ had now begun! So, the work of Jesus was finished -- giving us His redeeming Salvation and the New Covenant!

The Cross And The Thief

The thief thought, "This Man sounds triumphant while dying a senseless death on a cross. Certainly He would not be triumphant for nothing. Is He up to something on the cross? A Man with the powers of Jesus really did not have to accept this unjust death on the cross. Certainly He had the power to get out of it. Why did He do it?" And the thief wondered "what" was finished? The way Jesus was acting, He certainly meant that more than just His suffering was finished. What did Jesus mean, "It is finished!"

Today, because of the thief's faith in God, the thief used the Bible. And, today the thief looked to Jesus to get forgiveness for himself so that the thief could be with Jesus and a holy God in the Kingdom of Jesus with no sin against the thief. This is what the cross is about -- Jesus dying for the thief's sins and for ours. He took our punishment. The thief got it but could not put it theologically into words. The thief missed so much because he had not learned to use the Bible with God and His Christ. Old Testament phrases like "the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" and "make His Soul an offering for sin" and "He bare the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" escaped the thief. The thief did not yet know how it was all connected. He was still a babe in Christ without much maturity and would go into the heavenly Paradise of the Kingdom of Jesus this way. But, of course, even this is greatly desirable for the Bible Psalmist said, "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the House of God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."

Jesus dying a senseless death on the cross and considering it to be a triumph made the thief realize that there was some significance to this senseless death on a cross. What were Jesus and God up to? The thief decided that the cross must be something very, very important about Jesus and, with the things that had happened today, maybe something important to all the earth. The thief had picked up enough from God's Spirit today to enter into the eternal Kingdom of Jesus and the thief knew that the cross was important. But the thief would not get many of the details until he was in Paradise. But we can get many helpful and rewarding details now from the Bible if we don't waste our life like the thief did.

Jesus And Forgiveness

With the words that Jesus had just uttered, the thief knew that Jesus might be dying. The quivering, twitching face of the thief showed that emotions were swelling up in him. He loved Jesus now. The thief could still hear those words that really struck the thief earlier that day. [Tenderly and inflect upward] Father, [pause] Father, forgive them.”

[Pause a little.]

Jesus Dies

Jesus had had a drink. Jesus had stated that His work and the Old Covenant of God were finished. The New Covenant of Salvation had now begun. Now, Jesus uttered His last statement. He used a quote from the Psalms in a new way. Jesus died with the Bible on his lips. Jesus was going to prepare a place for the thief in Paradise. He is doing the same for us! Jesus slowly bowed His head and gave up the ghost right after having cried again with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commend My Spirit.”

[Pause slightly.]

They have killed the Prince Of Life!

JESUS OF NAZARETH IS DEAD!!!

Jesus And God

The thief in heaven with Jesus found out that earlier the disciples Peter, James, and John had been with Jesus up on a high mountain. And, they heard a voice from heaven. It was God giving honor and glory to Jesus in His majesty!

The disciple Peter, when he was growing old, knew that some day he would leave this earth. Peter wanted everybody to know about the unique experience that he had had with Jesus and the voice on the mountain -- so he wrote some things down for us that have become part of the Bible New Testament. Peter looking back on his own life said, “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known to 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, ... And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mountain.”

What did God say about Jesus on that holy mountain to give Him honor and glory?

“This is My own dear Son, in Whom I am well pleased; [long pause] LISTEN TO HIM!”

The thief listened and in time heard even more. “Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me [pause slightly] in Paradise.”

“Behold,” says the Lord God, “I will make a New Covenant ... and I will remember their sin no more.” The thief listened properly. The thief was ready to make changes in his life. He was willing to be transformed by God and Jesus Christ and Their Holy Spirit! The Bible was a part of this.

Listen To Him!

The disciple John said about Jesus Christ, “He was in the world, and the world was made by Him and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them He gave power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on His Name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only Begotten of the Father,) [slower] full of grace and truth.”

[Pause.]

[Pleading] “This is My own dear Son, ...
[with impassionate fervency] LISTEN TO HIM!”

Movement III - Closing Monologue

The Resurrection Of Jesus Christ

[Beginning of “Session Five” of “Study for Lent” presentation.]

[Break for ten minutes in “entire reading all on one occasion” presentation.]

[For the “entire reading all on one occasion” presentation: This heading needs to be started by 6 hours and 6 minutes after the beginning of the session (2:36 P.M. if you started at 8:30 A.M.) Session Five and Session Six will be done together in the “entire reading all on one occasion” presentation. ... {You should be finished by 3:22 P.M. which only gives you 38 minutes to be off schedule but try and be done by 3:22 P.M. which your group would most likely welcome. Please try to stay on schedule. - - You MUST be done by 4:00 P.M.!}]

The weekend Christ died, the disciples and close acquaintances of Jesus had normal human grief. The disciples in particular sat around in gloom and doom in unbelief. Some of them recalled how a lady a few days before had emotionally poured precious, very costly ointment on Jesus in adoration and Jesus said that this would be the anointing of His body for burial. Of course, all of these acquaintances of Jesus now knew that their Savior from the Romans was gone. But their loss was much more personal. They were greatly overwhelmed that their fantastic Friend was gone. Fond memories and kindnesses of Him ran through their minds. They looked at the places where Jesus had sat and would think, “He is not there. He is gone from now on.”

They wondered why Jesus had let them kill Him to end His cause. They were behind locked doors in cautious fear for their own safety.

But, on the third day after the death of Jesus, Jesus rose from the dead never to die again in a unique resurrection that was predicted by Himself and the prophecies about the Messiah in the Old Testament part of the Bible. The Old Testament Scriptures said, “For You will not leave My Soul in hell; neither will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.” In what was an obvious, unexpected turn of events, those close to Jesus in their unbelief were greatly surprised by the resurrection to say the least. The fact of the resurrection was more than the joy of having a dear Friend back from death to spend some more time with them. The empty tomb and seeing the risen Christ started making all of the pieces fit together for those close to Jesus. He really was the Christ and in ways that they did not notice earlier, a Christ for Whom even death could not restrain. The joy of those close to Jesus that first Easter became an unbelievable euphoric joyful excitement.

The enemies of Jesus went to great lengths to prevent the appearance of a resurrection hoax because of things Jesus had said. Their efforts made a hoax impossible to pull off. In His resurrection from the dead, Jesus came out of a tomb that was blocked by a large, sealed stone and guarded by a Roman soldier watch. He left His grave cloths behind neatly and undamaged. The Angel Of The Lord descended from heaven and rolled the

stone away. Then He sat on the stone. He was dazzling white and like lightning. At the sight of Him the Roman guards in fear did shake and became as dead men. The Jewish religious leaders knew that Jesus had said something about rising from the dead. So, the Jewish religious leaders got the Romans to block, seal, and guard the tomb to prevent the disciples of Jesus from stealing the body of Jesus and foisting a risen Jesus hoax on human history. What they actually did helped to make the resurrection more believable that it was not a hoax as people study and verify the historical records. (Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit of God and Christ, there was evidence passed down from the beginning as to which records were the good ones and even which records should be held at the level of Scripture and later be codified as Bible Scripture.) But, Jesus did rise! It was not a hoax but a witnessed part of history that the people who were sources preserved as well as any documented historical fact. They preserved this history for us at great personal cost! The Bible tells us that the last enemy that will be destroyed is death. Jesus defeated death for us! Jesus appeared to many in His resurrected form.

The Cover-up

There was an attempt at a cover-up We mentioned the bribe and stolen body theory earlier.

Crucified And Risen

It might also be mentioned that in the Bible in places like I Corinthians 15 the crucifixion and the resurrection must be connected. Christ was crucified, dead, buried, and then arose! If Christ did not rise, Scripture is not fulfilled. In a related matter in the Bible, Paul said, "... if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ ... if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; you are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." If Scripture is not fulfilled, we have no living Savior in the world. But Scripture is fulfilled. Christ arose. Also, this means that we do not have a dead Savior -- but a living Savior to help us and be with us spiritually!

The Ascension

Several days later Jesus in His transformed, resurrected body ascended into Heaven saying that He would return. Meanwhile, He will send the Comforter or the Holy Spirit to be with us. Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and God are all three God existing in different forms to minister to us just like water can exist in three forms: liquid, ice, and gas to minister to us. But this is a doctrine to study later. Jesus said that He has gone to prepare a place for us and He will come back to get us. The Bible tells us that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God. God has highly exalted Him and given him a Name which is above every name. Both the Bible Old Testament and New Testament talk about every knee will bow and every tongue will confess in heaven, in earth, and in a place separated from heaven and earth. The two descriptions of this sound similar as though the same thing. In the Bible book of Philippians this bowing description is connected to the Name of Jesus. Jesus is in heavenly Paradise with the spiritual soul of the thief and with the spirits of

those Old Testament Old Covenant souls like Moses, David, and Abraham who were cleansed in faith through the symbolic Christ symbols in the Bible Old Testament. Jesus has a new, glorified, heavenly, transformed body that is recognizable as Jesus. It doesn't have the pain and hindrances of earthly wounds although they still show. We, too, in Christ will no longer be a little lower than the angels, but will there in heaven be as the angels even though we will not be angels. In heaven in Christ we will judge the angels. Also, the Bible seems to be telling us in I Corinthians 15 that the buried or otherwise disposed bodies of the spirits that are with Jesus in heaven will be transformed and rise to rejoin their spirits at the Second Coming of Christ. Other places in the Bible point out that these spirits meanwhile are also recognizable. And, some like Jesus, Enoch, and the children of God alive at the Second Coming of Christ have their bodies transformed at the same time that their spirits go to heavenly Paradise. All of these people, except Jesus of course, have the sin in their works covered by Christ. These people will escape the hurt and power of the second death of the Bible book of Revelation in which some people are judged by their works which over a lifetime are contaminated with sin in their deed and motivation as compared to a holy God.

The Day Of The Lord

So, currently, Jesus and our thief are now together in heavenly Paradise. Jesus and the Bible tell us that Jesus Christ will return as King of Kings and Lord of Lords! But the Day of the Lord when Christ returns in His Second Coming in His glory and power will come like a thief in the night. The Bible states that the times of the return of Christ will be like the days of Noah at the Bible flood. To our thief, death preceded the Day of the Lord. At death our thief was fortunate not to be so hardened that he could not have one last chance and not to have suddenly had the awareness of reality taken away from him for the last time. Deathbed was our thief's last of many chances. Even though the thief wasted his life and missed earning many heavenly rewards, in the end he did make the right choice.

Many have wondered why Jesus is taking so long to return as King of Kings. The disciple Peter tells us that the reason for this delay is that God is patient toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. And, again, Jesus says that we are to be ready for His return -- it will come like a thief in the night.

Worldwide Reaction

Since the time of the ascension of Jesus into heaven, there has been worldwide reaction to the death of Jesus on the cross and His rising from the dead. Some reaction rejects Jesus. Some reactions make variations in the historical record of Jesus in the Bible, accepting part of it while rejecting other parts of it for all practical purposes or even changing it according to their thinking. And, other reaction accepts Jesus based on the historical record of Jesus in the Bible and seeks to use the total Bible, Old Testament and New Testament, as Jesus teaches and guides under the full sum of all of His teaching.

Kinds Of Knowledge

The Bible is a unique, very special book of knowledge from God. It is called God's Word for good reason.

Knowledge cannot be "proved" in a way that all people will inescapably be compelled to accept it. After reviewing the evidence, logic, and issues that may be relevant, people have to decide what they are going to bet their life on -- that is, what are they going to put their "faith in".

Knowledge is expressed in symbols devised by limited, finite human minds. Lacking infinite knowledge and the ability to see the total mind set behind the universe, we would be wise to realize that our derived knowledge would likely be able to use refinement or even a totally new, more correct approach when we gain further insights. In a like manner, our interpretation of knowledge that we accept as not derived but instead given to us -- our interpretation of this knowledge could also be refined as we grow and gain more interpretation insights.

There is a kind of knowledge that comes from tentative conclusions and educated guesses from observable data by limited, finite human minds.

There is a kind of knowledge that comes from logical deduction type thinking from tentatively accepted assumptions and definitions by limited, finite human minds.

These first two kinds of knowledge come from using concrete symbols that have a definite meaning like words and mathematics.

There is a kind of artistic knowledge, like music and the arts, that uses either symbols that do not have a definite meaning or symbols that have a definite meaning but are used as symbols that do not have a definite meaning. We each can put our own living meaning into this kind of unique knowledge as we realize what it is symbolically saying. But, this knowledge is very slippery in relation to the moral world. This knowledge cannot transform symbols with immoral attachments into moral symbols. For instance, if you start with symbols with obscene associations, the final product will have obscene elements even though we may be in a social web that pressures us to say that the obscene has been transformed and is no longer there. This knowledge has a way all of its own in being moral, amoral, or immoral based on its use in context. This knowledge can tell us about our feelings about life. This artistic knowledge, properly used, can stir our feelings about our choices in making decisions in life and we can choose to let it uplift our souls high above mundane human existence.

Also, there is a kind of knowledge that the Bible calls the secret things belonging to the Lord our God which we will never know in this life and probably not know some of it in the next life.

Then, there is a kind of knowledge about the world that God has created and the way He has made it to operate that we cannot know unless He tells us. This knowledge He does reveal through the prophets and apostles and also through the prayers of the children of God who walk Biblically with God and His Christ. God gives us appropriate evidence and tests so that the children of God walking Biblically will know that the knowledge is from God and not from Satan, the Devil. Within this kind of knowledge is a special Book called by such names as the Bible or Holy Scriptures and sometimes just God's Word and this Book reveals to us what God wants us to observe or do. How kind and exciting it is that God tells us in a believable way how we can get all of His benefits.

Knowledge can be complicated by the fact that what the mind accepts as knowledge can be influenced by personal world view, peer pressure, self-preservation, selfishness, accepting of false promises made by others, etc.

The Bible gives us the standard by which to judge everything. Our Bible of Holy Scriptures tells us that, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," and it was given to us by, "holy men of God" who "spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit," speaking, "not in the words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches." One Bible writer states, "But I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."

The Bible book of Hebrews chapter 2 verses 3-4, as well as other places in the Bible, tells us that God witnessed to His speakers with such things as signs and wonders. And these are not the lying signs and wonders that the Bible tells us that Satan uses to try to deceive us.

The Holy Spirit of God and Christ continued its work of giving us the Bible and has overseen the putting together of this Book of the Bible on earth. Both historical and corrupted versions of ancient Bible stories have spread to and can be found in other cultures but the version that became the Bible under the direction of God's Holy Spirit is the version that Jesus endorses as the divinely inspired version.

We use the Bible as forgiven sinners with limited, finite, fallible human minds which shows one reason it is important to continually confess any sin as it happens for cleansing so that we are not trying to hear God and Christ through the Bible with a mind, heart, and soul cluttered with sin. We cannot communicate with God to get the true message. The Bible Psalmist said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:" The sinful self will sometimes consciously or unconsciously override any kind of knowledge that might be useful and accept whatever it wants to without good basis. We should be open to correction from the Bible which is one of its uses. We should also be open to hearing others who God might be sending to us with correction for our benefit.

Biblical Christian faith comes from exposure to the Bible and its message. The Bible teaches that, "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

Jesus Endorses The Bible

[In the “entire reading all on one occasion” presentation: Assign to those attending the presentation to read at home this heading of “Jesus Endorses The Bible”. Tell them how to get a copy of the reading (you might need to provide them with one). Tell them that their assignment will give them comments about such things as: The New Testament part of the Bible does some interpreting of the Old Testament part of the Bible in a symbolic, fulfilled sense. All of the Bible is about Jesus the Christ and eternal life and blessings through Him. Upon close examination, Jesus supports all of the Bible, correctly interpreted His way, down to the jot and tittle -- the smallest part of its written language. Jesus gives understanding of the Bible. The correctly understood Bible needs to be mixed with faith that patiently does the Bible as a part of diligently seeking God. Thus, the Bible tells us about Jesus Christ and from that Bible message we see that Jesus Christ tells us that the Bible is a unique book from God. The document that you are reading is **An Advocate for interpreting the Bible the way Jesus of Nazareth interprets the Bible**. Jesus will honor the Bible if we use it the way He interprets it. ... Jesus our Savior believed the Bible as He interpreted it; so we know that what the Bible says about diligently seeking God and Jesus will be rewarded and honored in some way. See Hebrews 11:6; John 14:15, 21; 15:4-6; I Samuel 2:30.]

Jesus used all of the Bible in His living with God. He used the Bible while trusting God in his temptation by Satan in Matthew 4 and Luke 4. Jesus then saw through Satan’s wrong interpretation of the Bible. Jesus looked precisely at the meaning of the words while following God. Satan has been trying to give us bad information about God’s Word since the Bible Garden of Eden at the beginning of mankind on earth.

Many seeming conflicts in the Bible resolve under careful study. However, there are “apparent errors” in the Bible even to scholarly efforts with our limited human intellect. But Jesus, who had God’s understanding, said that Scripture cannot be broken (or false). Furthermore, God is watching over His Bible and gives us ways to sufficiently spot corruptions that creep into translations of the Bible. The Old Testament part of the Bible which Jesus endorses states that, “For ever, O Lord, Your Word is settled in heaven.” and also, “Blessed be the Lord ... there has not failed one word of all His good promise.” and also, “The Words of the Lord are pure Words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. You shall keep Them, O Lord, You shall preserve Them from this generation for ever.” and also the Jesus endorsed New Covenant states, “The Word of the Lord endures for ever. And this is the Word which by the Gospel is preached unto you.” From these preceding statements we can see that God’s Holy Spirit guided the making of the Bible. The Bible after its origin has been divided into chapters and verses to make finding a passage easier. Jesus and the writers in the Bible reference Scripture quotes and make other Scripture references from two divisions in the Bible -- the Old Testament or Old Covenant and the New Testament or New Covenant and they call no other documents Scripture. The original documents that make up the Bible are gone. So, today, and even in the time of Jesus, we need to seek the best likely text and translations from the primary source documents that we have and rule out slanted translations. This has

been very well done when compared to studies of other ancient texts. Even then, though, there will remain “apparent errors” in the Bible to our limited human intellect which we can’t resolve in this life but Jesus said that His grace is sufficient for people with limited human intellect.

