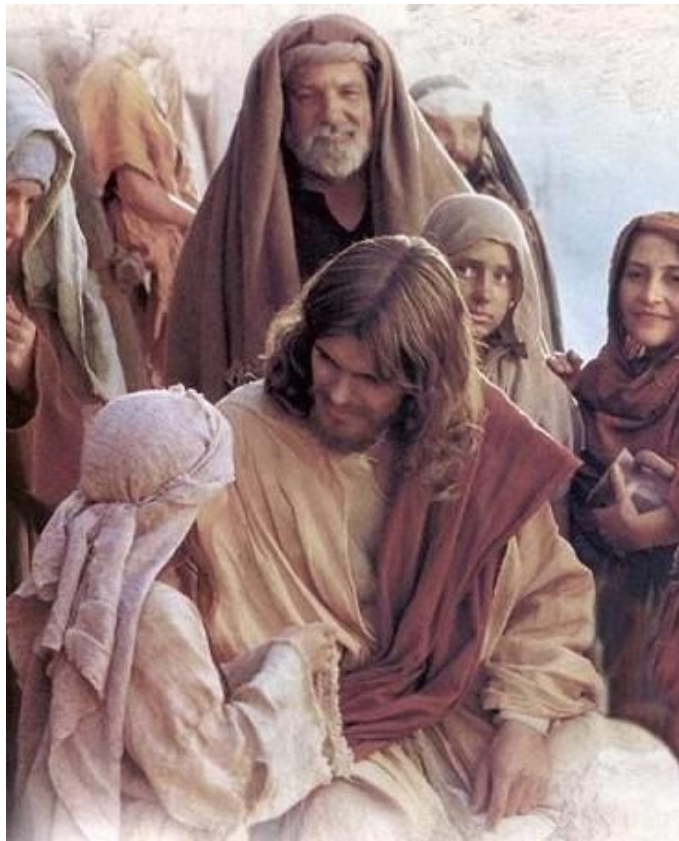


teachings, healings and miracles



Pastor Tânia Cristina Giachetti
Ministério Seara Ágape

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TEACHINGS, HEALINGS AND MIRACLES



Ministério Seara Ágape
Estudo Bíblico Evangélico

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I thank the Lord for all the miracles He has performed in my life; salvation was the main one. I thank Him for His mercy on me, touching me in the most difficult moments and seemingly without solution, awakening my faith and making me wish more of Him.

This book is dedicated to all those afflicted and contrite in heart on Earth, who believe in the Son of God and His power to perform all sorts of miracles, and right now need to be healed in some area of their lives. Let be done according to their faith!

“Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.’” (Mk. 10: 27 – NIV)

Introduction

This book came after the guidance of the Holy Spirit for me to write some texts of teaching about some episodes of Jesus' ministry, where He healed, taught and performed great miracles of deliverance and revelation of His power over the forces of nature and the natural laws, for example, in the multiplication of loaves and fish and in the resurrections of the dead (Lazarus, the widow's son at Nain, Jairus' daughter). His word is still alive through the centuries and always relevant for all the situations we have to go through. We can see ourselves in every character that had a deep encounter with Jesus, and also be ministered in our illnesses and human weaknesses, finding out that there is always a way out when we seek the solution of our problems in the right place: *in Him, Jesus, the owner of the miracle.*

I hope you may be taught by the Spirit of God and can find out that in every situation of your life there is a lesson that leads you to growth and the deep knowledge of Him. It is your faith that will put the divine power into action in your favor. The apostle Paul wrote in Rom. 8: 28-30, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified." All things work together for our good. Jesus confirmed that faith was the primary factor in the healing of all who got it. He said, "Go in peace, your faith has saved you."

May the Lord bless you.

Tânia Cristina

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Notes:

- Words or phrases enclosed in brackets [/] or parenthesis (), in italics, were placed by me, in most cases, to explain the biblical text, although some verses already contain them [not in italics].
- The version used here is the New Revised Standard Version, NRSV – 1989 (1995)
- NIV = New International Version (it will be used in brackets in some verses to make it easier for readers to understand).

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1

The healing of the paralytic at Bethesda
Jn. 5: 1-8



The healing of the paralytic at Bethesda

Reference text: Jn. 5: 1-18

Note: This study was written around 2010-2011 with another purpose, another anointing, extracting learning for us. But now in 2025 I discovered other information that I think is important to add to the text.

“After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Bethesda, which has five porticoes...



... In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed—[and they waited for the moving of the waters. From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease he had – *Some less important manuscripts bring this verse – note NIV*]. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, ‘Do you want to be made well?’ The sick man answered him, ‘Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Stand up, take your mat and walk.’ At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, ‘It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.’ But he answered them, ‘The man who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your mat and walk.’ They asked him, ‘Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take it up and walk?’ Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, ‘See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.’ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is still working, and I also am working.’ For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the Sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.”

Here we have important lessons:

1) *When we are sick, whether of body, soul or spirit, we must seek a place where God's mercy can flow and touch us with healing;* and the best place to achieve this is, theoretically, the House of God. *Bethesda* in Hebrew means *House of Mercy*. The paralytic had faith to be healed, so he sought help in the right place; however, it seemed there was no mercy there, but a competition between those who needed help. Each man sought help for himself; nobody seemed to want to help each other to be healed as well, even because just the first who arrived at the water was blessed. Many presume that Jesus healed only this paralytic because he alone had the true faith to be healed, but if others did not believe that the waters would cure them, they would not be disputing so much the healing through it. Therefore, the faith was not the crucial point that made Jesus heal only this man. Perhaps what most called His attention was his humility, patience and perseverance to exercise his faith for so many years or for being the only one there that, by the own state of weakness, had killed the competitive spirit of the flesh inside himself. It may be that only he knew to wait on God or, on the other hand, his soul was so hopeless that he did not believe in healing anymore because of the great obstacle he saw before his eyes: the crowd. Therefore, faith is a question mark in this miracle of Jesus at Bethesda. Anyway, the man was there and was needy. Jesus went by and had mercy on him. He was the only one who exercised mercy to the paralytic who was there; not men. No one ever helped him to reach the water. Another thought comes to our mind is that his case could not be so simple, only physical; however, he needed a deeper touch from God, because the disease was in the soul and spirit and the man needed the divine forgiveness (Jesus said, "See, you have been made well! *Do not sin any more*, so that nothing worse happens to you"). Who knows, the Lord had allowed him come to that point and suffer for all those years to be able to value humility and dependence on Him! So, another lesson here is: *when we are sick and needy, we should seek God's mercy in Jesus, confessing our sins and asking for His deliverance.*

2) *Sin paralyzes us*, for it binds us to Satan's chains. The Master warned him to sin no more, and this means that something had prevented him from living a normal life. If he continued this practice, the worse could succeed to him, as Jesus said. For example: not to attain salvation; in other words: to die. Sin prevents us from living a blessed life, it brings sickness in body, soul and spirit, for it separates us from God and leads us to death.

3) *Faith goes together with action.* The apostle James tells us that faith without works is dead. Assuming that the man had real faith in God and in healing, he could not reach the blessing because he had no action. Because he was paralyzed and unable to get help from somewhere, he couldn't move toward the miracle. Thus, when we do not put our faith into practice, that is, when we do not act according to it, we cannot have the totality of what we are seeking. Perhaps, by feeling totally helpless and unable to move, even to crawl to the water, is that the paralytic went through this suffering for so many years. If we remember the woman with the flow of blood who was healed by Jesus, we can see a difference between her way of thinking and the man's. Both experienced a great impotence due to the disease (he, due paralysis, and she, due the extreme anemia that tormented her for twelve years); however, the woman had not yet seen herself completely powerless to get what she wanted. She tried with all her strength, also without help from anyone, facing the same way the barrier of the crowd, probably crawling, but putting her faith into action. In her mind, if only she touched the garment of Jesus she would be healed. This type of proactive attitude was missing in the paralytic at Bethesda. He could have crawled if he wanted; however, the only answer that he gave Jesus was, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up." It is true that the barriers were terrible for him to face, but his soul seemed

not to have determination to put the faith of his spirit into action anymore, and he felt dependent on someone. Anyway, Jesus had mercy on him and healed him.

4) Another thing that draws our attention is the presence of the *angel* stirring the waters. *Angel* in Hebrew has the meaning of *messenger*, and is also a name frequently used for the *prophet*. Although verse 4 does not appear in the ancient manuscripts, something happened in that pool of Bethesda so that so many sick sought the cure; even because verse 7 is present in all the ancient manuscripts, and the man mentioned the fact of the waters being stirred up. What matters symbolically to us is the word ‘angel’, ‘messenger.’ This way, it is a messenger of the Lord (a prophet) who stirs the waters (*the Word, the Holy Spirit*) so that His anointing descends and the needy achieve healing. The paralytic was waiting for an angel to stir the waters so that he could be healed. This is what happens with a person who knows he needs a cure, but is not sure that the word of God in his own mouth has the power to break the spiritual barriers and act. He is dependent on a servant of the Lord to receive a blessing that is his; he hopes that the faith of other person comes to perform the miracle he needs. He waits that others make war for him, instead of going to the source of the miracle, Jesus, the Word, the living water. Therefore, the lesson here is: *we should not wait for others to do a work that is up to us to do. We mustn't wait for someone to lead us to the truth. What we must to do is let Jesus touch us and heal us by our faith, and seek Him by our own will and initiative.*

5) *Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath*. This has a very deep meaning for us. By the Law of Moses, the Jews could not do any work on Saturday (Sabbath; Shabbat = rest, cessation or interruption) because keeping this day as a day of rest was a sign of respect to God and compliance with His commandments. However, what God really meant was to rest from the secular work that they performed as a source of survival so that they might be free to have more fellowship with Him, to worship Him and wait for His help. Thus, they transformed a divine blessing into human religiosity that prevented them from reaching the true understanding of God, including from accomplishing His work, that is, to do good to the neighbor. That's why Jesus condemned this strict practice so many times, showing them that having compassion for others was allowed even on Saturday, for it meant to do the work of God, not the flesh's, which was held selfishly in the other six days of the week. In other words, when God tells us to keep one day of the week for Him, whether Saturday or Sunday, it means a rest *from* the things of the world and a rest *in* the things of God. *The Sabbath, the Rest*, also has the meaning of resting in Him in what we cannot do. When Jesus says that He was ‘lord of the Sabbath’ (Matt. 12: 8; Mk. 2: 28; Lk. 6: 5; Lk. 13: 15), He meant that, as God, He had done the spiritual rules, but He was not bound to any human rule that prevented His Spirit from acting. As a man He respected the Sabbath, not worrying about the things of the flesh; however, going to the synagogue to worship the Father, to do His work and teach the people. As lesson for us remains the idea that *God does not want religiosity but the true faith of who knows how to rest in Him and trust in His guidance.*

6) *God continues working, shaping His creation until today through our lives*. In 1 Cor. 3: 9, Paul says: “For we are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building.” The Lord created the world, but the man fell into sin, so He continues to work in our soul to restore the original perfection that was lost. He uses us to heal, to deliver, to teach and love our fellow men. That's why we are His co-workers to rebuild the walls destroyed by the devastation of the devil. Our heart is the land, the field where His seeds of life are planted and must flourish so that we can ‘return to Eden.’