[Read carefully.] The preceding discussion means that there are no errors in the Bible. The concept that there are no errors in the Bible is not a concept from the writer of the document you are now examining. The concept that there are no errors in the Bible is a concept from Jesus, our Savior and Son of God. A concept that there are errors in the Bible is a concept that is in direct conflict with the teachings of Jesus, our Savior and Son of God. The concept of no errors in the Bible also comes from the Bible and God’s Word in the Bible and the concept of errors in the Bible is in direct conflict with the Bible and God’s Word in the Bible.

Have you ever considered the theological implications of the errors in the Bible position? If you have never considered its theological implications, you are humbly asked to carefully consider the points in this discussion. Don’t miss the many benefits and promises of the Bible!

Simply stated, our limited human minds can come up with an intellect position that there are errors in the Bible or an intellectual position that there are no errors in the Bible. The main reason that many people accept the position that there are no errors in the Bible is because that is what Jesus the Christ, our Lord and Savior, the Son of God teaches.

From a practical standpoint the issue is benefits. This is what we lose with a concept that there are errors in the Bible. We need to use the Bible as Jesus teaches to expect many of its benefits. The thief on the cross confessed his sin, saw his need for Jesus Christ, and accepted Him. The thief never worked out his theology of the Bible concerning whether there were errors in the Bible but neither did the thief receive many of the benefits and promises of the Bible. Believing that there are real errors in the Bible cuts us off from the benefits that God promises in the Bible starting back at the Garden of Eden. Satan told Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden that God’s Word contained errors. The selfish self-centeredness of Adam and Eve accepted that position and they lost the Garden of Eden for all mankind. Of course, if we conclude that there are errors in God’s Word, then logically this give us the liberty of not obeying God’s Word. Selfish self-centeredness led Eve to a position of errors in God’s Word. However when God’s Word is considered to be in error, political correctness and peer pressure often determine what is “correct” as was the case for Adam when he accept the position that God’s Word contained errors from the peer pressure of Eve. The Devil can use peer pressure to make it very unpopular, even to the point of death, to not accept his position but those who obey God and Christ using the Bible and prayerful guidance have to trust God and Christ to take care of them which has earthly and heavenly implications. Both Adam and Eve did not take the time to examine with God the theological implications of their intellection position to their own peril. The generation of the children of Israel in the wilderness lost the Promise Land because of what the New Testament Bible book of Hebrews calls their unbelief. They considered God’s Word to contain errors and lost the

Promise Land. Jesus said to take His yoke upon us, and learn of Him; and you will find rest for your souls. If we believe that the Bible words of Christ contain errors, then we will not learn of Him and lose the benefit of His rest for our souls. The seeds parable of Jesus tells about losing fruit when the words of the Bible are not correctly accepted and also about losing fruit when the words of the Bible are accepted but abandoned when problems and persecutions come because of the Bible. Bible promises and benefits are lost in episodes all through the Bible when people did not obey the words of the Bible because they in effect thought that these words contained errors.

God made it easier and more believable for us to put our faith in the Bible by presenting it as a book which has no errors. Believing the Bible is full of errors unnecessarily weakens our faith in what is said in the Bible to our loss. The errors in the Bible position is incomplete in that it has not come up with the “correct” Bible with the errors corrected to the satisfaction of those who hold that position. Note that an apparent error in the Bible to our limited human intellect does not mean that it actually is an error that won’t resolve. However, a position of no errors in the Bible does not mean that there will be no errors or disagreements in interpretation of the Bible as we will discuss elsewhere in this document. Also, diligently seeking God and Christ in faith is a necessary part of the no errors in the Bible position or that position will be ineffective plus things like bad pride or trying to manipulate God and Christ creep in. The Bible, as written, is tied up with the promise of rewards for those who obey the Bible as a part of diligently seeking God and Christ. This Bible is endorsed by Jesus the Christ in places in the Bible like John 10:35 which contains the phrase “Scripture cannot be broken (or false)”.

Jesus endorsed the Bible, both the Old Testament and those who would give us the New Testament, when the Bible is interpreted His way. But even without the support of Jesus, the Bible gives tests and signs to check out the authority from God for one claiming to speak Bible level revelation from God.

Jesus wants us to interpret the Bible His way. However, this needs to be done carefully because the Bible contains things like figures of speech. For instance the Bible says that God hated Esau and we are to hate our parents. But hate and love are used in these places as a figure of speech in the sense of selecting one thing over another rather than the normal use of hate and love. In another instance, the Bible uses a figure of speech to emphasize a point -- not to give a literal description when it says, “The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs.”

It should be noted in passing that to some Jesus seemed to be living in conflict with the Scriptures when it came to the interpretation of the Sabbath rest statements in the Bible. But, a careful look at these situations will show that Jesus did not consider Himself in violation of the Bible Sabbaths. Instead He was in conflict with an incorrect interpretation of these passages. Jesus observed the Sabbath. God observed a Sabbath rest in the Bible. Jesus pointed out that the Sabbath was made for us, not we for the Sabbath. To add weight to His authority, Jesus implied that He had the authority even to make new Scripture level rules about the Sabbath if He wanted to because He was Lord of the Sabbath as the only begotten Son of God. And, in that sense He did change the Sabbath

since Christians generally have a Sabbath tradition on Sunday the resurrection day of the week rather than on Saturday which is the Sabbath day of the week.

Jesus supports the message of the prophets in the Bible Old Testament in a fulfilled sense down to the jot and tittle -- the smallest part of their written language. He gives this support in the Bible book of Matthew chapter 5, "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled." The Bible book of First Peter 1:10-12 has the Spirit of Christ writing the Old Testament through the prophets. The Old Testament that Jesus supports has a very high view of the Bible and what God can do with our obedience to the Bible as is stated by Isaiah in the Bible, "O that you had harkened to my commandments! Then had your peace been as a river, and your righteousness as the waves of the sea."

Jesus supports the message of His disciple apostles in the New Testament by saying that he that receives you receives Me, and he that receives Me receives Him that sent Me. The Bible says that Jesus has prayed for those who believe in the Biblical Christ through the word of the apostles. Jesus supports the message of Paul when He called Paul to be an apostle and the apostle Peter includes Paul as Scripture in his writings.

Checking all of the New Testament and Old Testament references for Job and Jonah, who is also called Jonas, show that Jesus and His Bible support as fact the debated existence of such Old Testament people as these and in some cases give significant theological importance to the fact that they existed.

Jesus supports the Word of God when He said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."

The endorsement of the Bible by Jesus is a support for our faith. We can have no better human authority than the Son of God. It is important to learn how Jesus supports the Bible so we will know the manner that we can use the Bible in faith. All of the internal evidence that the Bible has for itself is included in that support of Jesus.

The Bible which Jesus endorses tells us that the Bible message is laid on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. With this in mind and the fact that no other Covenant is predicted, no more additions are expected to the Bible. The Bible warns about adding to or subtracting from what God has revealed in the Bible or preaching another gospel or another Jesus other than the Biblical Jesus.

The Jesus endorsed Bible teaches that the Bible Old Testament, which is the Law, was like a schoolmaster when it says, "The Law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." The Old Testament is one thing used by the God's Holy Spirit to convict us of sin to show us our need for God and Christ. Of course, the New Testament is used for this, too. In the time of the Old Testament, the Old Testament had things symbolic of Christ for their faith as

we see in the Bible book of Hebrews interpretation of the Bible books of Moses; today we have Jesus the Christ who came to earth for our faith. That would certainly be a reason why the Bible speaking about the Law or Old Testament would say, “Do we then make void the Law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the Law.” Notice that in Old Testament times the Old Testament was not a way to earn salvation, it was by appropriate faith even then as we see in the fourth chapter of the Bible book of Romans. Thus, it should be noted in passing that the New Covenant or New Testament part of the Bible Scriptures, in places like Acts 15 and the book of Hebrews, symbolically reinterprets some of the Old Covenant or Old Testament for New Covenant people and the New Covenant New Testament keeps other parts of the Old Testament as is. In I Corinthians chapter 10 the Rock that gave water to drink in the Old Testament is symbolically called Christ here in the New Testament. In a sense New Covenant New Testament people are not under the Old Covenant Old Testament part of the Bible. But, we need to handle the Old Testament in a way that Jesus and those He endorses in the Bible teaches.

It was helpful to the minds of the Old Covenant people to have some Bible based physical “proof” about God and His Word in His Old Testament promises. However, New Covenant people now have enough to go on so that they can accept a more spiritualized fulfillment of the physical promises in the Old Covenant in light of the previous discussion.

What we call the Ten Commandments are among the greatest things to do in the Old Testament and are stated in some way in the New Testament. The Ten Commandments are found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Jesus picks the greatest commandments when He stated, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets.”

The Bible New Testament which is endorsed by Jesus tells us in the book of Hebrews in chapter 4 that the Bible has to be mixed with faith or it does not profit us.

Also, the Bible tells us that we should be doers of the Word and not hearers only. Jesus, in one of His divisions into categories, compares hearing and doing His words as opposed to hearing and not doing His words to be like a house built on a rock in the storms of life as opposed to a house built on sand in the storms of life. And, doing the Bible has to have the proper heart behind it. Jesus in what we call “The Sermon on the Mount” is concerned about the motivation of the heart as we use the Bible. We can sin in our hearts and minds even though that sin is not acted out.

Jesus did make fulfilled or symbolic interpretations in the Bible stated in places like Matthew chapter 5 and His considering John the Baptizer to be the Scriptural return of Elijah is an example. A possible Biblical interpretation today using this principle would be our using a handshake in Church as the “holy kiss” greeting we are told to use in the New Testament letters. We need to be careful that we use all of the concept of the

Biblical words when interpretations such as symbolic interpretations are appropriate and that we are not looking for a poetic escape from peer pressure, embarrassment from looking different, or worrying about what others might think rather than what God might think when appropriately obeying the letter of the Bible. However, the jot and tittle statement by Jesus points out that He is also concerned with the letter of the Bible and not just an inappropriate spiritualized interpretation of it. This issue gets confused in a statement in II Corinthians 3:6 that talks about the letter and the spirit (as well as in the book of Romans, chapter 7). But the verses that follow in the II Corinthians statement show that the “letter” is being used in the sense of the Old Covenant Law and the “spirit” is being used in the sense of the New Covenant life in the Holy Spirit of Christ. This statement is not talking about ignoring what letters of the Bible are obviously saying and then making some kind of spiritualized, unwarranted poetic interpretation from the words which can lead to strange interpretations.

Those who Jesus has endorsed in the Bible did make some allowances for customs in their Scriptural living. This principle is not an escape clause for disobeying something in the Bible and needs to be applied cautiously under the guidance of God and Christ since the Bible does not give a lot of examples of this principle. Using the handshake as the holy kiss of the Bible is an example of the customs principle. The customs interpretation principle has a statement in I Corinthians chapter 9, “And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the Law, as under the Law, that I might gain them that are under the Law; to them that are without the Law, as without Law, (being not without Law to God, but under the Law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without Law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the Gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.”

Another Bible interpretation principle, from those in the Bible, that needs to be noted is that sometimes in some minor issues where the Bible is not specifically clear we need to adjust the expression of our beliefs to the beliefs of others. Prayerful guidance can help us see if something is one of those minor issues. This thinking is in the Bible text in Romans chapter 14 and I Corinthians chapters 8 and 10. The minor issues in this text deal with eating meat offered to idols and making certain dates holy. A key statement for us all in applying this principle is the verse from the preceding text that states, “For he that in these things serves Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.” Here are some other key verses in that text -- but don't take these verses further than their surrounding text allows. “Him that is weak in the faith you receive, but not to doubtful disputations.” ... “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.” ... “It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby you brother stumbles, or is offended, or is made weak.” ... “Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.” ... “But when you sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.” ... “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.” (note in passing that the statement “all things are lawful” does not mean that there are no rules as earlier in the I Corinthians 10 shows as well as chapter 6 shows in which there is an almost identical statement) ... “Give no offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to

the Church of God: even as I please all people in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.” ... “For the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” A more precise picture of this principle may be gained by reading all of the text in Romans chapter 14 and I Corinthians chapters 8 and 10.

Jesus also taught that the whole Bible is about Him in places like the end of the Bible book of Luke and in the fifth chapter of John when He said, “Search the Scriptures; for in them you think you have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me.” And in the Bible book of Luke we read, “‘These are the words which I spoke unto you, while I was with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms concerning Me.’ Then He opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and He said unto them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things.’”

Since all of the Bible is about Jesus Christ, it makes it even more imperative that any verse in the Bible be interpreted in terms of the whole Bible and certainly in light of other material in the Bible that is related to the verse under consideration. And, obviously interpreting a verse in the context of the text that surrounds it using prayerful, thoughtful logic is assumed if one is to arrive at the wisdom God and Christ provides in the verse. Context may need to include a whole book in the Bible. The first two chapters of the Bible book of Esther give the setting in which God is going to act and it does not imply that this setting is God’s ways. Likewise, the end of the Bible book of Job gives the way that the whole book should be interpreted; it does not accept some of the things characters said earlier in the book.

Also note that the wisdom in Bible texts is opened to us by Christ and He opens it to those who are willingly following Him as is pointed out in such places as the end of the Bible book of Luke. We just noted that it was said about Jesus that, “Then He opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures.” Without God and Christ helping us in our interpretation of the Bible, we can believe that correct interpretations of the Bible actually break the commandments as the Jewish leaders at the time of Christ did in their discussions of the Sabbath with Jesus. The mixed up case of David eating the holy bread was another example here with the Jewish leaders and Jesus. On another occasion Jesus found it necessary to say that, “You do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.” We need to use the Bible under the direction of God and Christ. We need the understanding that Christ gives to gain wisdom and guidance from the Bible because sometimes on the surface the commands of the Bible seem to conflict for us. On the one hand Christ said to go the extra mile and sacrifice for others. However, on the other hand Christ said about some maidens that they should not sacrifice and share their lamp oil because of the poor planning of others or they themselves would not be prepared to do what Christ wanted them to do. We need to look to Christ to understand how to use the Bible.

The Old Testament which is endorsed by Jesus teaches that the Bible and its importance be passed on from generation to generation in such verses as, “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the Words of this Law.” And also, “These Words, which I command you this day, shall be in your heart: And you shall teach Them diligently unto your children, and shall talk of Them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up.”

The Old Testament which is endorsed by Jesus has three discourses on the Bible in Psalm 1, Psalm 19, and Psalm 119. These are three statements for reading and meditation to learn more about the Bible -- Psalm 1, 19, and 119. Deuteronomy 30:11-14 has a short discourse on the Bible. Places in the Old Testament like Leviticus chapter 26 and Deuteronomy chapter 28 discuss at length what will happen when the Bible is obeyed and what will happen when it is not obeyed. Also, Isaiah, who was upset, talks about teaching the Bible line by line in Isaiah 28:9-13. And, the example of Ezra teaching the Bible with confession and worship is found in Nehemiah 8:1-8 and Nehemiah 9:1-3. Note that Ezra led the people to deal with their sins and worship God as a part of his Bible teaching. In one of his Bible classes they heard the Bible a fourth part of the day. Then they spent another fourth part of a day confessing their sins and worshipping God.

The New Testament which is endorsed by Jesus has the two books of First and Second Timothy which teach Timothy to be a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and teach the Bible. First Timothy 4:12-16 and Second Timothy 3:12-17 are discourses especially relevant to teaching the Bible. Also, the New Testament in I Corinthians 10:11 states that Bible stories are examples and admonitions that have been written for us.

The use of the Bible will lead us to be obedient in all kinds of situations even when what we are asked to obey might be silly or not the best idea because of human frailty of the people issuing the orders. We will find ourselves obeying the laws of the land, our bosses, and other human authorities. This is because the Bible teaches, “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors.” and “Honour all people. Love the Brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.” The Bible book of Titus chapter 3 presents similar ideas. Of course, the Bible also teaches that in special cases and usually with costs -- sometimes great costs, “We ought to obey God and rather than men.” This leads us to the next point.