7) *The word of God heals us from any disease*. In the text above we can read: “The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease

he had.” The word of God heals us from any kind of disease and trouble; just put our faith into action.

The Hebrew and Greek words and the biblical versions

Let’s talk a little about the biblical text, especially about verse 4, which is not in the original manuscripts, and also about the Greek words and the different versions of verse 2, which have caused some confusion in the interpretation.

The NRSV version says in Jn. 5: 1-2: “After this [*the healing of an official’s son in Galilee*] there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Bethesda [some manuscripts, Bethsaida], which has five porticoes.”

NIV writes: “Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda [Some manuscripts: Bethzatha; other manuscripts Bethsaida] and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades.”

Some manuscripts write the name ‘Bethzatha’ or ‘Bethsaida’ (not to be confused with Bethsaida of Galilee). Βηθζαθά (Beth-zatha = בית חדתא), is a derivative form of Bezetha (Hebr.: בית זיתא), a neighborhood north of Jerusalem.

Strong’s Concordance writes the Greek word for ‘pool’ as ‘kolumbétrhā’, κολυμβήθρα, Strong #2861, which means (lit: a diving or swimming place), a pool. A diving-place, i.e. Pond for bathing (or swimming).

The Greek word for ‘by the Sheep’ or ‘near the Sheep’ is ‘probatikos’, προβατικός, Strong #4262, which means: relating to sheep (probaton), sheep (market); (a gate) through which they were led into Jerusalem (KJV with Strong).

And for the word Bethesda, Strong’s Concordance writes Béthesda (‘Beth hasda’ or ‘beth hased’), Βηθεσδά, Strong #964, Beth-esda, a pool in Jerusalem; of Aramaic origin (בית חסד), and which means: house of kindness, house of mercy or house of grace. The Hebrew word Hesedh or Chesedh (חסד) means mercy, loving kindness, steadfast love, grace, kindness, benevolence, beauty, favor, good deed, pity.

In Nehemiah’s time, the Sheep Gate in the northern wall of the city of Jerusalem, after the return of the exiles, served as a passage for sheep to the Second Temple. And the Jewish Encyclopedia actually refers to a sheep gate only in Nehemiah’s time, in the northern wall of the city of Jerusalem. It was probably destroyed in the Hellenistic period (especially by Antiochus IV Epiphanes), as were the city walls, so the expression ‘Sheep Gate’ described in Jn. 5: 2 was not actually written by the apostle John but rather added later.

The New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE) writes: “Now there is in Jerusalem at the Sheep [Gate] a pool called in Hebrew Bethesda, with five porticoes.” And it comments: “There is no noun with Sheep. “Gate” is supplied on the grounds that there must have been a gate in the NE wall of the temple area where animals for sacrifice were brought in; cf. Neh. 3: 1, 32; Neh. 12: 39.” Hebrew: more precisely, Aramaic. Bethesda: preferred to variants “Be(th)zatha” and “Bethsaida”; bêṭ-’ešdatayîn is given as the name of a double pool northeast.

In KJV it’s written: “Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep **market** a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches..”

And in 21st Century King James Version it's written: "Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep **market** a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches."

In Stuttgart Bible Greek Textus Receptus (NT) it's written sheepfold, not gate: "Now there is in Jerusalem by the **sheepfold** the chosen Jewish pool Bethesda, having five porches." [εστιν δε εν τοις ιεροσολυμοις επι τη προβατικη κολυμβηθρα η επιλεγομενη εβραιστι βηθεσδα πεντε στοας εχουσα].

Depending on the Bible version (as you saw above), the name of the place as being near the 'Sheep Gate' may merely be a reference to the Sheep Gate of Nehemiah's time, which was to the north of the city and was the place through which sheep entered the temple. But by the time of Jesus, it no longer existed. We can think of it as a place where sheep were marketed.

Historical and archaeological information:

Location

Although the specific name "Pool of Bethesda" is not explicitly mentioned in the writings of Flavius Josephus, herefers to the area where the pool was located, near the sheep market in Jerusalem. Josephus said that the neighborhood of Bezetha was located north of the Antonia Fortress and was later walled. Bezetha (Hebrew: בית זיתא), according to Josephus, means 'The New City' and was a suburb of Jerusalem during the late Second Temple period. It was located to the north and northwest of the Temple, built opposite the Antonia Fortress [Josephus, War of the Jews v.iv. § 2]. This description aligns with the identified location of the Pool of Bethesda. In Josephus' time, Bezetha was built on a higher hill than the Antonia Fortress, across the partially excavated valley, with the purpose of securing the new neighborhood from the Roman soldiers residing in the Fortress.

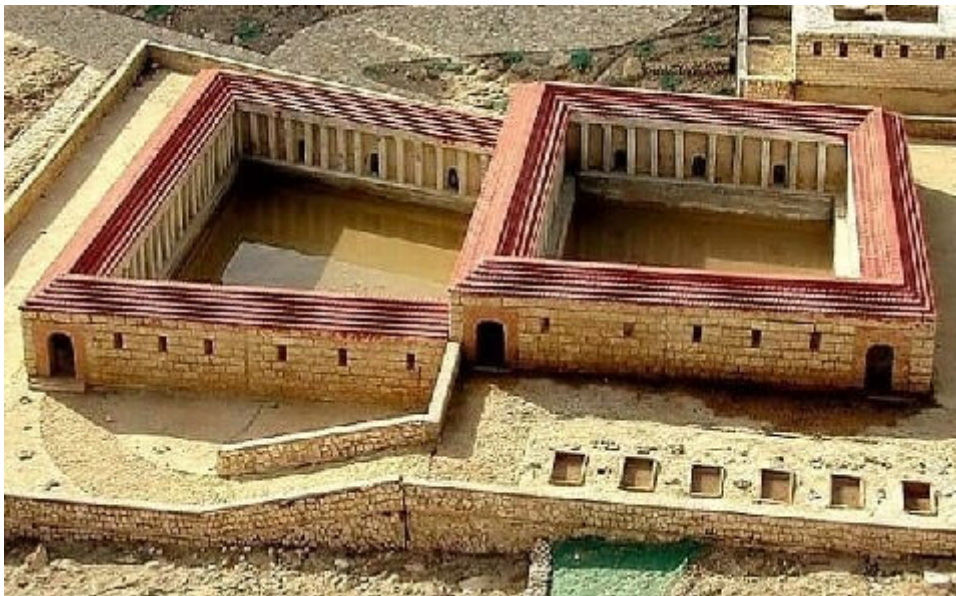


The Pool of Bethesda

In archaeological excavations carried out in the 19th century, Conrad Schick discovered a large pool in the area mentioned by Flavius Josephus, which he identified as the Pool of Bethesda. Further archaeological excavations in 1964 discovered the second of the two large pools and the dam between them, the remains of Byzantine and Crusader churches, Hadrian's Temple to Asclepius or Serapis, and the small healing pools of an Asclepeion (ancient 'hospitals' dedicated to Asclepius). The Byzantine church was found to have been built directly above Hadrian's Temple and contained the healing pools.

Asclepius (in Greek) or Aesculapius (in Latin) was the god of healing and well-being. Serapis was a deity in Hellenistic-Egyptian culture who united the Egyptian gods Apis (the god of the earth, who held the life force) and Osiris (the god of the underworld). His initial name in Egyptian was Userhapi or Osiris-Apis, and was later called Serapis. He was generally considered to be the god of the underworld, healer, and protector of distressed, providing an asylum in his temple. He was represented as a mature man, with a long beard and long hair, with a basket on his head (a calathus basket, the sacred wreath of the mysteries, symbol of abundance and fertility) and holding the staff of Asclepius or a scepter (according to other sources).

It is not true that this pool was used to wash sheep, as popular legend claims, even because one of the pools served as a water supply and both were very deep (13 meters). Perhaps we can imagine that the six small pools we see in the images of Bethesda, outside the bathing pools, were a place to wash sheep, since that place also seems to have been a sheep market, from the reference in the KJV ('market') and the Greek Receptus Text ('sheepfold').



Images of the two pools of Bethesda and the small tanks outside

Some scholars believed that this was a pagan site, but recent archaeological work at the site (1964) suggests that it was not a site dedicated to the Roman, Egyptian and Greek gods (Aesculapius, Serapis and Fortuna) until the Romans rebuilt Jerusalem as Aelia Capitolina in the 2nd century AD under Hadrian (r. 117-138 AD), when a pagan

healing sanctuary developed slightly east of the Pool of Bethesda. According to some sources, in the 1st century BC, natural caves east of the two pools were converted into small baths, as part of an Asclepeion.



Lower Pool of Bethesda – archaeological find (east view)

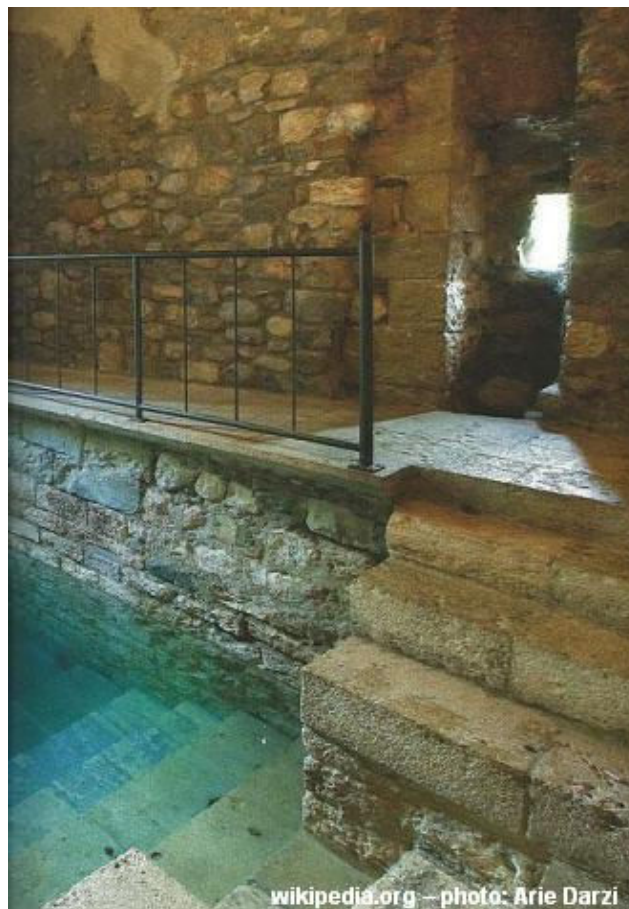
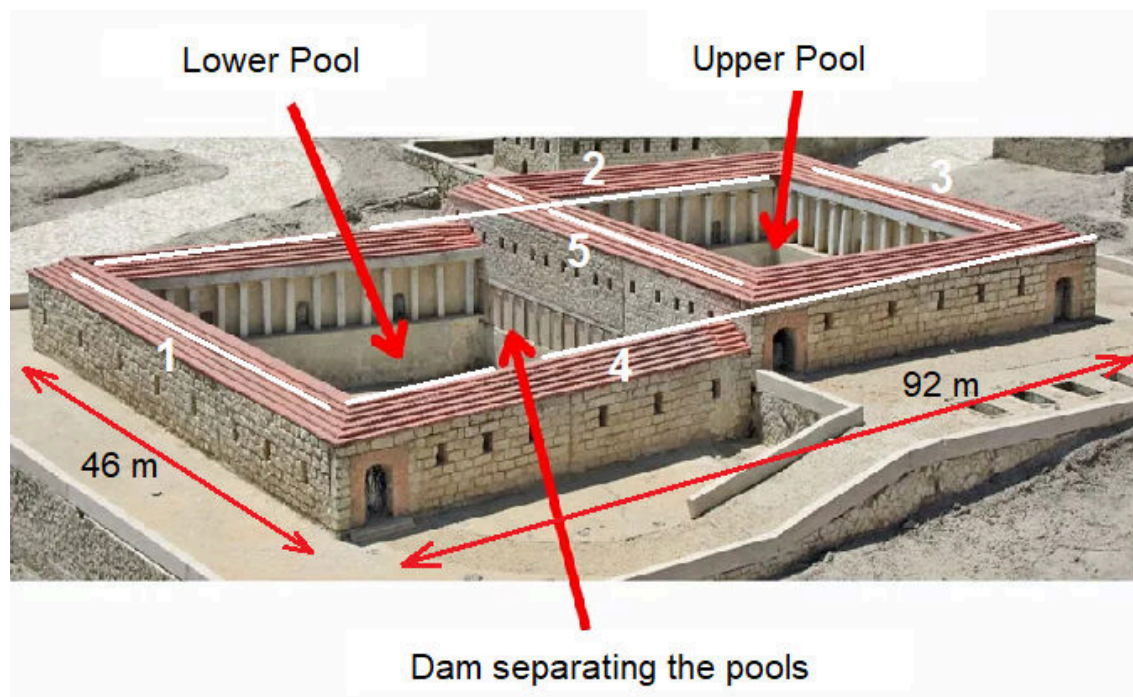


Image above: A mikvah in Besalu, Catalonia, Spain (wikipedia.org – photo: Arie Darzi). Note the steps down to the water collection

The Pool of Bethesda mentioned in Jn. 5:2 has an upper and lower pool. Its reference to five covered colonnades (some Bible versions write ‘porches’ or porticoes or pavilions or ‘stoa’), is due to the fact that all around it was surrounded by four pavilions and dividing the two pools, the upper and the lower, was another portico with colonnades. According to the Jewish Mishnah (the oral Law written in the 2nd century AD), Bethesda was in fact a Jewish ritual purification pool (a mikveh), where the upper pool was an ‘otzer’, that is, a reservoir for collecting rainwater. Thus, this upper pool provided clean water for the lower pool where ritual baths were performed before people entered the Temple. According to the prescriptions of the Mishnah, the water for a mikveh must be “living water,” that is, clean water and preferably from a natural stream or moving water (such as rain), in contrast to that from a well or cistern, which comes from a water table, thus a type of still, static, “non-living” water.

The Pool of Bethesda was approximately 46 meters by 92 meters, representing a double reservoir, found during excavations in 1888 and a depth of 13 meters [wikipedia.org], in the style of a mikveh, with steps. Other sources say that the northwest wall measured 66 meters, the northeast measured 60 meters, so it was not a perfect rectangle. It is not known whether the cubit used at that time for Bethesda was the common cubit of 44.4 cm or the sacred cubit of 51.8 cm (Ezekiel’s or Mosaic cubit), but if we take an average of 50 cm for example, and knowing that a mikveh has about 3 cubits of water depth (enough water to cover the entire body of an average-sized person), we would have 1.5 m of water depth in Bethesda and the other 11.5 meters would be distributed in the steps. Other mikveh were used by people before entering the Temple, such as those south of the Temple, in front of the Huldah Gates.



The 5 porticoes of the Pool of Bethesda and their measures

In addition to the rock-cut and plastered cisterns that were a common feature of many homes, the inhabitants of Jerusalem also used public storage tanks. These included the Pools of Bethesda and the Pool of Israel, north of the Temple Mount, and Hezekiah's Pool (or 'Tower Pool'), north of the Tower of David on the west side of the city, near Herod's palace. To the southeast and east were the Gihon Spring and the Pool of Siloam. The pools north of the Temple Mount probably also served the Temple, and their water was used to wash away the blood from the altar and courtyard, as well as to water the sacrificial cattle. There was another well that supplied the city, the Serpent's Pool, to the southwest of the city, but nothing is known about it. It is also not known exactly when the pools were built, but they were certainly enlarged during the Hasmonean period due to the increasing need for water in Jerusalem.

In the image below: The Pool of Israel

The Pool of Israel was a public cistern located on the north-eastern corner of the Temple. The Romans are believed to have erected this structure as a water reservoir and a protection to the northern wall of the Temple Mount. It was at the south of the Pool of Bethesda and the western side of the Kidron Valley. It fell into disuse as a reservoir by the mid-19th century, and because of waste it was and repurposed as a vegetable garden. In 1934, the area was filled in and is now recognized as el-Ghazali Square. This reservoir was once the largest one in Jerusalem, and played a crucial role in the city's rainwater storage system for centuries.



Moving of the Waters

We saw at the beginning that the Bible writes in v. 4: “[and they waited for the moving of the waters. From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease he had].”

KJV writes: “an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water; whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.” This verse is not in the original manuscripts.

Ulrich Von Wahlde, a NT scholar, suggested that the agitation of the water could be explained by the movement of water from the upper pool to the lower pool through a sluice gate (a floodgate) that could be opened between the two pools; thus, water would flow into the southern pool from the water supply of the higher pool to the north.

Some interpreters conclude that perhaps this verse is an explanatory note added later. But it probably describes a popular belief of the time, regardless of the references made to Asclepius. After all, the verse says: “**The first one** into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease he had,” which would theoretically invalidate God’s mercy. Why would He send His angel from time to time to heal just one sick person? This should have caused anxiety in all of them, even more so in people who had been sick for so many years like this man.

The Pool of Bethesda was large because of the number of people (Jn. 5: 13). Thus, the water likely became very dirty and contaminated. Therefore, a large infusion of clean water was introduced into the pool through the sluice gate of the upper pool by moving the water from the mikveh. Pilgrims from Jerusalem flocked to the Pool of Bethesda and the Pool of Siloam to purify themselves in these public mikva’ot and sometimes to seek healing.

So, if the pool in question was not a pagan healing center, but a Jewish purification pool, we learn something important about the man’s beliefs. He was not seeking the power of a pagan god of healing, but he believed in the miraculous power of God, whether it was through the mysticism of his mind or the mind of that generation or through the genuine faith of his spirit. The fact is that he was seeking his healing and believed that God could work in a different way than conventional, independent of rules, different from the way that the religious stipulated. From what we can perceive, this was a collective thought, not just his, because the others also believed that the bubbling of the waters could favor them (Jn. 5: 7).

And if there were other Jews there to rebuke him and ask who had healed him, it is a sign that they were all Jews and that this place was known to the leaders as a place of ritual purification. They also believed in healing and were there not to deny the healing, but to judge him for carrying his bed on the Sabbath (Jn. 5: 9-10), as well as to accuse Jesus of healing on the Sabbath (Jn. 5: 16; 18). The healing itself and God’s power to heal the man were not at stake, but rather the legalism of accusing the man of doing what was not permitted on the Sabbath and of accusing Jesus of doing it on the Sabbath and still claiming to be the Son of God (Jn. 5: 16-18).

In the culture of Israel and its symbolism, the purification ritual meant a restoration of life and of the wholeness of a person, in body, soul and spirit. With its clear waters, the Mikvah was and still is for the Jews a powerful symbol of life and rebirth. Therefore, why accuse or judge this man’s attitude in trying to achieve his healing in this way, in the water that was “alive” and that brought the power of God? Many people use Jesus’ phrase (“See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you” – Jn. 5: 14) as an explanation that the paralytic was a desperate and superstitious Jew who had sought help from a pagan god and that Jesus was warning him against idolatry. In this case, he would have committed the sin of seeking help that was forbidden to him. But hasn’t archaeology confirmed that there was a purification pool (a mikveh) there, with many steps, typical of the Jewish religion? And what were the legalists doing there too, keeping an eye on everything? In a pagan place?

It doesn't make sense. Furthermore, was the sin of the man that Jesus was referring to, being there seeking healing, or the sin that had paralyzed him for 38 years?