We talked earlier about how God will honor Christ guided use of the total Bible. However, we should not be surprised that, in the course of human history, Christ's Bible using people can have problems in this world because they use the Bible -- problems even to the point of being killed. The Bible teaches about persecutions and dealing with things that try our faith which can only be done by the power of the Holy Spirit -- not by our power. Jesus said, “If they have called the Master of the house the Devil (or Beelzebub), how much more shall they call them of His household?” In the time of Daniel in the Bible, laws were passed to prevent his living by God's Word. Daniel received dramatic deliverance. We are not promised the same outcome but we are promised help to endure plus rewards in this life and/or the next. In our era of human

history people try to write laws against the Bible teaching of “the rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself brings his mother to shame” and other Bible teachings on the spanking of disobedient children. There can even be laws to take these children away from their parents. Biblical spanking is not a last resort, raging, injurious abuse of children meted out by exasperated parents. It is not the forty stripes of the Bible. Confronting a child by means of a Biblical spanking on the bottom with a paddle is a harmless, possible life changing traumatic experience correctly used under God and Christ by an adult being obedient to God so that God can have a good means of possibly helping a child choose the option of change. It is an immediate response used by parents when words don't work or are inappropriate. It is used when a child makes an adult's words meaningless or ignores their words. Some seek to avoid spanking and use the rod in a new form in line with the fulfilled or symbolic Bible interpretation principle Jesus sometimes used. But, care needs to be taken that the new form of discipline is indeed not an unequal substitute that does not give the child the same harmless, traumatic experience that confronts the child in the Biblical framework of love to give a good reason to choose to change -- at least for the near future and hopefully help the child learn to someday make the correct choices without external discipline. However, Biblical spanking has not been ruled out by the New Covenant New Testament. But, when laws are passed against Bible teachings, Biblical Christians need to be prayerful and especially careful to making correct Bible interpretation and application under the guidance of God and Christ, careful to their own God-guided self-examination, and careful to the specifics of the conflicting law of the land. Many things in life baffle us. We need to be sure that we are following Christ and not ourselves while continually dealing with our sins. Ask, “Is it I?” Are we being persecuted because we are obnoxious or because people are reacting to the God we follow? Also, we need to wait on the Lord in the Biblical sense and then act as guided within the framework of the Bible. The Psalmist said in the Bible, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord (‘man’ here, of course, is speaking of men or women): and he delights in His way (and that includes the Bible). Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholds him with His hand.” We need to have faith but it has to be Bible based faith founded in God and Christ and what They want done -- not what we want done. Ill-founded faith is not faith at all. It is wishful thinking that any results with the appearance of being positive rob God of power and what He could have done liken unto the ancient tower of Babel.

The Bible helps us of limited intellect in our heartaches to be with the Christ who understands all things for all situations even though the whole world may seem to be going bad as at the end of the Bible book of Habakkuk in which a statement is given about how faith can live even when the whole world seems to be going bad around us. Life never gets so complex and bad that God and Christ doesn't know what They want us to do. At any age God has something for us to do. Elderly should remember that Moses didn't get started until he was eighty. We live Biblically in Christ and pray for guidance. However, in this life none of us gets it all together as we deal with the evils of a world with Satan on the loose. Instead, Bible people look to God and His Christ while using the Bible. God and Christ keep it all together and help us compassionately and patiently, even sometimes forcefully, relate to others who don't have it all together either. King Solomon, who is supposed to be the wisest man ever to live other than Christ, gave us his

conclusion to life which is in the Bible book of Ecclesiastes and it is stated in terms of Bible commands. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: 'Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.'" Of course, today we have been given a fulfilled picture of how fearing God in faith, Jesus Christ, commandments, and works go together. But the Bible tells us that even wise King Solomon did not always have it all together either. This you can see by examining all of the Bible stories about King Solomon. There are times in life that we don't even have the will to have it all together. There are times when the bottom completely falls out of life and what was will never be again or what could have been can no longer happen. We feel empty of all meaning. These times may even seem irrational or hopeless-appearing without God and Christ. These times may happen through no fault of our own, such as at the death of a family member, or they may happen because of our sin which we need to deal with if God's Holy Spirit shows us as we seek the guidance of God and Christ. It does not hurt to explore with the Holy Spirit to see if our misery is self-imposed. The great King David in the Bible tells us in his Psalm of confession that God will not despise a broken spirit and a broken and contrite heart turning to Him. This is true when our brokenness is self-imposed as in the case of David in this Psalm or when it comes from a person being overwhelmed by the evils of the world. The words of the Bible have much to help us in bad times. But besides the knowledge, wisdom, and understanding that come from the words of the Bible, the Bible can have other unexpected things for us. For example, the Bible sends us to attend a Bible believing Church and the believers there are told in the Bible to minister to us in our grief. To continue our look at how the words of the Bible can help us in bad times, let's mention that in our lack of understanding we all probably have times that we are sorry for others or ourselves for the fact that life has to be the way it is. But God and Christ have ways that They can neutralize these things -- often yet in this life. Scripture teaches that, "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." David in the famous "The Lord Is My Shepherd" Psalm tells us that even in the worst of times God can give us a new life and can put our lives back together if we let Him (and now we know if we also let His Christ) be our Shepherd. It doesn't necessarily remove any of the human pain and grief or scars at these times but David tells us that God can restore our soul. And furthermore, David tells us that if God Who surely gives us goodness and mercy all the days of our life -- if He doesn't choose to continue our life, then, with a restored soul in the next life we can dwell in the Lord's House forever. The truth of the matter is that our life is never going to be totally together until the next life. Paul said in the Bible that if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most miserable. In this life though, a Biblical goal is certainly to excel within priorities. This goal of giving excellence to God is described in the Bible Old Testament when it discusses sacrifice animals and says, "If you offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto your governor; will he be pleased with you, or accept your person?" Some people use this Scripture on giving your best to God as the basis for the tradition of dressing up to go to Sunday Church worship services. This Bible excellence is certainly also a basis for having rules and standards for participating and ministering in such things as Church music groups and not letting just anything pass just to show a person that he is acceptable. A distinction is made between showing a

person that he is acceptable and giving excellence to God. However, even with excellence goals, we don't use the Bible to get it all together. We use the Bible from God and Christ because none of us can get it all together and must turn to God and His Christ who have it eternally all together. Tribulation is with us but within tribulation we can have God's unusual peace because God and Christ have it all together forever. God's Word -- The Holy Bible -- tells us about God giving us Jesus Christ to die for us so that we can be with God who has it all together. The Holy Spirit of God and Christ helps us use the Bible. The Bible book of Proverbs tells us about frail people and Bible living. It says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and lean not to your own understanding. In all your ways -- in all your ways -- acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

A summary of some key points in this discussion about using the Bible would be the following. Review the Bible references and qualifying statements for these key points: Look precisely at the meaning of the words. The New Testament part of the Bible does some interpreting of the Old Testament part of the Bible in a symbolic, fulfilled sense. All of the Bible is about Jesus the Christ and eternal life and blessings through Him. Upon close examination, Jesus supports all of the Bible, correctly interpreted, down to the jot and tittle -- the smallest part of its written language. Jesus gives understanding of the Bible. The correctly understood Bible needs to be mixed with faith that patiently does the Bible as a part of diligently seeking God.

In a moment we will reference for more depth about how we can make the seeds of the Bible become fruitful.

Jesus teaches about the Bible with many sayings such as, "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it." How are we to learn about the Bible? Jesus said to take His yoke (or harness) upon us, and learn of Him.

The document that you are reading is An Advocate for interpreting the Bible the way Jesus of Nazareth interprets the Bible. Jesus will honor the Bible if we use it the way He interprets it. ... Jesus our Savior believed the Bible as He interpreted it; so we know that what the Bible says about diligently seeking God and Jesus will be rewarded and honored in some way. See Hebrews 11:6; John 14:15, 21; 15:4-6; I Samuel 2:30.

The Bible tells us about Jesus Christ. From that Bible message we see that Jesus Christ tells us that the Bible is a unique book from God.

Observe All Things

Our story of the thief gives us key evidence from the Bible which we have been given to trust Jesus Christ. This we will review in just a moment. Jesus said some very profound, stunning, powerful things about Himself. Jesus said, "I am THE way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father, but by Me." Jesus said that at the end times He will divide the people of the nations into the sheep and the goats as we mentioned earlier. After His resurrection and before His ascension, Jesus announced to his disciples that all

power in heaven and on earth had been given to Him. Then, as He gave the Great Commission to go make converts and nurture them, He said to His disciples in relation to His words, to “go ... teach all nations ... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” What do we make of a Man who talks like this based on the evidence He has given? What do you think about a Man that talks like that? Does the evidence He has given mean that we should listen to Him? Or will we listen to other voices based on the evidence they have given?

Who Is Jesus?

Does Jesus have some kind of a mental problem? Does He have illusions of grandeur? Did He needlessly waste His life by His crucifixion because God really does have plans for other ways for people to dwell in His Kingdom which do not need the crucified Christ? Is Jesus some kind of devil? Or, is He the greatest King that ever lived who is important enough for us to give up of ourselves and our ideas to follow Him with His ideas?

Based on the evidence he had been given, our thief decided that Jesus was the Great King and joined the Kingdom. Even recorded prophecies and predictions by Jesus had not stayed meaningful as a physical possibility in the minds of the close disciples and acquaintances of Jesus. The Bible shows that they were not expecting the resurrection. It may well have been an embarrassment to the disciples that a thief got it all together before they did because they were buried in the “woe is me” temptation of the flesh of the dark situation that makes for little faith instead of having the appropriate faith which they had adequate basis to have!

The risen Jesus verbally chastised and forgave the repentant disciples for their slow belief. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the close disciples of Jesus saw how much of the Bible was about Jesus. God and Christ revealed to them and the circle under their spiritual authority the theology of what had happened. Under the Holy Spirit’s activity this revealed theology became the New Testament part of the Bible. The disciples had been the close eyewitnesses of Jesus and His ministry. They had a chance to stick their fingers and hands into the nail holes and side of the crucified, buried, and risen Jesus on our behalf for us. The disciple John certainly learned more about Jesus by having Mary, the Mother of Jesus, live in his home after the death of Jesus. Mary had to be an inspiring source to John as he wrote about Jesus. The disciple John, the best friend of Jesus, gave us the most popular summary statement about Jesus on the cross which goes, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Support For Jesus

Those close to Jesus saw something very unusual in the history of humanity. How do you “prove” to other people that you saw something unusual? In a sense you can not - - all you can do is tell what you saw, give any support you may have that indeed you correctly saw, and strive to make yourself a reliable witness. But in a larger sense you are basically

in a position of just telling what you saw. Those close to the unusual Jesus told about the signs of support of His that had convinced them and then basically told what they saw and heard. The signs of support they saw in Jesus certainly helped convince them to also accept His words. The disciple John said in the Bible, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life; (for the Life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show to you that eternal Life, which was with the Father, and was manifested to us;) that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

Those who saw Jesus with their own eyes had unique obstacles to overcome when they told others about what they saw and heard. The message of what they saw and heard is an affront to the love of ourselves when that love is unhealthy and eternally costly. Their message is also an affront to the very existence of evil in the universe and, for those who accept it, their message is a total defeat of evil from a personal and eternal standpoint. Thus, in the face of such severe opposition, those who saw Jesus with their own eyes had to wait for the Spirit of God to come with power from on high to help them tell what they saw and heard.

To support Jesus, we have His works, His words, His fulfillment of the Old Covenant Old Testament Bible Scriptures, the attested witness of John the Baptizer, the attested witness of the close disciples of Jesus, and the great cloud of witnesses down through the ages. And, then, we have the resurrection. Lazarus was resurrected but died again at a later time. Enoch in the Old Testament never died but was translated into heaven. But the resurrection of Jesus is different. We have the unique, predicted resurrection of Jesus never to die again to support the fact that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah, the Christ, the only begotten, unique, very Son of God!

Jesus And Life

John and others also told us many of the other signs that Jesus truly did in the presence of His disciples. John told us many profound and eternal things about Jesus that are hard for us to comprehend in all of their enormous implications. Also, John tells us that Jesus has existed with God since the beginning and was even a part of creation. And, John said that, “there are many other things which Jesus did, which, if every one should be written, even the whole world itself could not contain all the books that should be written.” And, it was John that made a statement about his book in the Bible which applies to the whole Bible, “But these are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life through His Name.”

Good-bye To Our thief

As we say, “Good-bye,” to our thief, no one at the scene of the cross that day knew quite what was happening except for our thief. He caught a pretty good glimpse of what was going on and chose to act on it.

Human History Swept

Many there at the cross rejected Jesus outright. Some did so in the Name of God and the Bible Scriptures. Some had a continual skepticism that is never satisfied and they insisted on more reasons beyond what had been given to be adequate support. The Bible tells us to put everything to the test. But it also tells us to keep what is good. Some of those who had mocked Jesus saying come down from the cross so that we can believe were around when Jesus did come down from the cross in a since with the resurrection. But they still didn't believe. It was like Jesus said -- if they did not use the Bible evidence God has already given them from Moses, then they still would not believe even if one rose from the dead.

However, some there knew that this could not be the end for Jesus but they were in grief and bewildered as to how the next step would take place. In their lack of understanding, some of these through unbelief had forgotten the promises of Jesus and of God. Do we ever do that? The Bible states that Jesus said, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." Jesus follows this statement by poetically saying, "Look, I stand at the door, and knock: if any person hears My voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me." Jesus knocks on the door of everybody's heart. Our thief opened that door. Our thief through turning to God, looking to Jesus, using the Bible, and dealing with his own sins -- through this he was the first one we know of that was given some understanding of the cross of Jesus and he chose to act on it.

Others, too, began to turn to Jesus. The soldier that said, "Truly this man was the Son of God" was beginning to turn. The detailed comments in the Bible story of Simeon, the Cyrenian visitor to Jerusalem, who was forced to carry the cross of Jesus -- this story of Simeon along with the Bible New Testament passage in the book of Romans 16:13 imply that Simeon's experience that day ended up converting Simeon and some of his family.

Two great Jews who were religious leaders, a rich man Joseph of Arimathaea, a good and just man who had not consented to the counsel to kill Jesus, and Nicodemus, who came to Jesus secretly by night to learn, were already in the process of beginning to turn. Joseph was waiting for the Kingdom of God and had been a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews. But, at the death of Jesus, these two did do a rather bold thing. In the face of great religious, family, professional, and peer pressure in their era of human history, Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus persuasively asked the Roman ruler Pilate for the body of Jesus the day Jesus died and buried Jesus that day. Pilate knew that he had allowed an innocent man to be killed -- so his guilty conscience helped him make an exception and release the body of the crucified Jesus for burial. Joseph and Nicodemus did ask for the body of Jesus secretly though for fear of the Jews. This showed a great deal of love, faith, compassion, courage, and thoughtful preparation on their part. They had gathered one hundred pounds of burial spices and Jewish burial clothes to bury Jesus in a nearby, newly made garden tomb of Joseph's which was close at hand. Based on the works, the words of Jesus, and their loving admiration for Jesus, Joseph and Nicodemus

knowingly chose what would most likely be separate destinies from family members and friends to follow Jesus. They left others to God either in disregard of the eternal consequences of separation because of belief or in realizing that in the next life when we understand more fully, we will be in total agreement with God's wisdom for each of us in eternity. They realized that God is always smart enough to know what He is doing, regardless of how meaningless it may look to us now. Like the thief, Joseph and Nicodemus wanted to be in the Kingdom of Jesus wherever it may be with God. The burial of Jesus was predicted by Isaiah in the Bible Old Testament when he said, "And He made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death."

The eleven disciples of Jesus and those close to Jesus got it together in the next few days. Immediate family members of Jesus who earlier had rejected Jesus -- turned to Him later. The Bible New Testament tells us in the sixth chapter of Acts that even some of the Jewish religious leaders later turned to Jesus. Many, both Jews and non-Jews, turned to Jesus it is recorded in the Bible New Testament historical record. The tide has swept human history and, according to the Bible, it will last through eternity!

Jesus And His Church

[In the "entire reading all on one occasion" presentation: Assign to those attending the presentation to read at home this heading of "Jesus And His Church" just as you did with the heading of "Jesus Endorses The Bible". Again, tell them how to get a copy of the reading (the web address is at the bottom of the handout). Tell them that their assignment will give them comments about such things as the nature of the Church, human relations in the Church, Satan trying to get into the Church, error in the Church, and the giving of the tithe to the body of Christ at the local Church level and elsewhere as Christ directs. Also mention that Appendix One of this document has a detailed look at the Church related statement of Jesus which said, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."]

The followers of the Biblical Jesus Christ who use the Bible as the basis for faith become members of the His Church. The Kingdom of Jesus is called His Church. After the ascension of Jesus into Heaven, the Holy Spirit came upon the believers with power and founded the Church. The Church is to proclaim the Bible message, convert by God's Spirit who uses the Bible to convict of sin, teach the Bible, nurture in the Bible, and fellowship as redeemed Bible believers who follow the Biblical Christ.

Jesus did an evaluation of seven local Churches at the beginning of the Bible book of Revelation which is profitable for all of us to study and use -- heeding the warnings and advice. We are told to listen to what the Spirit of Christ has to say to the Churches which He now says the basis through the Bible. May the Spirit give us discernment as we listen. The Bible books of First and Second Timothy as well as the book of Titus and the fifth chapter of First Peter also have much to say about running a Church.

Jesus, speaking about Church business, said in the Bible book of Matthew, "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against

you; leave there your gift before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” To ignore this when it needs to be done can be costly to our spiritual life and to the activity and power of the Holy Spirit in the local Church. The greatest example in the Bible of people sincerely getting back together after an estrangement is Joseph and his brothers in the book of Genesis. It was made possible after the brothers demonstrated their new ways and sincerity in dealing with their wrongs when Joseph said, “Now therefore be not grieved, or angry with yourselves, that you sold me earlier.” Joseph and his brothers are the ones who became the twelve tribes of Israel.

The Church is an unusual group of people who are redeemed saints who have received salvation for their sins but yet still have some sin in the flesh. The war is over and won but the battle still goes on! Members of the Church are forgiven sinners through Christ. But, they are still sinners. However, they are no longer hopeless, generally powerless sinners which is a fact that they can capitalize on in Christ by being improving sinners using the Bible through Christ as He chastens and prunes us.