2

The healing of the blind man at Jericho
Mk. 10: 46-52; Lk. 18: 35-43; Matt. 20: 29-34



The healing of the blind man at Jericho

Reference texts: Mk. 10: 46-52; Lk. 18: 35-43; Matt. 20: 29-34

“They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho (Mk. 10: 46; Matt. 20: 29), Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside [Lk. 18: 35 says: “As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging”]. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Jesus stood still and said, ‘Call him here.’ And they called the blind man, saying to him, ‘Take heart; get up, he is calling you.’ So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ The blind man said to him, ‘My teacher, let me see again.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your faith has made you well.’ Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.”

This is one of the passages where Jesus healed a blind man in a different manner from that He healed the others: in Mark 8: 22-26, with saliva in the eye [the blind at Bethsaida], and in John 9: 1-12, with mud and saliva, sending him to wash his eyes in the Pool of Siloam [the blind from birth].

In this text, the bible says that the name of the blind man was Bartimaeus, which in Hebrew means *son of Timaeus*. Timaeus means *highly regarded, highly rated or highly esteemed*. The first lesson is: *we do not inherit the spiritual, emotional or social achievements of anyone, nor of our parents; each has his own ‘Promised Land’ to conquer*. The father of Bartimaeus could be important man for his merit, he may have won his position in society, but the son did not get the same thing. We are spirits with different characteristics. For example, we can inherit certain natural gifts present in the family; however, it is up to us to determine how to use them. Our victories, only we can have. Our mission, only we can fulfill; our cross, only we can carry.

This Jericho was built by Herod the Great, and was a rich place, especially for those who collected taxes (So much so that Luke, soon after, mentions the story of Zacchaeus, the tax collector, who lived in Jericho – Lk. 19: 1-10). It’s not the same Jericho won by Joshua by entering the Promised Land. In Luke, the bible says (Lk. 18: 35) that he was sitting by the roadside, begging alms, and in Mark, it describes him as a blind beggar, that is, he was blind and poor in the midst of a rich city.

The bible does not say that he was born blind, but it is assumed that he went blind after, because in verse 51 of Mark he says, “My teacher, let me see again.” We don’t know what blinded him, if an organic illness or an accident. But the fact of being physically blind at the moment and probably for a long time in his life, made him develop another vision, the spiritual one, since he did not have the distractions of physical sight; and this made him recognize that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of David, He who was able to restore him completely. *When God removes from us some material and physical distractions, He has a purpose that is to develop in us another kind of perception of life and that will lead us to recognize the need of Him, preparing us for the moment of real meeting with Him*. Bartimaeus, surely, had time to meditate a lot and was inwardly prepared for this meeting, so much that his inner thirst to be touched by Jesus made him overcome all obstacles of the crowd, trying to shut him up. The interesting thing is that Jesus did not care about the outer and superficial voices of the people that followed Him even by curiosity. He was aware of the inner voices of the afflicted and contrite in heart, who really wanted Him. It’s difficult to think that before

the noise of a crowd, someone can identify the petition of a single voice; however, Jesus stopped because He heard Bartimaeus and said, "Call him here." When Jesus called him, probably the crowd fell silent to see what would happen. *Many voices can speak within us and around us, trying to stop the Lord's call, but when the cry of our heart is sincere, Jesus comes to meet us. When He confirms the call, the voices fall silent and then He speaks.*

The bible says in Mark 10: 49, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." In Greek, the expression 'Take heart' means, 'Have courage.' First, we recognize our weaknesses, our spiritual poverty and our need for God. After, we recognize that Jesus is the solution. So we cry for His help and we are willing to seek Him, even if all around us say *no*. And when the time comes, we discover that we must have courage. Courage! What for? To do what the blind man did, he went out of prayer and passed to action. Even without seeing where he was going and depending on others to lead him to Jesus he made an inner movement; he stood up, that is, he ceased to see himself as a poor and powerless, to take possession of the blessing. He stood up, he took on his position of authority and dignity in the face of that situation and before the people and was willing to be helped and blessed. He threw off his cloak, which means that he gave up the label and the stigma, for at that time, the blind were recognized by the cloak they used. He relinquished the shyness, the situation in which he hid and the interior limitations. Perhaps many years of humiliation and defeat have made him fearful, without daring to risk once more, or have taken away of him the hope of being honored again, of being someone who can direct his life and earn his living; maybe, those years were only valid to test and strengthen his faith that the promised Messiah would come one day and touch him. If he saw Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of David, one supposes that he knew the Scriptures and believed in them. Although his soul was hopeless with the apparent impossibility of healing, his spirit certainly kept the flame of faith. This faith gave him the correct notion of the time to take possession of the blessing, and his strengthened spirit has enabled his soul to overcome his own limitations and prejudices and get up, harmonized with the will of God for him. The bible says that he sprang up, that is, he got up quickly; he was determined, he wanted this meeting and came to Jesus.

It is interesting that Jesus could have made things easier for the blind, going to him, but He stopped at some distance so that the blind man came. It was one more test to see if his faith and his desire were really great to be touched by Him. We can imagine that Jesus also benefited him with this attitude, honoring him before the people who once humiliated him, that is, He used those who tried to prevent the blessing to help him conquer it. He told them to call him, making him feel special and important in front of that people, individualizing him before the crowd. *Jesus treats us individually*, showing that even if there is a crowd on our side, He recognizes us personally and calls us; He deals with our problem in particular when we are really willing to seek Him and when we want to overcome all the barriers to get our blessing.

The next step of Jesus was amazing. He asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" We can think that this is an unnecessary question, since it is logical to a blind to ask for cure for his blindness, but Jesus knew what He was doing. He wanted to see if Bartimaeus had an idea of what was really a priority in his life, if his request was in accordance with the desire of God's heart for him. Bartimaeus could ask Jesus for many things: family reconstruction, his own house or someone who sheltered him or who supported him financially, and many other material petitions; however, his need was another. He truly needed to know the Messiah and experience His power over him; he needed to see things and his own life differently. So he asked to have his vision restored. The expression 'let me see again', in Greek, means, 'may I recover my sight,

may be given to me the ability to direct or reconsider, may I see with the mind's eyes.' Maybe he had recognized Jesus as his Savior and the One who could restore his identity and self-esteem, but had not yet the vision of how he could be someone of value, able to work again for his own sustenance and to show himself to people as a living witness of God's power. In a way, this story is like Job's, who knew God before by hearing about Him, but after his suffering he came to know Him, because he saw Him in truth; he experienced the Lord by himself. The divine design for us is to make us know the truth of His word and have the eyes of our soul and our spirit open to be able to walk with dignity and authority. Bartimaeus called Jesus Teacher (Master, Rabbi), because he knew that there was wisdom in Him to teach him to do all things and that He was the true way. Then the Lord said, "Go; your faith has made you well" (NIV: "Go, said Jesus, your faith has healed you"). And immediately he regained his sight.

In Mark and Luke, the bible tells that Jesus *said* him to regain his sight, and in the book of Matthew it says that *He touched his eyes*. The fact of touching his eyes would be, perhaps, to confirm what He was doing, because the blind was sensitive to the tactile information, and to leave within him a physical certainty that he was actually cured, a sensory mark in his brain; or else to satisfy his need to be touched by Jesus. As God made Jacob lame of one leg as a mark of his encounter with Him, Jesus, in several cures in the bible, *left the mark of His touch imprinted in people's memories*, for He knows the need of each one of His children.

When we studied the healing of the paralytic at Bethesda, Jesus said: "See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you." (There was sin generating or perpetuating his illness). In the case of the blind man at Bethsaida, we could read: "He [*Jesus*] took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village", that is, before healing him, Jesus removed him from the source of the illness (spiritual blindness was involved). Here, the case is different. According to the Gospel of Luke, Bartimaeus learned about Jesus when He was approaching Jericho, therefore, the cause of his blindness, spiritually speaking, was not the external influence of the village or pagan idolatry. The Lord did not drive him away from the village, but Bartimaeus followed Jesus back to Jericho. This means that Bartimaeus believed, he already had knowledge of the Word and was waiting for the Messiah, there was no sin involved in his illness. That is why Jesus simply said: "Go; your faith has made you well." This teaches us that only Jesus knows the true cause of an illness, and when He heals it, He goes directly to the root so that the person can see and now position himself (herself) correctly before God. The healing of a beggar showed a wealthy city that for God there is no respect of persons, but what matters is faith, because a person's money and status do not buy His blessings.

Do you need to see with the eyes of God?

Ask Him and have your eyes open today, in the name of Jesus. Receive your victory.

3

The harvest of the Lord and the choice of the
twelve apostles
Matt. 9: 37-38 and Matt. 10: 1-4



The harvest of the Lord and the choice of the twelve apostles

Reference texts: Matt. 9: 37-38 and Matt. 10: 1-4

Let's talk about the last two verses in Matthew 9, where Jesus directs His disciples to ask the Father to send out laborers into His harvest and about the choice of the twelve (Matt. 10: 1-4). It is written: "Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.' Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean [NIV: the Zealot], and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him." (cf. Lk. 6: 12-16)

The Master was talking to pray to God, asking for laborers into His harvest, that is, He was explaining to His disciples that His work is great and it needs that He Himself brings workers for it, i.e., that He calls those whose heart is turned to the things of heaven rather than the things of the flesh, because they need to be trained differently from those who care only about the natural life. The specific call of God for certain people to do His work is only of His will and known exclusively by Him. His work is very great, because it involves the salvation of souls and, consequently, a greater dedication, surrender and willingness of His disciples, even having to take certain risks to accomplish the mission that was given to them. We can see that all followers of Christ suffered for the cause of justice, risked their lives and paid a high price because of those who Jesus wanted to save. They had boldness and perseverance and, surely, gained great reward before the Lord.

Let's give focus on two interesting points about the choice of the twelve apostles:

- 1) *Characteristics of those He called to be apostles.*
- 2) *Empowerment given to them to carry out the mission.*

1) *Characteristics of the chosen ones:* In first place, the number of them was twelve, because *twelve* means *the number of divine election, of the calling, of God's elective purposes*. Repeating, their names are: Simon Peter and Andrew his brother; James, son of Zebedee and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew (also known as Nathanael); Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus (also called Judas); Simon the Cananaean (also known as the Zealot), and Judas Iscariot.