Satan, the Devil also called Lucifer, who will spend eternity behind the gates of hell meanwhile tries to steal members of the Church through improper use of the Bible which can lead to hardened sin and he tries to secretly get into Christ’s Church through the sins of its members. The description of the seven Churches in the Bible book of Revelation shows clearly Satan trying to get a foot into Christ’s Church through strayed choices of its members. These members need to be dealt with carefully in Christ as led or we ourselves may become snared. All Church members and leaders need to be alert that Satan is looking for ways to use our selfish choices and disobedience as a way for him to get into the Church! We don’t want to become one of the corrupting influences in the Fellowship that the Bible New Testament warns about. Satan can tempt us to do many devious things. We can be tempted by Satan to volunteer to help Church leaders in order to derive power for our selfish purposes. We can be tempted to help others in order for us to get a place in the sun through their talents. May we all deal with our sins that help Satan try to get into the Church. To ignore the possibility of the presence Satan makes it easier for him to act. Once Satan is in the Church by coming in through an individual, he has a better chance of weakening the Church and a better chance of running people out of the organized Church. The Bible tells how clever and deceptive Satan, the Devil, is. In II Corinthians it tells that he can disguise himself as an angel of light. Jesus warns of false people arising, even false religious leaders, with signs and wonders that will try to deceive even the very elect. Satan can give worldly results to falsely imitate success to mislead us when we are disobedient, ignore the Bible, twist the Bible, or are not Spirit led. The Bible book of Second Timothy chapter 3 describes the low, low level that some people’s choices will descend to which will lead to the total folly that will be in some people’s mixed up mind in the end times. These mixed up people can even, as it says in the Bible, “have a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” or, as it says elsewhere in the Bible, “They profess that they know God; but in works they deny Him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.” Please see the Bible Second Timothy chapter 3 to see what are these low levels of choices and minds. We all stand in danger of being misled by our sinful desires. We can find ourselves using prayer, the Bible, and false soul-searching with God to really be seeking justification

rationale for our sinful desires. Beware of Satan trying to rob us of life! We all also stand in danger of being misled by trying to please someone we adore or want the approval of and love of rather than trying to first please God and Christ. Satan can present false things so that they appear to be truth and even sound the opposite of what they really are. The Bible shows that Satan even tried to tempt Jesus, the Son of God, by using the Bible on a scholarly level but in clever, deceiving, devious ways to make false Bible interpretations that sounded true. Satan makes promises we see from the temptation of Jesus -- but if Satan delivers on his promises at all, it is empty. Jesus tells us things and the Bible tells us things that might happen in an evil world so we will be prepared and recognize it so that our faith will not be carried away. Satan is active in whatever age we live in and even more so in the normal appearing age like the days of Noah at the time of the Second Coming of Christ. We are told in the Bible to not to neglect to assemble ourselves together. We need to regularly meet with other believers in some kind of a "Church". This is not only necessary as Christ builds His Church but it helps us in our personal struggle against Satan. We need to look to Jesus for help against Satan because Jesus has defeated Satan and we need to not overlook the help already given us in the Bible. Church members need to live Biblically in the Biblical Christ as an act of holiness to God and as a deterrent to the Devil. Peter speaking of Satan, the Devil, tells us in the Bible, "Yes, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon Him; for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."

What are some of the things the Bible tells us that Church members are to do or observe? Even though we have to wait on God and decisively deal with problems, Jesus says in the Bible that He does not want His followers to lord it over each other like you sometimes correctly need to humbly do with the law of the land. This lording it over other followers of Jesus can be cleverly hidden and made to look officially correct like it is in the Bible story of Ahab and Naboth's vineyard as people covet things or covet what they want to happen instead of allowing God's Spirit to lead. We are to let the Spirit of God and Christ lead us. David knew that it was better to obey than to build the Temple for God. He was not like his predecessor King Saul who wanted to do something special for God rather than obey and Saul lost the Kingdom as Samuel told him, "... to obey is better than sacrifice ..."

Also, Jesus wants His followers to be known by the love they have for each other even though that love may have to be tough at times as in the Bible verse that talks about speaking the truth in love. We need to appreciate each other, listen to others instead of doing all of the talking ourselves, be interested in others, express sincere apologies and say "I'm sorry" when appropriate, express noticing when things are well done, and express verbal and written thanks to each other just as we express thanks to God and Christ. Without love, the Bible tells us that our great works are like a tinkling cymbal and are nothing.

And, following the words of Jesus, we need to forgive to be forgiven. But, we may need to allow for the way other people are prone to act. People may sincerely ask for forgiveness but still may be struggling with the same weakness that made them sin in the first place. Some people need our forgiveness regardless of what they do but this does not necessarily mean that we should excuse them from any worldly judgment that is a part of their chosen consequences. There are some who will use apologies and “I’m sorry” as a way of manipulating people and as a way of trying to escaping worldly judgment.

The Bible command to forgive others and Bible statements like, “let not the sun go down on your wrath:” shows how practical the Bible is. Not to be forgiving puts you in theological difficulty with God as we just mentioned. However, these statements are also very practical. If you will not forgive and hold on to your wrath, you can become a slave of another person who wants to keep you worked up all the time. Why should we let someone else keep us worked up if we can choose to get rid of their influence by forgiving them and releasing our wrath? Instead of turning things over to God for His control, we may be trying to use our wrath to control others by making them feel guilty for aggravating us and then maybe they will do things our way. When we make this choice, we lose God and His peace.

Paul in I Corinthians and Peter in his first letter in the Bible point out that there are times that we may need to suffer wrongs and just leave it to God both inside and outside the Church as Christ did on the cross. The Bible presents several thoughts along the line that there are times following the guidance of Christ that we are to overcome evil with good, to love our enemies, and to do good to them that hate you. The Christ led appropriate practice of these ideas certainly should not be strangers within the Church fellowship if anyone’s choice of actions should make the use of these ideas possibly needed.

As we discussed earlier, in the Bible book of Romans chapter 14 and I Corinthians chapters 8 and 10 there are times that we even need to adjust the expression of our beliefs because of the beliefs of others. But, also, there are places in the Bible that we are told to separate ourselves from others in places like II Corinthians 6 and near the end of several of the New Testament books. We need to separate ourselves from them because of their beliefs and actions both as a witness for them and as a protection for ourselves.

The Bible tells us that, “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.” Following that discussion, the Bible gives a detailed discussion of using the Bible and its benefits. And, the Bible tells us something spiritually very dangerous to do without following God and Christ’s Spirit, “And of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.” Only Christ can use us to snatch someone from the grasp of Satan, the Devil. God does not want any to perish. That is why the return of Christ is taking so long. But the Bible gives cases showing that it may no longer be up to us as an individual to be involved with an individual such as dealing with what the Bible calls a heretic. But be careful with labels like heretic, though, which can easily be used not like the Bible uses

it. Labels can be dangerous and misleading. Get defined what we are talking about rather than use labels that are not carefully defined and unexamined as to what may be a concern with the label designation. What some people, not dealing in ideas, call a heretic may be what the Bible would put in the category, “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” It takes the help of Christ to understand the Bible and know which Scripture to use in which situation. It should be clear that we need to take the yoke of Christ and learn of Him with humbleness in such matters. Taking the yoke of Christ and learning of Him we will look at in the next section.

And also, under the guidance of Christ, we are exhorted to earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints and we now have in the Bible.

And, very important for our personal and mutual benefit, the Bible tells Bible using believers who believe in the Biblical Christ to assembly together regularly. Go to Church. As our example, Jesus met regularly with Jewish believers in their place of worship to mutually seek God.

Concerning Church meetings and worship services, the Bible New Testament First Corinthians chapter 14 teaches about whether or not to use speaking in tongues in Church. This discussion about speaking in tongues would also be a good starting point for guidance on seeking to change the local Church’s traditions concerning other overt actions in Church services such as: interrupting a Church service to say “Amen” or being uninhibited to interrupt the service with other personal expressions; kneeling for prayer; pushing a religious fad; raising the hands in prayer or praise; applauding a musical performance to give glory to the performer rather than giving glory to God; permanently shifting the type of music used in a worship service -- more specifically, changing the thrust of the Church music program among the options of the thrust being that of providing for God the power and majesty and aesthetic beauty of well done art music with fire and emotional warmth versus the thrust being that of providing the pleasantries of pop/folk music and the expressions that can be done in these structures versus the thrust being that of staying satisfied with the poor, lame, lifeless performance quality of whatever kind of music being provided; also this chapter in the Bible on speaking in tongues may provide guidance on seeking to permanently changing the worship service to a more formal or a more informal service; plus the chapter may provide guidance on doing anything that its use would call attention to ourselves rather than to God or doing anything that fosters needless disruptive friction and strife rather than seeking God’s and Christ’s patient, sometimes creative, way to foster the peace of God on a matter in that location or possibly the resolution for some individuals may even lie in another location. This chapter of the Bible on speaking in tongues has two overall guiding conclusion statements: “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all Churches of the saints.” and “Let all things be done decently and in order.”

Now to continue with other Bible things Church members are to do or observe. We are to be giving to the body of Christ at the local Church level and elsewhere as Christ directs

you to support the stewardship use of your giving by others. In the New Testament Jesus still supports the Old Covenant Tabernacle/Temple ten percent tithe as a standard for giving which now goes to the Body of Christ and the work of Christ in the local Church or beyond the local Church as you are guided to cheerfully give as the first Christians, choosing where they would give their money, supported the work of Christ locally and beyond in the book of Acts chapter 11, in Romans chapter 15, and in Matthew chapter 25 and 28:18-20. The book of Hebrews now has Christ with a new Tabernacle/Temple rather than an earthly building (Hebrews 9:11). Hebrews 9:11 talks of a “greater, more perfect Tabernacle” now. God and Christ are the Temple in Revelation 21:22. We give to Christ in ways that we may not expect because He said about the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and the prisoner that “when you did it to one the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.” See also Deuteronomy 26:12 concerning designated giving. We know that Jesus still accepts the tithe principle from His statements made in passing about the tithe when He said, “Woe unto you, Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these you ought to have done, and not leave the other undone.” and also, “Woe unto you, scribes, and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the Law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these you ought to have done, and not to leave the other undone.” Appendix One point Number 8 has more to say on tithing.

And, we are to help others -- especially those in need while we remember such Bible verses as the one that talks about speaking the truth in love and the one that says, “...this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat,” whatever work may mean here. Sometimes helping people makes them dependent invalids of a sort.

Concerning needed error correction in ourselves or in the Church, it should be noted that we will obviously need correction and other help as we learn to live the right way under Christ based on the Bible. The Bible tells us that the Bible is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for correction and instruction. The early Berean Christians in the Bible searched the Bible daily to see what was really what. The Bible Psalm 1 tells us to use the Bible daily day and night to prosper. This day and night use of the Bible to prosper is a similar message to that which was given to Joshua at the beginning of the Bible book of Joshua. If the Bible is profitable for correction, we need to always consider the possibility that we may be the one that needs correction to help keep us from error. We should not resist giving consideration to correction from others -- even from unlikely sources. If someone sees our error and tells us, it is for our profit to use it. The Bible says that, “In multitude of counselors there is safety.” and, “Do you see a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him.” and also, “A reproof enters more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool.” (Note that these statements are not saying that we should go around correcting every little error and word in others plus always have a better idea which can drive others away from us.) After prayerful consideration with God and Christ concerning correction offered by others, we can accept it or reject it as appropriate. Correction offered by others can be true or false. Some people may be tempted to give us fabricated labels of sin and error when really the problem might be that we are not doing what they want us to do just as that small group of Jewish religious

leaders mistakenly condemned Jesus to death when He did not act as they wanted Him to act.

Another point regarding error is that sometimes the confronting of error is done by the Bible based witness of separation which is one reason we have many different institutional groups that make up the Church of Christ and it is also a reason why people as individuals leave a local Church to go to another Church.

As we as individuals and as groups seek to have the cooperative one mind in Christ that the Bible talks about, we need Bible based intellectual conflict so that we who want to follow the Biblical Christ and so that any of our institutions that want to be called part of Christ's Church will not fall into error.

It should furthermore be noted for our example that within priorities Jesus came to be a minister, not to be ministered unto, as stated in the Bible book of Matthew chapter 20. He was to minister even to the point of giving His life as a ransom for many. But we shouldn't use the minister part of these verses just to get others to serve us and our cause. Also, Jesus didn't serve everybody everything they wanted. He let God lead Him as to who He would serve, and when, and how, and how much. As one person, we can't do everything for the needs of others -- but God and Jesus do expect us to do something.

The Bible tells us that our Biblical works show our faith or it states it another way when it say that we are to repent, turn to God, and do works right for repentance. Before He died, Jesus told His followers that if you love Me, you will keep My words, then the Holy Spirit will come and live in you. Just before He ascended, Jesus continually drilled Peter with the idea of, "first -- 'Do you love Me?' and, then, second - 'Feed My lambs and My sheep.'"

The Bible tells us that with our spiritual gifts, we should seek to excel to the edifying of Christ's holy Church.

It should be noted, too, that in the history of the Church the living Church is not always the same as some institution or building with that name. Local Churches at the beginning in the Bible did not have a building and even many today do not have a building. The Bible New Testament does not require a temple or tabernacle type building since as mentioned earlier we have a "greater, more perfect Tabernacle" now plus God and Christ are the Temple in Revelation. Jesus said in the Bible that where two or three are gathered together in His Name, He will be there in the midst of them. There are many societies in which Christians may have to function out of sight of worldly rulers thus making a Church building out of the question. However, the Church has found it beneficial to have local Church buildings for activities and for special ministries. Local Churches join together to form an institution to champion their understanding of the Biblical Christ and the Bible which adds bureaucracy but gives the possibility for new ways of effectiveness. Much of the local Church building, as well as Church dress up dress code and worship, is patterned after the proper awe of God and the holiness from the old Tabernacle and Temple of the Bible. This patterning after the old Tabernacle and Temple of the Bible is -

not a requirement but it is a method that renders helpful assistance to worship, faith development, and faith works for the world -- especially the cause and needs of the poor and needy. Many of us find the tradition of a local Church building to be something that people have given us which is a tremendous help to our faith. A group of believers large enough to have a local Church building makes things possible that would not otherwise be possible such as an extensive education program and the possibility of a high quality Christian music program. They can pool their resources and get things like an organ and have great music like David did in the Tabernacle. They can get a quality organist that plays masterworks and other music to lead in worship rather than be a concert during worship. However, Church buildings come and go though as the socioeconomic patterns of an area change. A Church building no longer functions as a Church building for many reasons such as a need for a bigger, better building or the cost of upkeep of a no longer needed facility has become overwhelming to the congregation at the time. But the living Church lives on. The living Church is the Biblical followers of the Biblical Christ. And speaking of His eternal, living Church, Jesus Christ said, "The gates of hell will not prevail against it."

The Bible compares the love for the Church that Jesus has to the relationship between a husband and wife. Also, it might be mentioned, the relationship between Christ and his Church is supposed to be an example for husbands and wives. Jesus on the cross gave His life for the Church.

Take My Yoke And Learn Of Me

[Beginning of “Session Six” of “Study for Lent” presentation.]

[In the “entire reading all on one occasion” presentation: Assign to those attending the presentation to read at home this heading of “Take My Yoke And Learn Of Me” just as you did with the heading of “Jesus And His Church” and the heading of “Jesus Endorses The Bible”. Tell them that their assignment will give them comments about such things as the nature of following Jesus Christ as a living Person and not a dead historical person plus comments about the Bible Word of God being compared to a sower sowing weeds with the implication that this fits in with “take My yoke and learn of Me and I will give you rest.”]

Because of the cross in His life, Jesus asks us to become a part of His Church, His Kingdom. The main theme of the message Jesus had His disciples preach was that “The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!” -- right now, this moment, for you and me. Because of the cross in His life, Jesus says to us all, “Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. [Say as two requirements but don’t say numbers.] [1] Take My yoke upon you, [2] and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly [drop voice] in heart: and [emphasize each word equally] you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is [say “easy” softer and higher] **EASY** and My burden is [inflect “light” up] light.” Jesus takes the over-all responsibility. Our responsibility is to [say numbers here] (1) take His yoke to follow Him and (2) learn of Him (which involves prayer and exposure to the total Bible). The results are that it is easy and quite a light burden compared to trying to make things happen on our own although it involves our guided efforts and guided leadership. We obey and leave the responsibility for the situation and the results to God and Christ. Those results we may not even understand at the time. “Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. [Say as two requirements but don’t say numbers.] [1] Take My yoke upon you, [2] and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly [drop voice] in heart: and [emphasize each word equally] you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is [say “easy” softer and higher] **EASY** and My burden is [inflect “light” up] light.” A yoke is kind of like a harness and is a figure of speech to symbolize Biblically submitting to the words of Jesus and His spiritual guidance moment by moment to do God’s Will for our lives. “Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me,” He said. Our thief took the yoke and learned from Jesus. Our thief found it light and easy, and it gave him eternal rest which began to develop immediately.

As we finish up with our thief, it is probably worth our time to take a moment to see a little bit more how the Bible fits in with “take My yoke and learn of Me and I will give you rest.”

This peaceful rest has two forms. It is the rest we get from being made right with God through Christ which is told to us in the Bible. And, it is the rest we get as we follow Christ moment by moment within the framework of the Bible. The thief had both kinds of this rest in the end.

When we take the yoke of Christ to follow Him we learn of Him through the Word of God. The Word of God has various forms in the Bible. Jesus is the Word of God. The Word of God is the Bible based guidance we get through prayerfully talking to God and Christ while taking the yoke of Christ. Also, the Word of God can be non-Bible-level messages from God's people. However, the big use of the Word of God in the Bible refers to the Bible itself which is our standard and FRAMEWORK for everything.

Here is combination of several settings of the same Bible story from Jesus about the Word of God that especially applies to the Bible and our obedience to the Bible. This story gives a good basic picture of how the Bible works in our lives as we obey the directions from God and Christ given to us in the Bible. As we learn from Jesus we find out that in the Bible Jesus compared the Word of God to a sower when He said, "Listen, behold, a sower went forth to sow his seed: and it came to pass, as he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and they were trodden down, and the fowls of the air came and devoured them up. Some fell upon a rock and upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and immediately they sprung up, because they had no depth of earth: and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away, because they lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up with them, and choked them, and they yielded no fruit. But others fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some bare fruit an hundredfold. He that has ears to hear, let him hear." When the disciples asked Jesus to explain this parable, Jesus said, "Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. Now the parable is this: the seed is the Word of God. Those that receive seed by the way side are they that hear the Word; but when they have heard the Word of the Kingdom and understand it not, then comes immediately the Wicked One, Satan the Devil, and takes away out of their hearts the Word that was sown in their hearts, lest they should [emphasize believe] believe and be saved. But these are they likewise which receive the seed into stony places and which on the rock are sown; the same are they who, when they hear the Word, immediately receive the Word with joy and gladness, yet they have not root in themselves, and so endure and believe but for a while: for afterward, when affliction or tribulation or persecution arises because of the Word, immediately by and by they are offended, and in time of temptation fall away. And they also that received seed which fell sown among the thorns, these are they, which, when they have heard the Word, go forth, with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the Word, and the Word becomes unfruitful, and they become unfruitful, and bring no fruit to perfection. But they that receive seed sown on good ground, these are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, receive it, understand it, and keep it; which also bear fruit, and bring forth with patience, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred."

Jesus puts people into four categories in this story about God's Word, the Bible, as illustrated by the sower. However, the real purpose is not to put people into categories -- but to give us hope! We can choose to change categories! Our thief changed categories. The person that bore fruit by faithfully using the Bible probably also profited by avoiding

the other three categories. That faithful, fruitful person may well have found himself in all of the unfruitful categories from time to time -- but he didn't stay there. In the Bible book of II Timothy chapter 3 it states, "But you continue in the things which you have learned and have been assured of, knowing of whom you have learned them; and that from a child you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that anyone of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

In the first category of Bible seeds we see ourselves choosing to let the Bible seeds fall into the wayside of unbelief and be eaten up by the doubting birds of Satan. In the wayside of unbelief category we don't believe it can happen. We don't think that God and Christ are capable of doing anything for our problem or our situation. We decide that the Bible has nothing for us and our life situation so we don't try to understand its real meaning when we hear or read the Bible. We don't bother to find out what the Bible is really saying. We choose to decide that God probably won't honor living the correctly interpreted Bible in our life as it says. We don't want any Bible restricting our living. But Jesus said that obeying the Bible will make our joy full -- not unnecessarily fence us in. Forgetting about salvation in Christ, we notice that Jesus had a rough time on this earth and got the greatest part of His joy in the next life which does not seem too appealing to us at the moment. No door of faith is left open so that God and Christ can act. We never come close to putting on the yoke of Christ and learning from Him.

Let's say again that the Bible book of Hebrews in chapter 4 tells us that the Bible has to be mixed with faith or it does not profit us. One of the saddest places in the Bible is where Jesus was in His own local country area and it states, "And He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." Two other places emphasized by saying, "He could do no mighty work there ... and He marveled because of their unbelief." Jesus knew what He could do for His own people, He knew what was possible, but He couldn't do it because His own people did not have the necessary faith to allow Him to do it and make it happen!

We need to do things in faith that will leave doors open and make it possible for God and Christ to do anything that They might want to do. Our lack of faith sometimes causes us to do regrettable things. Rebekah in the Bible did not have faith that God would come through for her son Jacob and ended up sinning to try to make things happen without God because of her lack of faith. The Bible tells us that God said, "Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver?" And in another place it said, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear." God can do what He thinks needs to be done in ways that might be too complex for us to understand. We need to trust God and Christ to be smart enough to know what they are doing.

At other times we sometimes suddenly find ourselves guided with a special opportunity to use our faith and are given the means to make something really nice happen for God

and Christ, for us, and for others. We need to always look to see if we can make adjustments, attend to appropriate detail, give freely, and do what it takes to “make it happen”. In relation to a situation, we believe that God and Christ can do something and then we show that belief by being willing to act under the guidance of God and Christ in ways that might make a desired result in the situation come to pass if They choose it for Their purposes which we may or may not know or understand at the time. We don't try to force the situation in ways that God doesn't want. We take the yoke of Christ and learn of Him. We try a guided step. Then, we wait on God and see what happens. This helps us see what we might do next. The Bible Psalm 119 states about the Bible Word of God, “Your Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” A lamp or lantern lights enough of the path to take only the next few steps -- then you can see where you will need to take the next few steps or maybe even need to turn around and go in another direction. A description of a Bible user following the guidance from the living God and Christ is in the Bible book of Isaiah when it states, “And your ears shall hear a Word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk you in it, when you turn to the right hand, and when you turn to the left.’”

There is no situation in which God and Christ cannot be active on behalf of the faithful. God acts in mysterious ways. Satan, the Devil, sometimes can use our own human frailty against us to the point of making us helpless. Satan took the Son of God when He became a man and hung Him on a cross. But God can do things with us for His Kingdom even when Satan has made us helpless in a human frailty sense. Look what God did with the helpless Jesus on the cross! Even though we may have to assume results are there and see them only by faith, the Bible teaches that, “All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose.”

Down with the category of letting the seeds of the Bible fall by the wayside of unbelief by letting Satan, the Devil, convince us that what God said in the Bible is wrong and that God and Christ are limited and can't do whatever They might want to do. If we don't believe that something can happen, we have given up and nothing is likely to happen. We don't give God and Christ a chance. We don't give Them anything to work with. We are left to the faithless, “Woe is me!” Jesus said that, “With God all things are possible.” That doesn't mean that God thinks that all things should happen. Anything is possible if God and Christ think that it should be done. It is our job to be faithful and be open to all possibilities -- even those we didn't think of. And, then act under the guidance of God and Christ within the framework of the Bible so that anything might be possible. Don't close doors unless God has closed them.

Our thief on the cross did not let the Word of God fall by the wayside of unbelief. He Biblically cast his burden on the Lord in faith that he would be sustained. The thief left ridiculous but plausible doors of faith open when, as a dying man, he asks another dying Man to be in His Kingdom. But, these doors were surrounded by reasonable Divine hope because God's ways are higher and vastly more complex when compared to our limited minds. It didn't all make sense to the thief at the moment but he waited in faith to see how God and Christ would act in these matters as They said They would. The thief took the

yoke of Christ and learned of Him. The thief, in his own clumsy way, learned and chose not to let the Word of God and its meaning for all of life fall into the wayside of unbelief.

Before we begin the second category of Bible seeds, let's clarify. The second category, of the rocks of withered belief, tempts us to unbelief with problems. The third category, of the thorns of choked belief, tempts us to unbelief with the lusts of the world. In the first category of Bible seeds, our belief never starts. In the second and third categories of Bible seeds, our belief starts but is stopped before it bears fruit. Now let's continue.

In the second category of Bible seeds we see ourselves choosing to let the Bible seeds fall into stony places and on the rocks of withered belief to be scorched and withered by Satan because the seeds have no earth to grow roots for moisture. Bible based belief has its own set of problems that need to be handled effectively in God and Christ. In the rocks of withered belief category we don't deal with problems in applying the Bible. In the rocks of withered belief we quit believing and trusting when problems develop. Then, we stop. We give up and quit trying. We put off the yoke of Christ and don't dare learn from Him. We believe until Satan makes us pay the costs of belief. Satan may even make us pay the price of persecution and peer pressure because we use the Bible and trust God and Christ. Realize that when our belief is shown to be real by putting it into guided, Bible based action trusting God and Christ, then do we become a threat to Satan and he tries to stop our belief with problems.

Problems and setbacks have to be dealt with or the road of faithful progress ends. Then, once again God and Christ have nothing to work with. Anytime we see an obstacle, we also have to ask if there is a way to overcome or eliminate the obstacle. We have to let our minds be creative and analytical under the guidance of God and Christ while searching the Scriptures daily. The Bible provides reproof and correction for us to check out for our problems. The Bible tells us to "desire the sincere milk of the Word, that we may grow by it." Are we, on a regular basis, growing in our knowledge and understanding of the Bible? Also, God and Christ may be giving us help through others for our problems. So, we may need to reach out -- carefully testing what is offered.

There may be times in our problems that we do not have an opportunity to do anything. Like the thief on the cross, our hands are tied as far as taking any specific action. But we can pray and look to God and Christ Who are not restricted in Their taking action -- or They may redirect our guidance elsewhere. At times like the thief on the cross it is good to know some Scripture by memory like the thief did so that we will have the Bible when we need it. The Bible Psalmist said about God's Word, "Your Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against You."

No problem or setback is bigger than God and Jesus Christ who created the universe. It is true that there are some problems God may show us we may have to live with. However, if our Bible based belief is the kind that can be stopped by problems, then we are maintaining no roots that can faithfully reach out to God and Christ for moisture and our faith withers away. We need to take the yoke of Christ and learn of Him. That's where our roots get moisture. The Bible book of John chapter 15 gives us yet another picture of

being connected as a vine and branches to Christ to be fruitful to help us understand the process.

Sometimes we just have to wait. Daniel in the Bible had an answer to a prayer delayed by the evil of the universe. As we wait we need moisture from God and Christ so that we will not wither just as we need moisture to grow and not wither. It is true that God and Christ can do things for us regardless of any faith on our part or we would never live long enough to reach a saving faith. However, without faith many things cannot happen. Things of positive eternal significance happen only when they are rooted in the power of God and Christ.

In addition and along these same thoughts of being rooted in God and Christ, did we consult God and Christ before acting? Our problem may be the result of acting on our own rather than a result of our Bible based belief. The Bible character of Jonah had problems which were not a result of his Bible based belief but instead were a result of his refusing to do the one thing that God was urging him to do. No amount of doing the things that the Bible said to do or no amount of religious activity would fix Jonah's problems until he was willing to do what God really wanted him to do. He was not diligently seeking God which we noted earlier was a condition for receiving rewards from Bible living. Later Jonah had more problems because of his attitude and these problems were also not a result of Bible based belief. Did we plan with God and Christ to root our work in Their helpful moisture?

Our problem may be from not using what God has already given us in the Bible. Did we create our problem because we did not use the Bible before acting? The Bible says in Proverbs 21:19 that, "It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman." Furthermore Proverbs says in two places that, "It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house." It would seem logical that these verses apply to both a woman and a man. Did we marry a contentious, angry person and now have to trust God to be able to deal with it? Although we are sometimes need to use the Bible to live in undesirable situations as Daniel and Joseph did in the Bible, these verses we just mentioned may apply to dealing with the stress of any contentious person who could even later turn on you such as a boss who could ruin your career or retirement. It can sometimes even be dangerous to accept and have to control volunteer help from a contentious person who may be using you and your position for their purposes and will later turn on you when they don't get the results they want. Does the Bible verse about not being "unequally yoked together with unbelievers" relate to our situation?

Another point is that the Bible book of Luke tells us to count the cost before acting. We plan and schedule the steps that need to be done to meet a goal while allowing time for setbacks. Then count the costs. Can we both do and complete our plan of action with the help of God and Christ. If not, were we really listening? One cost to count is time. Do we have enough time to do the job and bring it to completion while still fulfilling our other obligations, responsibilities, and commitments?

We need to continually reach out to God and Christ for moisture for our faith. Inaction can bring regrets. No amount of preparation can prevent many evil disasters that happen in the world. However, while not depending on our own power, some problems can be dealt with by doing our homework, planning, and also by preparing backup plans for likely problems. But still, we need to continually reach out to God and Christ for moisture for our faith.

Also, earlier we talked about dealing with sins which may be interfering with our contact with God and Christ to receive moisture.

How we handle problems has a lot to say about our faith. The Bible book of James challenges us to grow in faith when it states, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that gives to all people liberally, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that person think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded person is unstable in all his ways."

Our thief did not let problems of not being able to conceive how God and Jesus may help him, problems of being physically restrained, and the problem of a looming death wither his belief. The thief took the yoke of Christ and learned of Him. The thief looked to Christ. The thief dealt with his sin. And, the thief chose to trust God and Christ based on the Bible thus choosing not to let the Word of God and its meaning for all of life fall into the rocks of withered belief and be stopped by the immense problems he faced.

In the third category of Bible seeds we see ourselves choosing to let the Bible seeds fall among the thorns of choked belief where Satan chokes the Word in us with other interests. In the thorns of choked belief category Satan tries to choke our fruitfulness in the Word by eating up our time, our energy, our material, our thoughts, and our well-functioning body with the choking effect of the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in -- all to crowd the Word sufficiently out of our lives so that we bring no fruit to perfection.

This category is not to be confused with enjoying life and the blessings of God for the Bible tells us that, "It is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he takes under the sun all the days of his life, which God gives him: for it is his portion. Every man also to whom God has given riches and wealth, and has given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God." However, we can let things of no eternal significance crowd out the things of eternal significance in our lives. And, we can be led astray by lusts for the world by focusing too much on taking our portion of our riches in life. In the beginning of the Bible book of Daniel, while trusting God, Daniel went to considerable effort to have a proper diet that would give him a body to fit him for service. Daniel was not

tempted with the king's rich food. Money riches can be a blessing and an opportunity as well as a possible problem. Many Bible people were richly blessed. However, Jesus talked about how hard it is for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God but He did not say that a rich man cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Really, though, both rich and poor face temptations to lust in the wrong way for things of this world.

Most anything can become a thorn we lust for -- even something like too much sleep. The Bible writer said in the book of Proverbs, "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall your poverty come as one that travails, and your want as an armed man."

We need to beware of all of the thorns that may be in our lives. Will we take care of all the thorns except the one possibly little thorn that is keeping us from the life that Christ has for us? As mentioned earlier, the Bible tells us to beware of, "the little foxes, that spoil the vines."

In the first two categories of the sower story, God and Christ can help us deal with the wayside of unbelief category and the problems on the rocks of withered belief category with the facilities of our being pretty much fully occupied on the Bible task of life. But with the thorns of choked belief category our facilities become preoccupied and there is little or none of our facilities left in any meaningful way to be occupied with the Bible task of life. The lusts of our very being work against us. Satan uses our very selves to work against us -- the sin that is in our flesh since the time that sin entered the human race at the first disobedient, disbelieving sin by Adam and Eve in the Paradise Garden of Eden. Paul says in the Bible, "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." If you have ever tried to break a bad habit or stop a substance abuse or control some out of control thing that affects your body, the temple of the Holy Spirit, then you know what we are talking about. The Bible calls it the "lust of the flesh." In the Bible Paul says, "For I delight in the Law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." The Bible also teaches that the thorny lusts of the flesh can ruin our prayer life: "You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts."

But Paul knows how to deal with choking thorns. He continues by saying, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with my mind I myself serve the Law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." It is the Christ idea of "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me." Paul later elaborates in another place in the Bible while talking about God's and Christ's Holy Spirit by saying, "This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that you cannot do the things that you would." So, the Bible way to deal with the choking thorns is immersion in Christ -- make it a daily, all day long, way of life: take the yoke fully and learn of Him in the walking and in the Bible studying. The choking thorns that choke belief are dealt with in Christ by

choking the thorns. Our attention is on Christ which leaves little time to be focusing on the thorns.

Let's also mention in passing that walking in the Spirit is not necessarily the same as immersion in religious activities on behalf of some religious group. When religion looks like religion but ceases to be religion, things get out of balance. Our out of balance religious practices can cause us to neglect other needed Biblical requirements and get things out of perspective. Solomon said in the Bible, "they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyards have I not kept." Paul said in the Bible, "But if any provides not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." Also, when we are not immersed in God and His Christ using the Bible, the thorns can even look very religious and desirable tempting us to get very mixed up. For example, the religious leaders who committed the worst act of human history by getting Christ killed -- these leaders were not like such people as Moses, Samuel, and David. At the trial scene while committing the horrible act of seeking to kill Christ, these leaders would not go into Pilate's hall of judgment because they did not want to be "defiled".

The Bible can be helpful in cutting the thorns out of our life in the power of Christ. As we immerse ourselves in Christ and use the Bible as a part of learning of Christ, the process is not like looking up something in a reference book. There is not one Bible verse for this ailment and another verse for that ailment. It is good, though, to study all that the Bible has to say directly on a subject and there are Bible study reference books to help with this but be aware of the theological perspective of any Bible study aid and filter out theology that is not thoroughly Bible based.

Before solving a specific problem though, we may first need to deal with some underlying problem that is not yet identified or not yet acknowledged by us. The problem could be a thorn. So, our Bible study needs to be the total Bible. The Bible tells us that, "the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." We all may need to be cut at different places to get the sin problems of the flesh that are unique to us individually including the thorns that have ensnared us in the sense that we are using thorn here. Jesus talks about pruning us. A systematic total Bible reading or listening plan regularly can expose us to the full sword of the Holy Spirit of God and Christ to show us where we need to take fruitful responsibility to bring something in our lives under the power of God and Christ. Your systematic Bible reading plan can be worked through most of the time on a daily basis as your daily Bible study. Read the Bible! Help comes from the most unusual places in the Bible as the Holy Spirit of God and Christ pierces our hearts.

The Bible tells us while being led by God and Christ to be "submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" unless God leads otherwise. Submitting is a word also used in the Bible in teachings about marriage while being led by God and Christ. It is a key to making it possible for two sinners to live together. But this Biblical type of submission has benefits besides just good human relations. It costs us ourselves as we learn to give

up our own selfish ways and this skill also helps us break our attachment to the empty, choking, selfish appealing thorns that devour our belief in the Word of God, the Bible.