We know little about the personality of the disciples, except from what we can infer from their attitudes in the gospels.

a) *Simon* (Σίμων) was a later form of the name *Simeon*, which in Hebrew means '*hearing, he who hears, God heard.*' The Hebrew word is *Shim'ôn*, which derives from *Shâma'* (*to hear*). Later, the Lord added the name of *Cephas* (Aramaic) or *Peter* (Greek), meaning "*rock, stone.*" Peter was probably a blood type, with strong emotions, loyal in his friendships, sincere, however, insecure and in need of more self-control. Just analyze his reactions during his walk with Jesus. And because he had a family and responsibilities with the fishing business (Lk. 5: 10), he should also be a man concerned with doing the best he could, and in everything he did he put his entire being. When he drew his sword in Gethsemane to protect Jesus and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant, he showed that with him it was all or nothing. But soon after he ended up denying Jesus at Caiaphas' house for fear of being arrested and dying. A visible and

understandable emotional instability, when it comes to a human being in a situation of such a danger.

In addition to *Peter*, the other Simon described is *Simon the Zealot* (or the Cananaean). He was so called *zealot* (Greek: *zelôtes*) because of his zealous temper with the things of the Lord and the kingdom of God. It is not known exactly if he was a revolutionary. Perhaps, the people have given him that nickname by the fact of his zealous spirit remind the behavior of the followers of the party of the Zealots, founded by Judas the Galilean, who led a revolt against the Romans in 6 AD and opposed to the payment of tribute from Israelites to a pagan emperor. They received the nickname of zealots for following the example of Mattathias and his sons and followers, by their zeal for the Law of God when Antiochus IV tried to suppress the Jewish religion (Maccabees), around 167–163 BC. Therefore, *the first characteristic of a disciple is to listen to the voice of the Lord (to be ‘Simon’)* and remain firm in this conviction, that is, let the Word be a rock in his spirit; in other words, to be a person grounded in the Word, which is Jesus Himself, the Rock, and to care for the things of God (to be a ‘zealot’).

b) Andrew was Peter’s brother and was the one who introduced him to Jesus (Jn. 1: 41-42). Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist and followed Jesus because of the prophet’s testimony (Jn. 1: 37; 40). His temperament seemed to be more prudent and sensitive than Peter’s, being willing to help and taking practical actions: “One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ‘There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?’” (Jn. 6: 8-9). Andrew is a Greek name that means “*manly, virile, winner.*” Therefore, *the second characteristic of a disciple is to position himself as a courageous and winning person.*

c) John, the son of Zebedee. John should have been a more peaceful and loving type, more sensitive to the essence of things and people, however, with an explosive temperament when it came to more serious situations, due to the fact that Jesus had called him, together with his brother James, Boanerges (Mk. 3: 17), which means “sons of thunder”. John and James were Galileans with strong, determined and impetuous spirits and, probably, with a nationalist feeling that brought them a somewhat impatient behavior with injustice and oppression. However, it is clear that their character was always willing to serve. Perhaps there was a certain ambition in their hearts (John and James’) to one day be more than they were now, due to the fact that they competed for the position at the right and left of Jesus on His throne. John was the youngest of the apostles, and very close to Jesus. Having followed Him to Annas (Jn. 18: 15 – he was known to the high priest) and Caiaphas’ house (Jn. 18: 24) after they arrested Him in Gethsemane, makes us think that he was faithful and would never be able to abandon a friend in trouble, even putting his own life at risk. Even though he was known to the servants of the high priest there, the commotion at that moment was great and everything could turn against him, due to the fact that he was a disciple of Jesus. He was also the only disciple who was openly present at the crucifixion.

His name is of Jewish origin (*Yôhânân*) and means ‘*The Lord is gracious.*’ *Grace* means an unmerited favor of God, that is, a divine favor, simply because God blesses, not because we need to do something to deserve it. In Hebrew, the word used in some texts of the Old Testament, is *chesed* or *hesedh* (mercy), and *chen* (grace, favor) or *chanun* (the adjective), derived from *chanan*, a primitive root, meaning *loveliness, beauty, favor and good will.* Therefore, being like John is *to be sure that God blesses and is provider of grace and favor.*

d) James. The gospel speaks of two James: the first (also known as James the greater), the brother of John, son of Zebedee and Salome; and the second James – Matt. 10: 3; Mk. 3: 18; Lk. 6: 15; Acts 1: 13 – son of Alphaeus (known as Clopas; cf. Matt.

27: 56; Mk. 15: 40; Lk. 24: 10; Jn. 19: 25), also called James the less [or the younger], and brother of Joseph (this one not chosen by Jesus as an apostle). His mother was called Mary (Mk. 15: 40; Matt. 27: 56). It is assumed that the meaning of the nickname 'less' is perhaps because he was smaller in stature than James, the brother of John or younger than him; or else, for having been the second James chosen by Jesus as His disciple. Another hypothesis is related to the third James, the brother of the Lord, ordained as the first bishop of Jerusalem and known as *James the Just, James of Jerusalem or 'the Lord's brother'* (Gal. 1:19), and the writer of the epistle with the same name.

James, John's brother, was one of Jesus' three closest disciples, alongside John and Peter. He was present at the resurrection of Jairus' daughter, the transfiguration of Jesus and in Gethsemane.

Anyway, his name is derived from the Greek, *Iakōbos*, a transliteration of the Hebrew, *Ya'aqōbh* (Strong #3290 – יַעֲקֹב), *Jacob, who supplants, the deceiver, who holds by the heel; supplanter*. Another translation is: "coming and going", "the one who oscillates", "which bends but does not break." This means that, despite the weaknesses of the flesh as indecision, insecurity and even a competitive spirit, Jesus can choose someone, transforming these deformations of character into qualities such as: *the ability to remain steadfast in the struggles and keep intact the fighting spirit to achieve what one aims*. In other words, despite the enemy's onslaughts to bring down a servant of God, he can be sure that he will 'bend', but will not 'break'; he may oscillate sometimes as a human being of flesh; however, his spirit remains in the strength of a warrior by the faith in Jesus and in His promise. It's something like what happened with Jacob in the Old Testament, who, after having wrestled with the angel, had his name changed to *Israel* (יִשְׂרָאֵל – יִשְׂרָאֵל – Strong #3478), which means "he struggles with God and prevails, winner, prince of God"; in the original, in Hebrew: "he will rule like God."

According some scholars the name Israel is most likely a compilation of the verb 'sarar' and the noun *El*, the common abbreviation of *Elohim* (God, plural of *Elohe*). It has the same root of the name *Sarah* that comes from the verb *sarar* (Strong #8323), which means to rule, to reign, to be prince, to dominate, to control. So, Israel would have the meaning of "God Wrestles, God Strives, God perseveres, God contends, he will be a prince with God, he will rule like God." As we said the name James is derived from the Greek, *Iakōbos* (*LAKWBOS*), a transliteration from the Hebrew *Ya'aqōbh*, (Jacob). In Latin the name is either *IACOBUS* or *IACOMUS* (dialect variant of the first name). The latter was brought into English as the name *James*, the consonant *J* in the place of the vowel *I* and without the letters *CO*, *JAMUS*. The name is written as *Giacomo* in Italian, *Jaime* in Spanish, and *Iames* in French. The English (*James*) is like the French form, but with *I* anglicized to *J*.

e) *Philip* was from Bethsaida, like Simon Peter and Andrew (Jn. 1: 44; Jn. 12: 21). He seemed to be knowledgeable about the Law and the prophets and identified Jesus with the Messiah and the Great prophet prophesied by Moses (Jn. 1: 45). He seemed to be eager for the knowledge of the word of God; an intelligent person, the type willing to have experiences, without minding taking risks (just see his question during Supper: "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." – Jn. 14: 8). He participated in the multiplication of loaves and fish, and his comment showed what everyone else felt, that is, the feeling of impossibility of feeding a crowd: "Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little'" (Jn. 6: 7). He was a friend of Nathanael (also known as Bartholomew), from Cana in Galilee (Jn. 21:2).

Philip comes from the Greek, *Philippos*, *lover of horses, tamer of horses*. The horse, in the bible, has several meanings; for example, it is a symbol of war as well as a

carnal or worldly power, because at the time of the entry into Canaan and for many centuries later, Israel had no horses; it had to import them from Egypt (prefigures the world). It can also symbolize hurry or our attitude toward our fellow men. So, Philip, as a ‘tamer of horses, a lover of horses’, teaches us that *a disciple must have self-control, knowing to control his soul and his spirit, in order to keep them under the dominion of the Holy Spirit of God. It means to make the flesh submit to the divine will.*

f) *Nathaniel or Nathanael (Jn. 1: 45)*, from the Hebrew, means “*present from God, God has given.*” He was also known as *Bartholomew*, from the Aramaic, “*son of Timaeus or son who lifts the waters, son of the highly esteemed.*” Nathanael was from Cana in Galilee (Jn. 21: 2) and from his attitude described in Jn. 1: 43-51, when he is introduced to Jesus by Philip, we can imagine that he had a lively, sharp mind; he should also be a person who studies the word and fears God, praying and seeking answers, for Jesus had seen him under the fig tree, before Philip brought him to the Master, and the Lord Himself said that he was truly an Israelite in whom there was no deceit (Jn. 1: 43-51). He believed in Jesus through this simple revelation. He himself had said to Philip,

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

“Come and see,” Philip replied.

When Jesus saw him, He said,

“Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!”

“Where did you get to know me?” Nathanael asked.

“I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

“Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

“Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.’ And he said to him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.’”

With this we can infer that *being a “Nathaniel or a Bartholomew” means to seek the truth, to feel as a beloved child of God and be a blessing, a divine present to the brothers.*

g) *Matthew* is a Hebrew name that means “*gift of God, man of God, God’s reward.*” Jesus called Matthew the tax collector at the tax booth. A tax collector was a collector of taxes or customs in favor of the Romans, employed by an employer of the collection of taxes. It was a despised and hated class because it was composed by selfish, greedy and ambitious types, eager for money and for the benefits it offered. The tax collector was reputed unclean because of his continuous contact with the Gentiles. Dealing with tax money, he had to be meticulous when doing his work, in a practical and professional way and he also liked money, like everyone in his business, charging extra so that he could make a profit for himself (cf. Zacchaeus – Lk. 19: 1-10).