Again, let's state that in our larger discussion here of the Bible being shown as a sower and the seeds, in the first two categories of leaving the door of faith open and dealing with the rocky problems in faith -- these two categories do not require as much of us as the third category of the choking thorns of unbelief. Part of our being likes the thorns which makes this seem like Satan's most vicious attack on our Bible life. Since part of our life likes the thorns, we must give up of our very selves. Jesus said, "Whoever will save his life shall lose it; but whoever shall lose his life for My sake and the Gospel's, the same shall save it."

Satan can tempt us to sell or give away our very souls and bodies for glory, fame, wealth, power, prestige, the wrong kind of sensuous desire, or for other things to satisfy our lusts in which we think things are great but they are not. The Bible describes one way that lust can cause us to lose sight of reality when it says, "Neither take a gift: for a gift does blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous." Jesus Christ knows that He can help us ultimately defeat Satan, the Devil, and in all situations He knows that He can help us deal with the Satan element in that in a situation. So, I wonder what must go through His mind when He has to emphasize to us that, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Spiritually mixed up Satan is very crafty in his use of lust to get us to serve him which will ruin us. The Bible warns that even the blessings of God can make us "waxen fat" and forget God as Satan tempts us to make these blessings into thorns and we say that "my power and the might of my hand has gotten me this wealth." Satan gives us bad information and lies to us. What does he tell us to believe? "Within the realm of possibility I want what I want and I want it now[!] regardless of what that might mean for you." Satan uses desire and lust to get us to desire with such low sights for empty things that do not satisfy instead of desiring the satisfying, mighty, eternal riches by grace which we can get from God starting now. We need to dream about the possibility of wonderful things for our desires that might be out there in the mysteries of the universe; things which we can not find out for ourselves unless someone tells us about them. Does anybody out there really care for us? We might be selling ourselves short because we believe the very limited poor picture that Satan offers to our lusts and desires. The Bible prophet Jeremiah had occasion to warn, "Behold, you trust in lying words, that can not profit."

There are some aspects of lust or desire which are healthy. It is prudent to seek money, position, and health. But when we look to money, position, and health for sustenance instead of looking God, then we are in trouble.

We may even lust for our past and try to hold on to it when that would be a hindrance like Lot's wife did in the Bible instead of trustingly going into the future with God and Christ.

The Bible book of Proverbs talks about various kinds of the wrong type of sexual lust. For example, “Whoso commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding: he that does it destroys his own soul.”

Lustful temptations to take it easy, collect our pay, and be sloppy in our work habits and attitudes can create all kinds of extended problems for us and those who have to clean up after us.

Lust can lead to unjust wars on a national level or on an individual level in our own little sphere of the world as we try to satisfy our lusts and we can even turn into evil dictators. Our lust for personal convenience can cause us not to take the time for justice, mercy, and humbly seeking the will of God and Christ. In our search to fulfill our lusts we can find ourselves being corrupt, telling lies, and doing other regrettable things. When we lust for something and someone else gets it instead of us, Satan may tempt us to try to make them fail rather than leave the matter in God’s hands.

Our lusts for our selfishness can even lead us to treating widows and orphans improperly. God has a special concern for widows and orphans in that the Bible says, “A Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widows, is God in His holy habitation.” Jesus was very scathing in His condemnation of the bad treatment of widows when He talked about them that, “devour widows’ houses ... the same shall receive greater damnation.” People who succeed in “devouring widows’ houses” may consider any worldly profit they get to be a windfall, spend it for something special which continually serves as a reminder of the type of people they have been. There are times that the friends of the widow come to her support and the friends of the friends hearing of the “devouring” situation also come to the support of the widow. Thus, the ones who have “devoured widows’ houses” have a wider and wider reputation for what they have done and have placed themselves in a smaller and smaller social box. In our lust for money and selfish, lofty, high-sounding legal professional goals and platitudes which are out of line with God’s purposes, those of us who are professionals in the law of the land and in judging can find ourselves a party to those who “devour widows’ houses.” To keep our deeds from being exposed, we can find ourselves intimidating people as a way to attempt to silence the truth and get our own lustful way. Those who “devour widows’ houses” and do other similar things do not consider all of the implications nor do their advisors usually advise them of all of the implications of their lustful choices. Thus, they miss the more important moral, eternal issues of the human social-political implications and the issues of justice and mercy and humbly seeking God’s will in a situation. It should not be too hard to see that it would be to our eternal and present advantage to deal with any sins we may have in the area of widows and orphans. In a larger statement of this type of thinking for our relationship to the world, the prophet Isaiah said in the Bible, “Cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.” The Bible further expands this to “strengthen the hand of the poor and needy”.

Improper lust for worldly things, or lust for the wrong kind of pride and self-glory can foul up any human endeavor. Those of us who are judges to apply the laws of the land can lust to make our professional lives simpler and thus not take the time to consider

issues of justice, mercy, and humbly seeking God's will while still not being in a position of rewriting the laws of the land. Lawsuits can be a means to justice and an immediate cause for someone to straighten up. But especially lust based lawsuits can be a means of harassment and a stopping of good works and an infliction of injustice when people use them as such. Further, these lawsuits of injustice can more easily happen in a court when the misguided personal or professional lusts of the judge or the jurors allow their successful use. Those of us who are charged with enforcing the laws of the land as law enforcement officers can lust for an easier professional life which can lead to such things as not taking the time to avoid careless error and then find ourselves being dishonest about our acts to the detriment of the citizens of the land who often have no practical means of due process for coming up with any evidence after the incident in question happened which a court would accept in contradiction to an agent of the state, the law enforcement officer. Lawmakers can let lust for improper things and then not take the time to insure that the laws of the land are just while insuring that citizens charged under those laws have a means of gathering evidence after the incident in question happened that a court would accept as truth if it were facts that were to contradict the state's law enforcing agent or the law enforcing technology when it malfunctioned, was used in error, or was used carelessly. Many law enforcement situations in court end up being a matter of the word of the charged citizen against the word of the state's agent, the law enforcement officer. Without laws that provide a due process which gives a practical means for those charged under the law to gather evidence after the incident in question happened, even the highest caliber judges and lawyers are in a difficult, awkward position of having to act with no real evidence and the court of the state usually goes with the word of its agent, the law enforcement officer, which can lead to mistakes. Due process in which the citizen has no practical process to gather evidence after an incident has happened means that there was no due process at all. Just sitting in court is not due process if the citizen has no practical process for obtaining evidence which the court would accept and the case ends up being the citizen's word against the word of the officer of the state and his possible erroneous use of technology. But the fact is that the best that humans have come up with for law enforcement makes it often necessary for the only real "evidence" in court to be the word of the law enforcement officer. We depend on the moral fiber of the law enforcement community to insure justice and to insure that our laws have meaning by being enforced. Citizens ultimately need to trust God and Christ, not the courts, because the best plans of humans can fail and become oppressive when various responsible parties in the legal system have a serious problem with corrupting lust which is something that can happen in the world at any time and in any place.

Satan can use lust in larger ways. Satan can tempt large numbers of people in one race, a social class, or in any group to see other groups as a threat to satisfying our lust and then we do disgusting things to each other in the sight of God who created us all in His image.

Laws of the land can be derived from the best religious moral code of human history but if there is no holiness in the population, it should be rather easy to see how lust alone could decay the civilization and the civilization fall from within. Lust can also lead us to look to the government to satisfy our lust without work and taking our own share of responsibility. Society rulers can come into power and maintain power by appealing to

our lust and saying it is our right to expect the government to satisfy our lust without work and taking our own share of responsibility. Without regard to good budgeting and without regard to all of the implications of policies, this type of lust as a driving force in society can reach a point that it strangles the resources and policies of a whole society. No government or culture has enough money to pay for the unbridled lust of its people. This description of looking to the government to satisfy our lust may be the way that the evil world ruling antichrist of the Bible comes into power in the last days of the world. All kinds of leaders in society such as governmental, spiritual, educational, judicial, etc. should be willing to pay the political price of giving needed, even unpopular, humble, God guided warnings to any aspect of society, especially to their own fields, according to an application of Ezekiel 33:6 in the Bible, "But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand." The Ezekiel passage also points out that if there is a warning sounded and the people do not listen, then the watchman is not held accountable. However, we need to be aware that a civilization can go under in one generation when enough of us who know better will not take adequate risks to adequately warn and hopefully stem the tide of decay. Read the Bible story of Esther. With the help and guidance of God and Christ, we need to be committed enough to Jesus Christ to oppose or flee from Satan or even possibly suffer patiently. See Lot in both the Old and New Testaments. The Bible tells us how a fallen society culture can get back into the graces of God. It would be a safe plan if a culture would go ahead and live this way at all times. "If my people, which are called by My Name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

There are those who have been led astray by their own lusts who may tempt us to be led astray by our own lusts. To be able to put an honest (as opposed to dishonest) spin on things to make things look favorable to our position is a valuable skill. However, some may use spin to distort or misrepresent reality and what is really going on to blind those who will not dig for the truth. Some can make things sound plausible when we do not dig for the truth or do not want to hear the truth. The Bible states that some "with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goes after covetousness". Some can make us feel O.K. when really we need confrontation if we do not dig for the truth or do not want to hear the truth. As Ezekiel speaking for God said in the Bible, "With lies you have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life." The Bible prophet Jeremiah tells us that some will say, "Peace, peace; when there is no peace."

It will do no good on the Judgment Day to say that we had some good reasons to us in our minds for rejecting those Bible helps that told us things that would lustfully get in our way of getting into the Kingdom of God. The beginning of the Bible book of Romans has a discussion of the terrible things that Satanic lust can lead us into causing us to give away the grace that gets us into eternal heaven and it tells us that we can become those "Who changed the truth of God into a lie." How we deal with lust has a lot to say about

our faith because the beginning of the book of Romans tells us that we can find ourselves worshipping and serving the “creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever.”

The Bible book of James has lust in a sequence of things that ends up in sin and death. When it comes to lust, we need to be like Joseph in the Bible in that when he faced a problem situation, he even left his coat and fled. We need to analyze situations and conditions that lead us into problems and then make plans to head off such situations and conditions before they develop.

After all of our discussion about lust, it is no wonder that the apostle Peter at the beginning of his second book in the Bible talks about lust in terms of being the corruption that is in the world.

The Bible states that those lusty thorns will be empty and be vanished a thousand years from now as we dwell throughout eternity, “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he that does the will of God abides for ever.” Furthermore, in the Bible we are told, “By the mercies of God ... present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but you be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

Our thief chose not to let the thorns of choked belief stop him as he dealt with peer pressure, the thoughts of others, the desires of his pride, and his terrible pain. He let the example of Jesus lead him to the power of Christ as he saw Jesus on the cross who was thinking of others and God instead of Himself even to the point of giving up all those perishable things and empty mental things that we can needlessly lust for in this life. We need to choose to fill up our time with taking the yoke of Christ and learning of Him rather than choosing empty thorns of no eternal significance -- the thorns that can choke the very life out of us! This takes patience which takes us to our fourth category of the Bible being shown as a sower and the seeds.

In the fourth category of Bible seeds we see ourselves choosing to let the Bible seeds fall on the good ground of Bible based patient belief that lets God and Christ bring forth fruit in our lives. When we receive seed sown on good ground, we in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, receive it, understand it, and keep it with patience.

In these several settings of the story of the sower, Jesus has given us three steps to Bible living: in an honest and good heart receive the Word, understand it, and keep it with patience. It takes all three steps: in an honest and good heart receive the Word, understand it, and keep it with patience.

First, in an honest and good heart receive the Word. Some Scripture amplifications of this step would be: “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts.” Our heart needs God’s peace on an action before acting so that we are acting in a manner that God and Christ

can make fruitful. Also, consider the Bible verse that says, “Follow peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking diligently lest any one fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.” Certainly we should see that what God tells in the Bible about faith in Christ and holiness is not to make life difficult for us but instead to make life more pleasant for us now and forever. The Bible states that “His commandments are not grievous.” The Bible tells us good things for us when it tells us such things as, “But if you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descends not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.” We need to see the connection between the Bible and a good heart or holiness as we explore all the seeds of the Bible looking diligently to God and Christ. We deal with our sins. We are willing to use the seeds of the Bible for holiness seeking the peace of God and Christ (even though there may be times when we, while having the peace of God, need to use confrontation with others). This picture of holiness which we have just examined is a needed aspect of making good ground in which God and Christ can grow the seeds of the Bible into fruit. Is a helpful picture of the first step emerging? This is the hardest step because we have to deal with the problem of our selfishness which keeps us from getting what God has for us.

Second, having accomplished the hardest step by grace, we now seek to understand the seeds of the Bible as God and Christ teach about understanding in the Bible and as They help us to understand.

Then, third, we keep the Word -- with patience.

The Bible book of James expounds on the using and obeying all the seeds of the Bible by saying, “But you be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”

Notice that these three steps to Bible living are another way of saying, “Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me.” Also, in terms of the Bible being shown as a sower and the seeds, notice that these three steps to Bible living help us develop a faith that keeps the doors of faith open while seeking understanding -- the Bible seeds do not fall into the wayside of unbelief. These three steps help us develop a faith that deals with problems in faith while looking to God and Christ -- the Bible seeds do not fall on the rocks of withered belief. These three steps help us develop a faith that chooses the eternal significance of the yoke of Christ rather than the yoke of worldly desires -- the Bible seeds do not fall among the thorns of choked belief. When we look at the eternal significance and development of our life, Jesus said, “Without Me you can do nothing.” Or as the Bible writer said, “I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me.”

The thief in an honest and good heart began to receive the Bible, understand it, and keep it with patience. Looking to Jesus, the thief bore fruit in his life that helped him on the cross and he continues to bear fruit in the history of Biblical Christianity as people study

his conversion to Christ. Among other fruits, his Christ endorsed conversion and brief time of faith at the end of his life bear fruit in many of those through the ages who are considering a deathbed conversion. The example of the thief stands before us.

The Prayer Of Jesus

The Bible and prayer, which is talking to God and Christ, are two key parts to learning from Jesus for those who take His yoke. We have already talked about Jesus and the Bible. As a matter of practice and as an example, Jesus was a man of prayer. He prayed for the disciples who would establish His Church on earth through the Holy Spirit. Jesus even said a blessing and gave thanks to God for His food before eating.

One of the greatest things written about Jesus was the daily prayer and prayer pattern with an added doxology which Jesus taught for those who respond to the cross.

Is The Cross Central?

But before we close by hearing that prayer, let's go back to our original question. "Is the Cross of Jesus Christ central to human history?" But the more important question for the thief was, "Is Jesus on the cross central to me?" In a somewhat indirect way our thief under the activity of God's Spirit decided "yes" to both of these questions based on the evidence he had. The undeserving thief said "yes" trusting the mercy of God. The thief committed his total being to Jesus on the cross and said, "... remember me" He was the first known person to respond to Jesus on the cross. The thief died on his cross for one sin. Jesus died on His cross for all of the thief's sins and ours! The thief used the Bible and what would become the Bible in his spiritual quest. The thief confessed his sin and turned to Jesus on the cross. The thief caught a lot of the meaning of the cross but he knew that Jesus, in the manner that He died, was not dying a meaningless death for nothing. The thief knew that there was more to the cross than he was seeing. Today we know more fully about the cross and the resurrection. The thief knew that Jesus was the way to get forgiveness with God so that the thief could be in the presence of a holy God. The thief knew that Jesus had a Kingdom somewhere with God. Moses said to listen to the Christ. God said to listen to Him. The thief listened correctly to Jesus. The thief learned to love God and Jesus Christ. The works of Jesus and the words of Jesus convinced the Holy Spirit influenced thief in his brief Bible living life to seek forgiveness and follow Jesus on the cross to be in the Kingdom of the Christ.

Jesus Christ King of Kings

Do we want to be in that Kingdom of Jesus the Christ, King Of Kings, with God, Jesus and the thief? Jesus wanted the thief - - He wants you and me!

Joining The Kingdom

To enter Christ's Kingdom like the thief did, we need to acknowledge our sin in need and ask Jesus Christ to enter. In our minds or by talking aloud we can talk to the spiritually living God and the living Jesus Christ to make this commitment and to continue in that relationship. This is what we call prayer. Are we willing to change and be transformed by God and Christ and follow Their leading? Are we willing to use the Bible? After entering the Kingdom, we need to continually deal with our sins and listen directly to Jesus while using all of the Bible. The Biblical Jesus of Nazareth, Who is the Christ -- the only Son of God, is our ultimate human authority for interpreting the Bible. He said, "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it." And, the Bible needs to be used to the glory of God and Christ in ways that God says He will honor. Remember our new possibility for life: "Them that honor Me I will honor." He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. God is a rewarder!

Bible - Cross - Christ - Kingdom - Church

Then, with our spiritual gifts, we can seek to excel to the edifying of Christ's holy Church which is what the Bible teaches us to do. This involves the Bible, the Cross, Jesus Christ, the Kingdom, and the Church.

People usually do not have the same ideas about the Bible all of their lives. Many people change their theology of the Bible based on Jesus and the Bible so that they are not in contradiction with their Savior.

The Bible is good for instruction and other help. But there is no suggestion that this process will ever be complete in this life although we are assured that for any given moment we will have grace that is sufficient. Thus, a thorough study of the issues raised by the thief's story, the cross, and the Bible will never be finished. We just summarize our present status at any given moment in the study as we grow and refine our thinking in Christ.

We are not to be discouraged but rather to endure in Christ. Jesus said, "All power is given to Me in Heaven and in Earth. ... Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world!"

Listen Directly To Jesus

Now, let's conclude by listening directly to Jesus in the words He taught His followers to pray daily -- even moment by moment. The prayer goes, "Our Father Who is in Heaven, hallowed be Your Name. Your Kingdom come. Your will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, as we forgive every one who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for Yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, [pause and speak firmly] for ever!" [No Amen].

[Pause.]

This Man Is The Son Of God!
Amen

Truly, this Man is the Son of God!

Amen.

[The remainder of this document is not a part of the reading presentation.]

- Appendix One-

A Church related theological exercise concerning the Biblical meaning of the Sabbath.

This exercise will require time, looking up cited references, and prayer.

After receiving what is called salvation, it is amazing that repentant sinners can receive rewards in this life and/or the next (the lay up treasures in heaven idea) by diligently seeking God and Christ (Hebrews 11:6). Actions with the right attitude are evidence of this diligently seeking God. Actions that people involve with diligently seeking God are tithing (giving), honoring the Sabbath under the New Covenant, dressing up for Church Worship Services to reverently be in the presence of an awesome God, using the Bible as Christ interprets it, etc. When you stop to think about it, some Bible teachings like not being bitter or not letting the sun set on your wrath have obvious built in rewards. Other Bible teachings tell us ways that block getting rewards such as how a man treats his wife can hinder his prayers. Psalm 34:8 challenges us by saying, “O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed in the man that trusts in Him.” Talk to people that tithe to the Church or to the work of Christ including the Church and see how many of them think that it is a bad idea or check to find people that tried tithing and stopped because it was a bad idea. As an added plus, the occasional bit of designated giving can make things happen and the money goes where you want it to go without any institutional budget or other battles.

Here is some clarifying background on the profitable benefits and rewards example from Jesus of “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” found in Mark 2:27. The Bible Old Testament Sabbath is a rest day on the seventh day of the week. The subject of the Sabbath under the New Covenant is an important topic upon which those who make a thorough, systematic theological study of the Bible come out with somewhat differing positions. The following is the position of this document:

1. One item about the Sabbath we can deal with quickly. For Israel the Sabbath was a covenant sign of sanctification in Exodus 31:12-13, 16-17 because on the seventh day of creation God rested and was refreshed. Furthermore in Ezekiel 20:11-12 it reminds Israel that the Sabbath was a sign that it was God that sanctified them. However, Jesus in the New Covenant/Testament did not give the Sabbath to be a covenant sign. Thus, we are finished with our consideration of the possibility that the Sabbath may be a covenant sign in the New Testament. Now, let’s look at the rest of the items that we need to consider in a thorough look at the Sabbath.
2. At the Last Supper in Matthew 26:28, Mark 14:24, and Luke 22:20 we see that Jesus instituted the New Testament or New Covenant to replace the Old Testament or Old Covenant. Jesus says that His New Covenant “fulfills” the Old Covenant in Matthew 5:17-18 when He says, “Think not that I am come to destroy the Law, or the Prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, ‘Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled.’” Jesus continues in Matthew 5:19 by

- saying, “Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.” So, the background from Jesus is that “any” Bible Old Testament commandment is important but some commandments may now be interpreted in a “fulfilled” sense.
3. The idea of a Sabbath day of rest and refreshing along with the blessing and sanctifying of the seventh day came from the creation in Genesis 2:1-3, “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the hosts of them. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made.” So, from what we have said, the blessed and sanctified seventh day will be important to Jesus either as is or in a fulfilled sense.
 4. The command for remembering the blessed, hallowed, seventh day of rest and keeping it holy comes from what we call “The Ten Commandments” found in Exodus 20:8-11, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor, and do all your work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God: in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.” So, from what we have said, the command to remember and keep holy the blessed, hallowed and sanctified seventh day of rest will be important to Jesus either as is or in a fulfilled sense.
 5. Specifically, though, Jesus upholds the Sabbath and its rewards when He said, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” found in Mark 2:27. In Matthew 24:20 Jesus implies that He expects some kind of seventh day observance to be around until the end times. Note in passing that Jesus did contradict Sabbath practices of His day when it came to healing or getting a meal to eat and this created serious problems for Him with the religious establishment. (Also note in passing that the Old Covenant also promised rewards for keeping the Sabbath in Isaiah 56:1-7, “Thus says the Lord, ‘You keep judgment, and do justice: for My salvation is near to come, and My righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is the man that does this, and the son of man that lays hold on it; that keeps the Sabbath from polluting it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil. Neither let the son of the stranger, that has joined himself to the Lord, speak, saying, “The Lord has utterly separated me from His people:” neither let the eunuch say, “I am a dry tree.” For thus says the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep My Sabbaths, and choose the things that please Me, and take hold of My Covenant; “even unto them will I give in My house and within My walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the Name of the Lord, to be His servants, every one that keeps the Sabbath from polluting it, and takes hold of My Covenant; even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in

My house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.””” Isaiah 58:13-14 promises rewards for keeping the Sabbath, “If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words: then shall you delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father: for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.” Jeremiah 17:21-27 also spoke of both Old Covenant rewards for keeping the Sabbath plus the results of not hallowing the Sabbath.) So, from what we have said so far, Jesus upholds the Sabbath and its rewards: the “specific” command to remember and keep holy the blessed, hallowed and sanctified seventh day of rest and the “rewards” of the seventh day are “specifically” important to Jesus and will be under the New Covenant/Testament either as is or in a fulfilled sense.

6. Jesus will keep the Sabbath under the New Covenant/Testament. Jesus in Matthew 24:20-21 expects of some sort of Sabbath observance in New Testament times because it will still be appropriately observed around time of the Great Tribulation. As we have noted, Jesus did “not come to destroy, but to fulfill.” Thus, the question becomes, “Under the New Testament does Jesus keep the Sabbath as is or does He keep it in a fulfilled sense?” Note in Matthew 12:8, Mark 2:28, and Luke 6:5 that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath having authority and power to change the Sabbath. Jesus is able to and can change the Sabbath to some kind of a “fulfilled” sense. For understanding from the Bible to answer our question, we can look at the words and actions of Jesus. We can look at the words and actions of the twelve Apostles and Paul whom Jesus empowered to speak for Him. We can look at the well-considered practice of the growing believers in the New Testament who are prayerfully acting under the guidance of the words and actions of Jesus, the Twelve, and Paul. Regarding God resting on the seventh day, Hebrews chapters 3-4 talk of a kind of “fulfilled” rest for the children of Israel available by entering the Promise Land in belief. (Jesus is another name for Joshua and Jesus in Hebrews 4:8 is considered to be Joshua who took the believing children of Israel into the Promise Land.) But in this “fulfilled” rest for children of Israel they were still to obey the Sabbath in the Old Testament/Covenant. There is a New Testament/Covenant “fulfilled” rest in Hebrews 4:10-11 which talks about New Testament believers not earning Salvation by their own works but instead by faith in Jesus Christ thus they can “rest” from their works. This goes along with what Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30, “Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” Is this “fulfilled” rest all that is expected in the New Testament or are we expected to still keep some kind of holy rest “fulfilled” or as is Old Testament Sabbath just as Joshua’s people still were expected to observe an Old Testament Sabbath even though there was a fulfillment of God’s rest by entering the Promise Land? The Sabbath worship will be around in the end times in the new heavens

and new earth according to the end of the book of Isaiah in Isaiah 66:22-24. Jesus supported the Sabbath as we have already noted. The sinless Son of God Jesus went to the Synagogue regularly on the Sabbath as noted in Luke 4:16. He was noted for having a zeal for God's house in John 2:17 and this was true even in His youth in Luke 2:46-49. Jesus observed a holy seventh day of rest. If the Son of God needed, observed, supported a holy seventh day of rest, the same should be true by His example for us who are His people. But Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath as we have already mentioned and He has the power and authority to change the Sabbath as He "fulfills" the Old Testament. A change did occur with the seventh day in the New Testament. The followers of Christ in the New Testament began using "The Lord's Day", the first day of the week (Acts 20:7) rather than the seventh day, as the holy seventh day of rest because that is the day that Christ rose from the dead (the term "Lord's Day" is used in Revelation 1:9-11 where John did some writing on the book of Revelation). Hebrews 10:25 speaks of regularly assembling ourselves together. In Acts 20:7 Paul met with believers on the first day of the week for worship and study. So, there are some "fulfillments" of the Sabbath in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. However, the followers of Jesus still observed a seventh day on the first day of the week. This was a change in the Sabbath but Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath and can make changes in the Sabbath for His followers as He "fulfills" the Old Testament. Jesus sets a seventh day example for us in word and deed plus He expects a seventh day observance to be around in the New Testament.

7. Now let us look at a few loose ends.

First, Jesus made a lot of clarification in Sabbath observance. Jesus interpreted some Bible commands stricter than was common practice such as considering habitual patterns in our thought life like murderous or adulterous thoughts to be a violation of the commandments in addition to our actions that would break these same commands about murder and adultery (see Matthew 5:21-30). However, Jesus interpreted Bible commands concerning the Sabbath in a less strict manner than was common practice (see Matthew 12:1-8; Matthew 12:9-13; Mark 2:23-28; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:1-5; Luke 6:6-11; Luke 13:10-17; Luke 14:1-6; John 5:1-18; John 7:10-31; John 9:1-41 and these need to be definitely examined for important clarifications concerning remembering one holy day of rest every seven days).

Second, it is interesting to note in the New Testament that when the Ten Commandments are mentioned by listing a few of them, the list never includes the Sabbath commandment (Mark 10:19, Luke 18:20). However, when Jesus said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" as he took the sins of the world and sin separates one from God, it is plausible to think that Jesus was quoting the beginning of Psalm 22 as a way of referring to the whole Psalm which includes both the exasperation one could feel plus the comfort that comes from God to the faithful in such situations. Thus in the same manner these Ten commandment lists could really be just quoting a few of the commandments as a way of referring to all ten.

Third, it is interesting and relevant for consideration to see that the Old Testament has God rebuking people for breaking the Sabbath and for polluting the Sabbath if you look up Sabbath and Sabbaths in a concordance. However, after the four Gospels in the New Testament, no one is rebuked for breaking the Sabbath, or for not observing a holy seventh day or for not observing the Lord's Day - - the first day of the week. It is even more interesting to note that the lists in the New Testament that say, "if you do these things, you will not inherit the Kingdom of God" (such as Galatians 5:19-21; First Corinthians 6:9-11; Mark 7:20-23; Mark 10:23-27; Matthew 7:21; Romans 1:18-32, 2:1-4; Ephesians 5:3-7; Matthew 5:22, 27, 28 [comments on sinning in our hearts and minds even if not put into physical action]; First Timothy 5:8; Second Timothy chapter 3; Colossians 3:5-9) list many things including specific or implied breaking of all of the Ten Commandments except the Sabbath commandment. The New Testament makes it look like it is not a serious matter to even forget about observing one holy day of rest every seven days. This document that you are reading or hearing is clearly not suggesting this view though. The position of this document is that even if this be true, why would you want to give up the rewards and benefits of remembering one holy day of rest every seven days?

Fourth, some places in the Bible on the surface have the appearance of giving a little slack in the use of the Bible and some places in the Bible do give a little slack in certain stages of a Christian's development to use a little slack in precisely applying the Bible. Some of these two kinds of places make comments concerning issues about observing days and about observing a holy seventh day.

Colossians 2:16-17 mentions holyday, new moon, and Sabbath days but in the context of not using these to earn Salvation (2:10 "you are complete in Him"). The issue here is not about observing a holy seventh day but rather observing days in order to earn Salvation. If you have eternal Salvation in Christ, do not abandon it and start trying to earn Salvation by the Old Testament Law which includes observing many days and festivals, etc. Galatians 4:9-11 with chapter 5 mentions observing days in a similar manner as Colossians. The issue of observing a holy seventh day as we diligently seek God and Christ, but not in the sense of trying to earn Salvation, is not really addressed in these places.

First Corinthians chapters 8 and 10 discuss meat offered to idols and other people's feelings about it. In some matters we should not practice our New Testament freedom if it is offensive to someone's developing faith in our presence. Matters such as the things in those lists of things to avoid or we will not inherit the Kingdom of God which we discussed in this Appendix in point Number 7 the Third item are not to be compromised though. This Bible discussion of the principle presented concerning meat offered to idols does not discuss whether it should be applied to the matter of the observance of a holy day

Romans 14:1-15:1 is very interesting in that it actually does grant some slack for the moment to developing Christians in some matters when it comes to precisely applying the Bible when it is part of their diligently seeking God and Christ but not as an Old Testament law of festival days or eating rules to earn Salvation which is rejected in other places that we have recently discussed. Of course, matters such as the things in those lists of things to avoid or we will not inherit the Kingdom of God which we discussed in this Appendix in point Number 7 the Third item are not to be compromised. Two of the things mentioned in Romans 14:1-15:1 are what you eat and the observing of special days. The days discussion seems more applicable to Maundy Thursday, Christmas, etc. than to a holy seventh day because there is reason to believe that the New Testament holy seventh day of rest is to be observed. But even if it is true that this applies to a holy seventh day, why would you want to lose the rewards? Romans 14:1-15:1 spends more time on giving some slack permitting personal opinion about diet such as eating vegetables only or eating only clean meats in spite of what the Bible said. The Bible has had different eating rules in different times of human history. Jesus said that what we eat does not defile us in Mark 7:14-23; Jesus made all meats clean in the story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10:1-48 and 11:1-18 which was also a sign that Jesus was reaching out to people who were not Jewish; man was vegetarian in the beginning in Genesis 1:29; at Noah in Genesis 9:3-4 man could eat meat and plants; in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14:1-21 man could not eat animals that were designated unclean; the next eating changes came with Jesus. In Romans 14:1-15:1 the slack given for eating rules and special days is in terms of the weak in the faith but who are still trying to lead a life unto the Lord. Who among us, when we first became a believer, did not have beliefs and practices in our early Christian growth that were not precisely Biblically grounded and needed a little slack from a merciful God? Remember the man in Mark 9:24, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief." The status of those weak in the faith in Christ is secure. The thief on the cross went into Paradise that day with Jesus. However, the thief missed many benefits and rewards of the faith. Romans 15:1 mentions the strong and the weak with certainly no expectation that the weak, in the sense of spoken here, will not always be weak. Hebrews 5:12-14 speaks of those who do not give attention to growing to be strong in the faith saying that when they should have been teachers they were still babes. We grow from glory to glory in Second Corinthians 3:18. But, the strong are not the same as being perfect. Paul in Second Corinthians 12:7-10 had his thorn in the flesh. It helped him though seek and depend on Christ even more for strength. (Note that weak is used in a different sense in these thorn verses than in the Roman verses.) Again, even if it is true that this Romans discussion applies to a holy seventh day, why would you want to lose the rewards?

Acts chapter 15 removes much Old Testament/Covenant Law requirements and required ceremonies and sacrifices except for what the New Testament/Covenant keeps. The book of Hebrews symbolically shows some fulfillment of the Old Testament in Christ and fulfillment of the Old Testament in the New Testament as Christ spoke of in Matthew 5:17-18. Hebrews speaks of some of these things to

be a shadow of what will be fulfilled in Heaven as the examples in Hebrews chapter 4 and the statement in Hebrews 8:5 and as stated in Hebrews 10:1 “For the Law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.” Thus, much of the Old Testament we are no under as laws to obey although all of this is important in a fulfilled sense according to Jesus. To see what we are still under from the Old Testament sometimes takes diligent, prayerful study with God and Christ.

One other thing in the New Testament needs to be addressed. There are statements in the New Testament that on the surface make it seem like anything goes. First Corinthians 10:23 and a similar statement in chapter 6 states, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.” We just noted in Acts chapter 15 that we are free from many of the Old Testament requirements. We have a lot of liberty. However, the word “all” is obviously limited because it does not include the killing, adultery, etc. that are in those lists to avoid if we want to inherit the Kingdom of God. The statement “all things are lawful” does not mean that there are no rules as earlier in both I Corinthians chapter 6 and chapter 10 show. We are not free to write our own Bible with a helter-skelter religion. Biblical Christianity has content. The New Testament letters have a multitude of helpful rules. There are New Testament things to avoid lists that have eternal consequences. There are things to obey as part of obeying God and Christ. Jesus said, “If a man love Me, he will keep My words” in John 14:23-24.

So, from these loose ends, we see that the study of a holy seventh day of rest is a complex subject with indeed many surprising findings but it is a study that should not be taken lightly or omitted.

8. On the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ the Sabbath was made for man and all other considerations will fit under that concept as we have examined in this document. The holy seventh day of rest and refreshing and assembling is generally now remembered on the first day of week, the Lord’s Day, because that is the day of the week of the resurrection. Many weekly holy day traditions have been added to strengthen our faith practice such as dressing up in our good clothes to go to Church because Malachi 1:6-9 says to give our best to God and the Old Testament priest in the Temple dressed up special to be in God’s holy presence in His holy Sanctuary plus one person was sent out of the what is considered to be the heavenly banquet in Matthew 22:1-14 because he was not dressed properly. However, this tradition of dress should not be done in such a manner that it is in conflict with James 2:1-8. We should be sure not to miss or overlook benefits and rewards and refreshing of a holy seventh day of rest because of ignorance, peer pressure, lack of examination, etc., neither because of temptation to put earning money or gaining extra time ahead of remembering a holy seventh day and getting its rewards. Jesus said in Matthew 6:19-21, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust does corrupt, and where thieves break

through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust does corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” The holy seventh day of rest observed properly can be one piece of evidence that we are diligently seeking God and Christ which is the basis for rewards in Hebrews 11:6 in the same manner that James 2:17-26 explains works to be evidence of faith.