He was son of Alphaeus (Mk. 2: 13-14) and also known as *Levi* (Mc 2: 13-14; Lc 5: 27-28), which means: *attached, joined, united, connected, adhered, set apart for the Lord, holy to the Lord.* But was he known as Levi, or was it Jesus who gave him this name at that time? It seemed like a huge contradiction to the profession he had. So *being a Levi, a Matthew, means that Jesus took us out of the world and sin, from the impurity, and set us apart for Him. We are now attached, joined, united, connected to Him and nothing will separate us from this covenant. Salvation was for us a gift of God, a reward from God, even though we have not deserved.*



Simon Peter



Andrew



John



James the brother of John



Philip



Bartholomew (Nathanael)



Thomas



Matthew



James the less



Judas Thaddaeus



Simon the Cananaean



Judas Iscariot

h) *Thomas* is an Aramaic name (*Te'ômā'*), which the Greeks called *Didymus*, *twin*. Probably, Thomas was a more rational person, and this rationality did not allow him to go further than his human and limited vision allowed him; he preferred real and tangible things to be able to believe in something, or perhaps he needed more information to be able to assimilate experiences. His rationality would be transformed in his walk with Jesus and his apparent unbelief would be a way of showing others what a disciple can expect and ask from his master. Like every overly rational person, he should also be the most suspicious type, not opening up too much to people or allowing himself to be deceived by anything. Another characteristic that we can deduce from Thomas was obedience and loyalty, for the comment he made in the episode of Lazarus' death makes us think that he took into account fidelity to Jesus and the sense of group ("Let us also go, that we may die with him" – Jn. 11: 16).

Although there is no confirmation about Thomas having a twin brother or not ('*twin*' may be just the Aramaic meaning of his name), we can extrapolate this argument, saying that, as Thomas was changed through his intimate contact with Jesus and became like the Master, being "*Thomas*" means to be "*twin brothers*" of the Lord, to become like Him, being changed every moment of our lives through our personal tests, gaining more faith every day; as the bible says, being transformed into the same image [of the Lord] from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3: 18). Many attitudes of Thomas were considered as unbelief, disrespect or imbalance of the flesh, but if we look for the purpose hidden in the bottom of each one, we will see that he was not afraid to dare and ask God for more. Therefore, *a disciple may even be misunderstood in his attitudes; however, he should never be afraid to want more from the Lord*. What may seem, roughly speaking, an irreverence before Him may be a cry for help of the soul and spirit, asking for strength to overcome hardships and to achieve another level of faith.

i) *Judas*. The Gospel speaks of two Judas. The first was also called *Thaddaeus*, son of James (Matt. 10: 3; Mk. 3: 18; Lk. 6: 16). Judas, derived from Judah, *Y^ehūdhā* means "*praised, celebrated, commemorated in praise (ydh) to the Lord*." Thaddaeus was also a Hebrew name that means "*he who praises or confesses*." Thaddaeus (in Aramaic) means "*courageous*"; and in Syriac, "*kind*." There is little information about Judas Thaddeus in the gospels. Perhaps, we can say in relation to his personality characteristics that he had courage and kindness, therefore, the spirit of someone who had reasons to thank God, even though he was human and subject to fragility like everyone else.

The second Judas reported in the Gospel received the surname of *Iscaiot*, from the Hebrew *'ish qeriyoth*, man from Kerieth, referring to the city of Kerieth-Hezron located about nineteen kilometers (11.80 miles) to the south of Hebron. In Aramaic is *'isqaryā'ā*, '*a murderer*.' Judas Iscaiot, logically, should have a more suspicious, calculating and avaricious temperament, with other human weaknesses that could even lead him to think about theft. He was the treasurer of the group and, certainly, placed by Jesus Himself to test and teach him in some way. In the same way as Simon, the zealot, he also did not look favorably on the Romans, making him anxiously wait for the Messiah of Israel who would free everyone from that uncomfortable yoke. Even knowing everything, Jesus did not receive him as a potential traitor at the time, but as one whom the Father had chosen to learn from Him, be restored and turned into an instrument of blessing to His people (He would test Judas). Like all those He chose, Jesus loved him.

Being like "Judas" (Judah, Yehūdhā) means that, as disciples, we must have within us, above all, the desire to praise the Lord, for this quality makes us lovely to Him, besides that a Levite is a brave warrior; through the praise, the Lord delivers him from

his enemies as described in several passages in the bible. Judas Iscariot fell because he abandoned this quality and gave gap for Satan to use him to betray his Master. When we do not praise God, rather, we blaspheme and complain, we give gap for the devil and we aggrandize him, saddening the heart of God and extinguishing the flame of the Spirit within us. Therefore, *the last and essential quality to a disciple is to learn to praise, to be a worshiper*. It is important to remember that we were created to praise God. In our lips there must always be the praise, because this brings us closer to the throne.

In short, the characteristics of a disciple must be:

- a) To learn to listen to the voice of the Lord, to be a person firm in the Word and to have zeal for the things of God ('zealot') [Simon].
- b) To position himself as a courageous and winning person [Andrew].
- c) To be sure that God blesses, provides strength, life, grace and favor [John].
- d) To have the certainty that he can 'bend', but will not break, because his spirit remains in the strength of a warrior by the faith in Jesus and His promise [James].
- e) To have self-control and make the flesh submit to God's will [Philip].
- f) To seek the truth, to feel a beloved child of God and be a blessing, a divine present to the brothers [Nathanael | Bartholomew].
- g) To be sure that we are connected, attached, united to Jesus and nothing will separate us from this covenant [Levi | Matthew].
- h) To be transformed from glory to glory into the image of the Lord and never be afraid to want more from God [Thomas].
- i) To be able to praise, to be a worshiper [Judas].

2) Empowerment given to them to carry out the mission.

"Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness." Here we have it clear the empowerment that the Lord gives us when we stand as true disciples. We receive in the first place, the same authority that was given to Jesus, and this authority has a specific purpose: to cast out demons and heal every disease and sickness, whether physical, emotional or spiritual. The gifts are bestowed as we exercise them, as well as a 'talent' (Matt. 25: 14-29) that is multiplied. Also it is given us by the Father according to His will, with our need, with the need of those whom He wants to achieve through us and with the particular characteristic of the Holy Spirit to our personality. This means that a gift of healing can be manifested in several ways, according to the personality of every child of God.

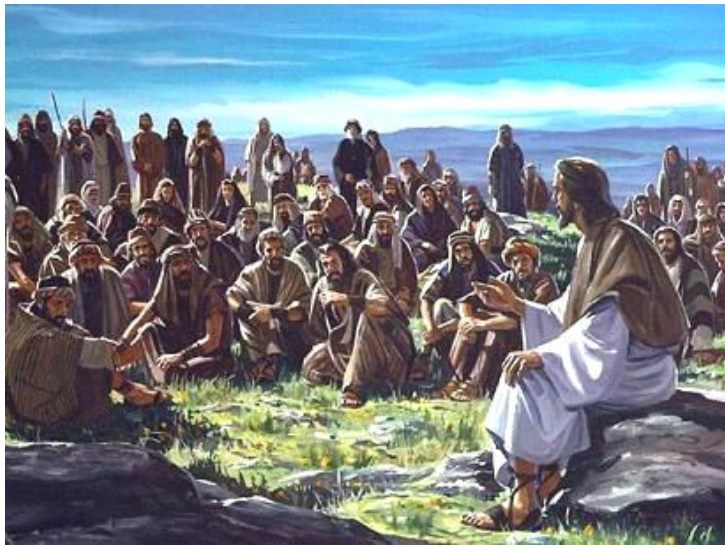


Replacement:

After the suicide of Judas Iscariot and Jesus' ascension, before the day for the fulfillment of Pentecost, there was a new choice among the disciples who followed Jesus from the beginning of His ministry, from those who were among the seventy to replace the traitor. The chosen one was *Matthias*, whose name seems to be a contraction of *Mattathias* ("*God has given*"). We have no information about Matthias. Therefore, in accordance with our previous reasoning, let's say that *in the place of honor next to Jesus in heaven there may be no traitors, but those who knew how to keep what they have received from God so that no one stole their crown*. Thus, when the chosen by the Father to be His worshipers do not take on their position and give up to persevere, as was the case of Judas Iscariot, He raises someone so that His work and His project are not interrupted. Therefore, God gave to mankind our brother Matthias, so that the mission His beloved Son began on earth was not frustrated or incomplete. The story of Judas Iscariot resembles Saul's, who lost his anointing and, consequently, his reign and was replaced by David so that God's work was not interrupted by human errors and failures. Thus, *being a "Matthias"* means *to be placed by God to complete a structure that has been planned for Him and that needs this "last piece" so that the whole remains structured. Being a "Matthias" is to be ready to occupy the position that the Lord wishes to put us, in order that His work does not die*. Therefore, the Lord says we are a body and individually members of it (1 Cor. 12: 27). The gifts we have are useful in the position and in the place where God puts us, where He "*gives us*" to His Church, so that the work which was started does not come to be ruined. It was Jesus who told Peter, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it" (Matt. 16: 18).

4

The first multiplication of loaves and fish
Mk. 6: 30-44



The first multiplication of loaves and fish

Reference text: Mk. 6: 30-44

“The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, ‘Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.’ For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, ‘This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.’ But he answered them, ‘You give them something to eat.’ They said to him, ‘Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?’ And he said to them, ‘How many loaves have you? Go and see.’ When they had found out, they said, ‘Five, and two fish.’ Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.”

This first multiplication of loaves and fish took place in Bethsaida, in the territory of Israel. Three evangelists (Matthew, Luke and John) give us the reference as for this:

- Matt. 14: 13-21 (a deserted place = Bethsaida); v. 22-33 walks on the sea (to the other side = Capernaum); v. 34-36 arrives at Gennesaret (fertile district on the western side of the Sea of Galilee);
- Lk. 9: 10 Jesus withdrew from Galilee, from Capernaum, to Bethsaida.
- Jn. 6: 1-13 – Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (v. 1); v. 17 towards Capernaum (Jesus walks on the sea), v. 24 (the people meet Jesus in Capernaum). The 2nd multiplication of loaves and fish was in Gentile territory (Matt. 15: 21; 29; 32 cf. Mk. 7: 31; Mk. 8: 1-10 – from where Jesus withdrew, going to Dalmanutha or Magdala, on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee north of Tiberias). Later you will understand why this was so.

Bethsaida comes from the Ancient Greek: Βηθσαιδά, Bēthsaidá; from Hebrew: bêth çayyadhâ or Bêt Şaydâ, lit. ‘House of the Fisherman’ or bêth çaydâ’ = ‘House of Fish,’ and was located northeast of the Sea of Galilee in the territory of Philip the Tetrarch, who named it Julia (Ancient Greek: Ἰουλία, romanized: Ioulía), in honor of the daughter of Emperor Caesar Augustus (Julia the Elder) [Flavius Josephus, ‘Antiquities of the Jews’, XVIII, ii, §1].

Josephus also makes it clear that this ‘Julia’ of Philip, that is, ‘Bethsaida’, was located in an administrative district known as Gaulonitis, in modern-day Golan Heights, that is, in the region north of the Sea of Galilee. Philip the tetrarch also rebuilt the city of Paneas, which was renamed Caesarea (or Caesarea Philippi) in honor of Caesar Augustus. Josephus writes: “ Herod built the city of Tiberius in Galilee (He means Tiberias, after Tiberius Caesar), and in Perea [beyond Jordan] another that was also called Julias.” This ‘Julia’ of Herod was named after the wife of Emperor Caesar

Augustus (Livia Drusilla, called Julia Augusta after 14 AD), not his daughter Julia the Elder [Flavius Josephus, 'The Wars of the Jews' II, ix, §1].

Bethsaida no longer exists, but archaeologists think it may have been located in three places: the Bedouin village of Messadiye; the small, deserted settlement of El-Araj; and the archaeological site of Et-Tell. Research is ongoing.

Wherever Jesus went there was always a large number of people following Him, and that the bible describes as 'a multitude' or 'crowds'; this, surely, because everyone wanted to receive healing, guidance and blessings of all kinds. As described in the text we read above, everyone seemed sheep without a shepherd. Jesus did not send them away; on the contrary, He received and fed them in every way. Hence, by hearing about Him, they headed for where He was. Knowing where the boat was going, people ran and arrived before Him. This means that when we know that the anointing of God is about to be poured over our lives or when we receive a prophetic word that He will do a miracle that benefits us, we must be alert and 'run', so that when He pours His blessing, we can receive it. It means to be always alert and vigilant to the signs of the Holy Spirit in order to 'eat the best of that land', as Isa. 1: 19 says: "If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land."

In this text, in particular, the Lord wanted to give a great lesson of unconditional love and faith to the disciples. He had nourished these people spiritually throughout the day, probably walking among the crowd also to heal them and He showed no annoyance at that. So, He waited until the end of the day because, as Son of God, He knew that sooner or later they would be hungry. The disciples, although walking every day with Him, didn't yet have an open mind to understand His actions; they lacked more faith, they still thought more in the things of the flesh than in the things of God. They were aware of the need of the people for food, but they could not remember that they were before Him who could provide all things. This was a moment of test for the disciples' faith. As men, they were aware of that limiting circumstance and the responsibility they had before them and wanted to get rid of it in a more practical way: to send people back to their homes. Probably, they were surprised when Jesus told them, "You give them something to eat." How? So much that they made quick calculations, evaluating that necessity in two hundred denarii of bread. A Roman denarius was equivalent to one Greek drachma, that is, a silver coin which was compatible with a wage for a day's work, which in our currency of today would be equivalent to US\$ 10.00 (BR)–58.00 (USA). Two hundred denarii would be a great amount of money. Still so, it was not enough to feed five thousand men, besides women and children (usually excluded from any census counts). So Jesus asked, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." So the situation seemed even more terrible, since they had only five loaves and two fish. Jesus divided the people into groups of fifty and one hundred and made them sit on the grass.

The numbers five and ten were important in the decimal system used in Palestine. Zero, when added to another could indicate multiplication in any way, for example, the number *one* conveys the concept of *unity and the unparalleled character of God, as well as the unity between Christ and the Father, the unity between believers and God and the unity that exists among believers*. Putting the number *zero* on its side, this can mean 'many times', the same way that *one hundred* is equivalent to a large number, and *a thousand or ten thousand*, an infinitely large number. The number *ten* may also mean *the first number of a major beginning, something complete or fidelity*, besides being considered by some as *the number of the Church*. The number *five* has the spiritual meaning of the *faithful fulfillment of the promises of God referent to the five books of the Pentateuch (Torah)*, that is, *the events that occurred as divine predestination*. We

can think that the number *two* means *the number of the covenant made with the chosen people, placed on the two tables of the Law given to Moses*, however, it can also mean *the two peoples with whom the Lord made a covenant: Jews and Gentiles*. Speaking in a symbolically way: by bringing to the Lord the five loaves of bread the disciples were showing that the promises given to them were still insufficient to satiate them on their needs. By multiplying the five loaves, the Lord wanted to show that His promises are endless and all will be fulfilled to the point of satisfying the crowds. By bringing the two *fish* (= *souls, lives*), the disciples were showing Jesus that His people, though spiritually dry and dead, needing His life, still kept the covenant with God. In taking in His hands the two fish, Jesus was prophetically multiplying the divine blessing and renewing the covenant with Jews and Gentiles, His other sheepfold, as He Himself said in John 10: 16. The groups divided by hundreds remind us the unity that He wants to see in the midst of His Church, multiplied by the same love with which He Himself supplies us and reminding us of His victorious sacrifice, which rescued us from sin and gave us eternal life. The multiplication of food showed His disciples that it is possible to make it plentiful when one gives with love, that is, *when we give our insufficient to God with love, He multiplies our offering and our supply abounds. He also taught them to share with others what one has*.

Another interesting lesson is that Jesus made the crowd *sit on the grass*. For us, this means that when we quiet down and give our cause before Him, recognizing our need, He begins to act on our behalf, multiplying our supply. The unrest does not let us see the miracles of God, because we are troubled and worried, looking for a way to do things for ourselves. Going further, when we sit in unity with those who also believe in Him as the source of the miracle, then, yes, we are ready to see the impossible happen in our lives. Our faith in action increases the faith of our brothers.

Why there was only bread and fish to feed them? Practically speaking, the bread was and still is the easiest food to carry and serve, because once it has been kneaded and baked, it can be taken to where a person goes and it's not required to do anything else with it to feed quickly someone who is hungry. At the time, it was done with various cereals such as barley, spelt (a kind of lower quality wheat), wheat (highly appreciated) and, rarely, oat. The unleavened bread was used exclusively for the Passover season. Bread was the strongest article of the Israelites diet. The fish brought to Jesus, probably were a little dry for being under the sun, but were also the more likely food to find along with the loaves, since Jesus and the disciples were not far from the Sea of Galilee (just see the following of the chapter, when Jesus sends the people back to their homes and climbs the mount in order to pray to the Father, returning to meet them in the famous episode where He walks on the waters). Bethsaida means 'House of Fish' or 'House of the Fisherman' and was located northeast of the Sea of Galilee, was it not? Symbolically speaking, they were in possession of the right food, for *bread (loaves of bread)* speaks of *covenant, communion and intimacy with God*, besides it is also a symbol of *the body of Jesus slain on the cross for our sins*. *Fish* symbolize *souls, lives for the kingdom of God*. This means that the Lord fed them with His own life (soul), strengthening their communion with Him and teaching them that He is enough to feed all who seek Him, not letting anyone to get hungry. By multiplying the fish, He taught them that, if they were willing to surrender to Him and His work, even if feeling a bit 'dry' and apparently 'dead', He would turn them into food for other lives also dry and needy of His word and the communion with the Father.

It was Jesus who multiplied the loaves and then gave them to His disciples to distribute among the people. This means that we are not the source of the miracle, but the Lord; we are only vehicles so that the miracle reaches other persons. So it was with

the disciples; Jesus provided the food, they just distributed it. It was not we that wrote the bible or created the world through the Word. Our part is only to preach it and proclaim it. The strength and the miracle are already embedded in it.

The bible says that they all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. *Twelve* is the number of *the divine election*. This teaching tells us that even feeding multitudes with the Word, *His elect will always have their portion, their reward*. What is theirs will never be taken away, and what they gave to others they will receive multiplied. The disciples gave the little they had and the Lord gave them back His abundance. They gave pieces of bread to the people and a basket full of food was left over to each one of them. Hence Paul repeats Jesus' words: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Giving makes us more like God.

Why there were more baskets left in this episode than in the other?

In v. 43-44 it is written: "and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men." (Mk. 6: 43-44). Here, the word "baskets", in Greek is "kophinos" (Strong #g2894), that is, a large basket (cf. Matt. 14: 20; Mk. 6: 43; Lk. 9: 17; Jn. 6: 13), contrary to the second multiplication of fish (Mk. 8: 8; Matt. 15: 36-37), where the word "spuris" is written (Strong #g4711), i.e. a small basket, a smaller woven basket, a plaited basket, when those who ate of the loaves were four thousand men. "Spuris" derives from "speiro" (as woven); a hamper or lunch-receptacle. At the first multiplication of the loaves, twelve large baskets were left over; in the second, seven baskets.

You may notice that the first multiplication took place in the territory of Israel, while the second one was in Gentile territory, Decapolis. Mark makes this clearer (Mk. 7: 31 e Mk. 8: 10). The Jews were fed, and there were twelve large baskets full; twelve, the number of the chosen, of the elect. The Gentiles were also fed and seven small baskets were left over (Mk. 8: 8-9; Matt. 15: 37-38).

We can interpret this as follows: the chosen people were already being worked, "sown" by God much longer than the Gentiles, since Abraham; therefore, they had more to give in return, more to give of the knowledge and word of God to other nations. The Gentiles had known the true God for a shorter time than the Jews, and therefore had even less fruit to bear; but surely, they were already in God's plan of salvation. Later, in Matt. 21: 43, because of the stubbornness and hardness of their hearts, and because they rejected the teachings of Jesus, He says: "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom."