We should note in passing that in a similar manner to the promise of a reward with a holy seventh day that all Bible promises are a potential source of rewards. Old Testament promises are as is or in a fulfilled, spiritual sense as we discussed in this Appendix in point Number 2 assuming that you are meeting the conditions for the reward within a proper New Testament lifestyle. For example the idea of tithing ten percent of your income to the work of Christ is supported by Christ in Matthew 23:23 in the sense discussed in this document under the section on the Church. The Old Testament big promise for tithing in Malachi 3:7-10 should be examined by New Testament believers to see if it will be rewarded as is or in a fulfilled, spiritual sense: “Even from the days of your fathers you are gone away from My ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto Me, and I will return unto you,’ says the Lord of hosts. But you said, ‘Wherein shall we return?’ ‘Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me.’ But you say, ‘Wherein have we robbed You?’ ‘In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse: for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. You bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in My House, and prove Me now herewith,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘if I will not open to you the windows of heaven, and pour out you a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.’”

9. While assembling together for religious purposes and remembering the clarifications that Jesus made in remembering a holy seventh day, what is a good Biblical example of remembering a holy seventh day? Ezra was probably the greatest Sunday School teacher in the Bible as people assembled for study in Nehemiah chapters 8 and 9. As a religious culture living in another culture in Nehemiah 10:28-29, 10:31, 13:15-22, Nehemiah and his the people under the influence of Ezra observed the holy seventh day of rest regarding rest, selling of wares, and stocking up on groceries in the following manner: “And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the Law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding; they clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God’s Law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and His judgments and His statutes;” “And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the Sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the Sabbath, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt.” “In those days I saw in Judah some treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on

the Sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, 'What evil thing is this that you do, and profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers do this, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? Yet you bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath.' And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the Sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened until after the Sabbath: and some of my servants I set at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the Sabbath day. So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice. Then I testified against them, and said unto them, 'Why do you lodge about the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you.' From that time forth they came no more on the Sabbath. And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your mercy."

10. Jesus observed and supported a holy weekly day of rest and refreshing and reward taking time to meet with assembled believers. Can we do any less? Why would we want to lose the rewards?

- Appendix Two -
Presenting The Reading In Various Kinds Of Presentations

General Comments on presenting the reading. If this reading is read to a group, the title and headings should be presented visually rather than read. You need to make a handout with this information on it by copying Page 121 being sure to make good copies. The preparatory and background Scriptures mentioned in the Sunday School presentation needs to be put on the other side of these handouts by copying Page 122. ... If you want to use it, Page 120 is a poster sheet to fill in and copy to use to publicize your presentation. The poster could also be adapted for other types of presentations. ... The presenter or others are certainly welcome to make their own comments about the subject at hand in a Lent or Sunday School presentation. Please keep separate the reading and the comments to help the listener make his own decisions and to keep the different or expanded thought systems clearly delineated for the listener. When the reading is presented in its entirety all on one occasion, it should be presented with no presenter comments on the subject. ... Some of the remarks in the Sunday School Study presentation may apply to all of the various kinds of presentations. ... Deal with problems in Christ.

Present as a Study for Lent. This reading can be presented as a six sessions, six weeks Study for Lent meeting once a week starting the first full week in Lent. All members of the study should have their own copy of the reading. People who can not attend because of scheduling problems should be told how to get a copy so that you reach a wider audience within your fellowship. (The reading could also be presented in its entirety all on one occasion on the Saturday before Palm Sunday, on Good Friday, or on the Saturday before Easter as described below.) ... Members of the study should ahead of time read the part of the reading for that session. During a session, the class leader reads the first heading title and then asks for comments on paragraphs under that heading. To stimulate discussion, the study leader may mention a key point under that heading or summarize the heading briefly. Continue this process to go through all of the headings for that session. About 10 minutes before the end of the session, the study leader should mention all of the remaining headings for that session and then ask for comments on any one of those remaining headings that a class member may wish to discuss. The first session may be different if the class members can not have the reading and assignment ahead of time. In this case in the first session, the first heading and its paragraphs can be read aloud by a study member or the study leader. Then, stop for discussion. Continue this process for the remainder of that session. Near the end of the session, assign the rest of the headings in session one and all of the headings in session two to be read by the study members by the time of the second session. Start the second session by reading the titles of the headings that remained from session one and ask for comments on any one of those remaining headings that a class member may wish to discuss. Then, do the rest of session two according to the described plan above.

Present as a Sunday School Study for adults or older youth. This reading may be useful as an adult or older youth Sunday School Study. All class members should have their own copy of the reading. This is an easy study to present. The class leader should be

carefully and prayerfully selected. One heading and its paragraphs can be read aloud by a class member or the class leader. Then, stop for discussion. Continue this process to go through the total reading. Longer headings may have to be divided into two or more parts with a break between the parts for discussion. Make an effort to not let one class member dominate the discussion. Keep the discussion orderly and allow time for each to make a discussion contribution if desired. Open and close the class with prayer. A brief reading from the Bible and a few meditative comments may also be used to open the class if desired. The overall preparatory Scripture for the study is Psalm 130 and Luke 1:68-70. Overall background Scripture for this study is First Corinthians 2:2 and First Corinthians 15:3-4. Optional at home further study for class members would be to check out all of the Scripture references in this document and use a concordance to find references whose location in the Bible is not given. The primary Scriptures surrounding the thief's story are Matthew chapters 26-28, Mark chapters 14-16, Luke 21:37-38 and chapters 22-24, Luke continues in Acts chapters 1-2, and John 10:19-42 and chapters 11-21. ... For a rapid Sunday School Study, it can be presented in six classes like the Study for Lent.

Present in its entirety to a group all on one occasion. If this reading is read in its entirety to a group all on one occasion, take a break at the places marked in the reading and ask people to please stand up a few minutes at these breaks. ... Time frame for the presentation would likely be 8:30 A.M. – 4:00 P.M. with one hour for lunch. This time schedule allows a little bit of time in case things get off schedule. Please do everything you can to keep the presentation on schedule. Stay on schedule or you will have a mess! Give people a two minutes warning as breaks near their end so that the break will only take the correct amount of time. Place a computer made sign by each door to the performance hall stating the following announcement and then announce no eating or drinking in the performance hall especially if it is a Church Sanctuary! There are some places marked in the reading that will be assigned to the people to read at home instead of presenting it that day because of scheduling considerations. Be sure to tell the people how to get a copy of the reading in order to do the assigned reading - - the handout gives the web address. In your publicity tell people when the presentation starts and when it will be over. Also in your publicity and on the publicity poster tell people the plans for lunch in the "Comments" line. Lunch should be something that does not involve going through a line because of the amount of time that takes. Do something for lunch such as a packaged lunch or everyone pack their own lunch in the interest of time. Beware of serving nuts in food at a group meal unless there is a warning notice because nuts are fatal to some people. In the opening logistic statements be sure to tell people how to obtain a copy of the reading if they desire one. Ask people to please turn off phones, watches, beepers, and anything else that could make a sound or vibration to disturb you or others. Tell them where the rest rooms are in the building. Announce everything in this paragraph and check to see that you have prepared and done the things in the paragraph at the beginning if Appendix II entitled "General Comments on presenting the reading". Welcome the people and ask them to look over the handouts during this first 15 minutes. Begin the class on time regardless of how many people have arrived. The reading needs to be started by 15 minutes after the beginning of the session (8:45 A.M. if you started at 8:30 A.M.) Do not run overtime at the end of the day! ... The reader

should be able to speak at about the speed of a newscaster with clarity or at least as fast as telephone conversation to keep things on schedule (at least 126 words per minute). The reader should move along but with clarity. Use a mike in a large room. ... Do everything you can to prevent a schedule disaster. In case of a schedule disaster, assign the remainder of the reading to be read at home by the people in attendance but to conclude do read pages 105, 106, and 107 starting with the section “The Prayer Of Jesus”. ... This is a formal presentation and there should be no comments by the reader and no discussion by those in attendance.

Thank you for presenting, “Is The Cross Of Jesus Christ Central To Human History?”

That's The Way I Understand It - Series

Presenting

**Is The Cross of Jesus Christ
Central To Human History?**

artistic/educational setting

by Daniel Hooke

- A Presentation of the words only to the musical dramatic reading “Is The Cross Of Jesus Christ Central To Human History?” is a musical dramatic reading examining the Bible and Bible issues including the issue of “is God a rewarder? Bible interpretation based on the teachings of the famous Jesus of Nazareth.
- **Story setting at Lent/Easter.**
- Uses “The seven last words of Christ”.
- Uses the story of the thief on the cross beside Jesus. The thief on the cross bad-mouthed Jesus severely. Then, in less than a few hours he converted. What happened? Why did the thief convert?

REGISTRATION

Date & Hours:

Place & Room:

Comments:

Register by:

Contact:

That's The Way I Understand It - Series

IS THE CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST CENTRAL TO HUMAN HISTORY?

By Daniel Hooke

Movement I - Introductory Recitative

A Thief Considers The Question
Meet The Thief
The Thief Meets Jesus Of Nazareth
Is Jesus The Messiah, The Christ?
The Works Of Jesus
Jesus Falls Under The Cross
Scriptures Fulfilled
The Case Against Jesus
Jesus Speaks To The Women

The Thief Resists The Cross
Honor Me And I Will Honor You
The Thief Rejects The Cross
The Place Of The Crucifixion
Mary's Difficult Morning
Jesus Refuses Drugs
The Crucifixions Begin
The Thief Ponders His Own Death

Movement II - Jesus Of Nazareth Crucified

Part I - The Morning

The Cross Of Jesus Raised
Jesus Makes A Striking Statement
Jesus Talks To God
They Gamble For His Clothes
Jesus Of Nazareth King Of The Jews
The Two Thieves Crucified
The Mocking Of Jesus
The Ultimate Proof Of The Resurrection

God Loved The Thief
The Thief Does An Important Thing
The Noisy, Milling Around Crowd
Mary And John Bid Jesus Farewell
Jesus Provides
The Thief And His Thinking
The Second Coming Of The Christ
The Thief And His Thinking

Part II - The Afternoon

Darkness
Jesus Feels Forsaken By God
God Wants To Dwell With Us
Sin And A Holy God
Jesus And Our Sin
The Thief Couldn't Handle It
The Thief's Only Hope
The Thief Uses The Bible With God
Is Jesus The Great King? Is Jesus The Son Of God?
Why Would God Want Me?
Why Would Jesus Want Me In His Kingdom?
The Important Thing Is An Important Choice
Will He Forgive Me? Will He Love Me?
Jesus And The Thief
Evil Forces Attack
Nature Reacts To Jesus Dying
Saints Arose
The Temple Veil Is Torn
The Cross Is Important
A Soldier Says, "Son Of God!"

The Thief Dies
Jesus Is Pierced
Acquaintances Of Jesus
People Return Home
The Three Crosses
Eyewitnesses For Us
Strength Made Perfect In Weakness
Not Perfect But Perfectly Holy
Dealing With Sin
Jesus -- Man And God
Is It I?
Jesus Thirsts
Jesus Has Power Over Death
Jesus Finishes His Work
The Cross And The Thief
Jesus And Forgiveness
Jesus Dies
Jesus And God
Listen To Him!

Movement III - Closing Monologue

The Resurrection Of Jesus Christ
The Cover-up
Crucified And Risen
The Ascension
The Day Of The Lord
Worldwide Reaction
Kinds Of Knowledge
Jesus Endorses The Bible
Observe All Things
Who Is Jesus?
Support For Jesus
Jesus And Life

Good-bye To Our thief
Human History Swept
Jesus And His Church
Take My Yoke And Learn Of Me
The Prayer Of Jesus
Is The Cross Central?
Jesus Christ King of Kings
Joining The Kingdom
Bible - Cross - Christ - Kingdom - Church
Listen Directly To Jesus
This Man Is The Son Of God!
Amen

Preparatory Scripture From The Bible
Psalm 130 and Luke 1:68-70

Out of the depths have I cried unto You, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice: let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication.

If You, Lord, would mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.

I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait, and in His Word do I hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.

Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenty of redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all His iniquities.

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David; as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began.

Background Scripture From The Bible

From the New Testament New Covenant part of the Bible, the book of First Corinthians, chapter 2, verse 2: “For I determined not to know any thing among you, except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”

And, also from the same New Testament book of First Corinthians; chapter 15, verses 3 and 4: “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures: ”

* * * * *

Please turn off phones, watches, beepers, and anything else that could make a sound, light, or vibration to disturb you or others. Thanks.

See the website danielhookemusic.com for other Bible related documents.

That's The Way I Understand It - Series

See the website danielhookemusic.com

Concerning Music Documents in "That's The Way I Understand It - Series": Read all of the music documents to get a picture of what has worked for the writer.

Concerning Religious Documents in "That's The Way I Understand It - Series":

These religious documents are **An Advocate** for interpreting the Bible the way Jesus of Nazareth interprets the Bible. Jesus will honor the Bible if we use it the way He interprets it. ... Jesus our Savior believed the Bible as He interpreted it; so we know that what the Bible says about diligently seeking God and Jesus will be rewarded and honored in some way. Hebrews 11:6; John 14:15, 21; 15:4-6; I Sam. 2:30.

Bible Lessons For Those Who Want To Be Better Informed About This Famous Book

Do you know what the Bible really says and what it offers? Do you know what are some of the main issues in a Bible interpretation position that is **An Advocate** for interpreting the Bible the way Jesus of Nazareth interprets the Bible and what kind of Biblical understanding it offers? Requires a few minutes a day of reading. Uses documents from **That's The Way I Understand It - Series**. [Another approach to the materials in **Studies In Biblical Christianity, A Self-Directed Course Of Study**.]

THE BIBLICAL GOD IS A REWARDER

Are You Informed About Where Biblical Christians Are Coming From As You Make Decisions?

Bible Rewards from God.

A Case For Art Music To Be The Core Of The Church Music Program

Persuasion to help us not to lose the great depth of Worship that is possible with a particular kind of music assuming that it is properly done.

An Easy Bible Reading Plan

Do you know what the Bible really says? With a few minutes a day you can read the entire Bible. The readings are divided into episodes to make your reading more logical and easier.

Encouraging Hope For The Adult Beginning Harpist

Encouragement for adult harpist. Discussion of musicianship for any musician and for many who are not musicians.

The Essence Of Teaching

Provides the professional teacher or the parent as teacher with a momentary reflection on the natural process of teaching hopefully with a more comprehensive, helpful look at teaching.

The Welcoming Committee For The Second Coming

A study in Biblical prophecy and the end times of earth time. **{Help to save you time in figuring out Bible Prophecy.}**

How To Sing At Sight For The Singer And Instrumentalist (How To Hear Printed Music In Your Mind)

Just what the title says. For the professional and the amateur. Get a copy of this document for each member of your performance organization especially if it is a singing group. Drill on it at the beginning of each rehearsal should pay good dividends.

That's The Way I Understand It - Series (continued)

Instant Sunday School – A Ten Year Verse-By-Verse Trip Through The Bible

Requires very little preparation time for a person to lead this group study. All of the work is already done for you. Thus, it is an easy Bible Study to present. This Bible Study goes through the Bible verse-by-verse alternating from time to time between the Testaments. This study can also be done as an individual study. Please see the document for more details and uses. Do you know what the Bible really says to help you discern error and grow? *"Blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it." Luke 11:28*

IS THE CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST CENTRAL TO HUMAN HISTORY?

Has anyone ever told you about Biblical Christianity? Do you know some of the issues about the Bible and Bible interpretation including the issue of is God a rewarder? Uses "The seven last words of Jesus Christ". Uses the story of the thief on the cross beside Jesus. The thief on the cross bad-mouthed Jesus severely. Then, in less than a few hours he converted. What happened? Why did the thief convert? Sinners can be forgiven and redeemed by God. An Advocate for interpreting the Bible the way Jesus of Nazareth interprets the Bible. **{Help to save you time in figuring out the Bible.}**

A Layered Aesthetic Interpretation Of Music For The Performer, Composer, And Listener

A new look at music in human existence. For anyone who makes music at any level and for anyone's enjoyment of music. Not as complex as the title might imply. The principles in this document have application to all of the arts.

A Mathematical And Computer Analysis Method For Catching A Sniper, Etc.

An inexpensive, simple to use tool for law enforcement to identify the law breaker in serial, multiple incident law breaking situations. For law enforcement professionals.

The Pattern Of Prime Numbers

Plus A Prime Numbers Formula

The Pattern of Prime Numbers. For the mathematician. Contains information on macro writing thus making it also for the computer person.

Studies In Biblical Christianity

A Self-Directed Course Of Study

Provides a Picture Study, a Linear Study, and Additional Studies that should go far in giving you the opportunity to examine the explanations, clarifications, and reasons in the view of a Bible interpretation position that is **An Advocate for interpreting the Bible the way Jesus of Nazareth interprets the Bible** to see some of the issues in Biblical Christianity for an introduction or review. Uses documents from **That's The Way I Understand It - Series**. [Another approach to the materials in **Bible Lessons For Those Who Want To Be Better Informed About This Famous Book.**]

A Quick Look At Biblical Christianity

Do you know why Jesus of Nazareth is important? Do you know what He claims His purpose is? Do you know how He supports and interprets the Bible? Compare your answers with this document. Many people who know that Jesus is important have never really investigated Biblical Christianity. Many people are restrained by peer pressure (both social and professional), threat of death, etc. from investigating Jesus of Nazareth or from investigating Biblical Christianity. This is a good document to use to begin your investigation of Biblical Christianity. This document could have also been titled "The Intellectual Basis Of Belief And The Belief Basis Of Intellect".