5

The transfiguration
Lk. 9: 28-36



The transfiguration

Reference text: Lk. 9: 28-36

“Now about eight days after these sayings [*The revelation that Peter had about Jesus being the Son of God and the Messiah*] Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray [*Probably Mount Hermon to the north of Israel*]. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, ‘Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah’—not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!’ When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.” [in Mk. 9: 9 and Matt. 17: 9 the bible says that Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone what they had seen until He rose: “As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, ‘Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead’”]

The word *transfiguration* in the dictionary of English language has the meaning of: *a complete transformation into a more beautiful or spiritual state*. In the dictionary of Portuguese language has the meaning of: *radical change in appearance (image), in the character, in the form; transformation, metamorphosis*. This means that the disciples witnessed there on Mount Hermon the revelation of the true image of the Lord, for they saw His glorified body as He has on the throne next to God the Father. The main revelation was that of *Jesus as the Christ and son of God*. Thus, when we are seeking a revelation from God to us, we must climb a spiritual level where this revelation is possible, i.e., to separate ourselves from the distractions that surround us in the natural and ordinary life in order to be in greater communion with the Holy Spirit. This can be done through a fasting, which puts our flesh in a lower degree of strength than our spirit, and therefore brings us a greater sensibility to the spiritual things, specifically to the voice of God. Throughout our Christian walk this habit of being in more communion with Him goes improving, ‘sharpening’ us in the Word and in the knowledge of the spiritual world itself, giving us strategies to overcome the difficulties of our day by day.

Here we can draw two lessons. *First*: praying reverently like Jesus changes our image, i.e., we approach Him in prayer and so we see who we truly are. We understand that more than a carnal body, we have a spirit created by God Himself and it was awakened from its sleep when we received Jesus as Lord and Savior and is now under His dominion, therefore, we’ll be improved to have the true knowledge of who our Creator is. Jesus said, “What is born of flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Jn. 3: 6). In *second* place, we can realize that He called His closest disciples: Peter, James and John. When we studied about the call of the twelve, we said that ‘being Peter’ is to be a rock, to be grounded in the Word and not give up on following Jesus. Being ‘James’ is to remain steadfast in the face of adverse situations that seek to

bend us, trying to ‘break our faith.’ And being like ‘John’ means to be always sure that God blesses and is gracious to us as His children. Therefore, who wants to ‘climb the mountain’ with Jesus and have the revelation of who He is and what is His will must be like Peter, James and John, warriors, for one of the things that the enemy most strives to take from us is the communion with the Lord, knowing that he cannot be at the throne; that place is exclusive for those who are children of God. Who climbs the mountain receives the right to see the glory of God. The biblical word for the *glory of the Lord* is *kābhôdh* (Heb.) or *doxa* (Septuagint, the Greek version of the OT) = *weight or dignity*, and which can be understood as *the manifestation of God’s power where it is needed, victory, protection, abundance, wealth, dignity, reputation* (Ex 40: 35; 1 Sam. 4: 22; 1 Sam. 6: 5; 1 Kin. 3: 13; 1 Kin. 8: 11; 1 Chr. 16: 28; 1 Chr. 29: 12; Isa. 11: 10; Isa. 24: 23; Isa. 42: 12 etc.). It’s the Jewish equivalent to the Holy Spirit. The presence of God in us brings, therefore, victory, protection, abundance, wealth, dignity, reputation, the manifestation of God’s power where we need it. Thus, even if we do not see Him as Moses did, our spirit in prayer can perceive all these divine manifestations, and direct this power to any area of our life that is in need of a revival and a change. Our prayer will bring a ‘transfiguration’ on that problem.

The bible says that Moses and Elijah appeared alongside Jesus. They represent the Law and the Prophets testifying about the Messiah, as things accomplished and overcame by Him. In other words, God allowed the disciples to see the spirit of Moses and Elijah for them to understand that the Law and the earlier prophecies were being fulfilled now in the person of Jesus. The bible also says that they talked about the departure of Jesus, which was about to happen in Jerusalem. God was showing that just as He worked miracles in the past through His servants He was working miracles in these days through His Son, in particular the salvation of mankind, and the spiritual world was already aware. The voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” confirmed Jesus not only as the Messiah, but also as the Prophet mentioned by Moses in Deut. 18: 15, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet.” The apostle John wrote:

- Jn. 5: 46: “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.”
- Jn. 1: 45: “Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.’”
- Jn. 1: 21: “And they asked him [*John the Baptist*], ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the prophet?’ He answered, ‘No.’”
- Jn. 6: 14: “When the people saw the sign that he had done [*the multiplication of loaves and fish*], they began to say, ‘This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.’”

Therefore, the disciples had again *the revelation of Jesus as Son of God, the awaited Messiah, and as the prophet announced centuries ago*. As prophet, Jesus prophesied about humanity and what would happen in the last days with the chosen ones and with those who rejected Him. His apocalyptic revelations are being fulfilled, as His prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans was fulfilled too. As a lesson for us, this biblical text not only reveals *Jesus as Messiah, Son of God and prophet*, but shows us that *many revelations from God to us must be kept for a time until the right moment to proclaim them*, for not everyone is ready to receive them; that’s why Jesus asked the disciples not to tell anything about that because of the people, who still were not able to understand the mysteries revealed there personally to them (Peter, James and John). This interval would also benefit the disciples, giving to their souls some time to assimilate the revelation that had already been given to their

spirits. The same thing happens with us. Somehow, the Lord gives us revelation of something, whether in dreams, visions or insights, but our soul still needs to be worked a little longer so that we are ready to see the fulfillment of the experience given to us. Therefore, we must save very carefully what He gives us personally, because it may come to manifest long after, and if we do not give credit to it, we'll lose our blessing, for we'll have forgotten the previous revelation that would keep us steadfast in faith. Believing in it, we would not be robbed of our victories and we would have the opportunity to discover the spiritual gifts that God desires to pour on us. Certainly, they came down the mountain reflecting a lot about what they saw.

6

Jesus washes the disciples' feet / A lesson of humility
Jn. 13: 1-20



Jesus washes the disciples' feet / A lesson of humility

Reference text: Jn. 13: 1-20

“Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, ‘Lord, are you going to wash my feet?’ Jesus answered, ‘You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.’ Peter said to him, ‘You will never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.’ Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!’ Jesus said to him, ‘One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.’ For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, ‘Not all of you are clean.’ After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfill the scripture, ‘The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’ I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am he [NIV: I am He]. Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.’”

Jesus spoke of His own sacrifice a few hours before die, in the upper room, as a way to prepare the disciples for what was to come and teach them about the purpose of all that. He spoke of the blood of the covenant that would be shed for the remission of sins. An interesting particularity that we can notice at the Last Supper, besides to prepare them for His crucifixion and make them understand the true meaning of Passover, was the teaching given there. In Jn. 13: 1-20 the Lord taught them the real meaning of humility and service, as well as sanctification so that they could receive the Holy Spirit later. Here Jesus washed their feet, something that only the servants did for the visitors. Just like the kiss and the oil, washing the feet was a customary ritual among the Jews when they received a visitor at home, for instance, Jn. 12: 3: “Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.” This Mary was not Mary Magdalene, as many preach, but Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus. We see this in Jn. 11: 2: “Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill” and Jn. 12: 1-3: “Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the

perfume”. We can see the same episode is described in Lk. 7: 37-38; 44-46: “And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment... Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.’”

Taking into account the biblical passages from Lk. 7: 36; 39-40; 43; Matt. 26: 6-7; Mk. 14: 3 and Jn. 12: 3, and assuming that it was the same Mary who anointed the feet and the head of Jesus (Jn. 11: 2), we can say that these are two different moments: in one moment she anointed Jesus’ feet and was cleansed from her sin. Now (Matt. 26: 6-7 and Jn. 12: 3), already forgiven and more aligned with spiritual things, she performed a prophetic act regarding the death of Jesus. She might not know exactly why she anointed Him (perhaps she felt touched by God to do so), but her spirit was certainly in tune with Jesus. The evangelists suggest that the host of the house was Simon (Matt. 26: 6; Mk. 14: 3; Jn. 12: 1-2). The names “Lazarus,” “Simon the Leper” (Matt. 26: 6; Mk. 14: 3) and “Bethany” appear together in all these texts, did you notice?

The kiss, the oil and the washing of the feet

In the Middle East, the custom of welcoming a guest into one’s tent was done with great pleasure and courtesy. The kiss and the act of washing the feet was not only a customary ritual, but a sign of cleanliness and civility (Matt. 6: 17). The host poured fragrant oil on the visitor’s head to bring comfort and relief from the heat and dust (Eccl. 9:8). The oil brought relief to dry skin. The head anointed with oil is a common biblical figure for abundance of joy (Isa. 61: 3; Ps. 45:7).

The guest was also kissed on the cheek and had his feet washed (Gen. 18: 4-8; Lk. 7: 44-46). Washing the guest’s feet was a sign of cleanliness, comfort, and hospitality, usually done by the humblest slaves, a thing that was done willingly by the sinful woman and by Jesus Himself (Lk. 7: 38; Jn. 13: 5).

The kiss (in the NT written as ‘holy kiss’ – 1 The. 5: 26; Rom. 16: 16; 2 Cor. 13: 12: “Greet one another with a holy kiss”) was a form of greeting, an expression of brotherly affection and unity among Christians. In Antiquity and in the Bible, the kiss was a common form of greeting and expression of affection. The kiss is also mentioned in Lk. 7: 45, when the sinful woman kissed Jesus’ feet. Simon had not done anything of this, but Jesus said nothing until the right moment, when He spoke to honor the woman that was there.

Let’s start with the *first teaching* of this text:

- *Foot* refers to “*base, pedestal*”, mainly in the wash basin of the tabernacle (Ex. 30: 18-19: “You shall make a bronze basin with a bronze stand for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it; with the water Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet”).

- The word *foot* in Hebrew, *regel* (רגל; sometimes written as ‘*reguel*’ or ‘*raghl*’; from the root: *rgl*), means ‘*to be firm*’ and indicates both in Greek (‘*podas*’ or ‘*pous*’) and in Hebrew, *position, destination, inclination of the individual*:

Prov. 6: 18: "... feet which hurry to run to evil ..." (In relation to the six things the Lord hates).

Prov. 3: 23: "Then you will walk on your way securely and your foot will not stumble."

- Foot also symbolizes the *defeat of the enemy*, when the winner puts his own foot on the neck of the vanquished foe:

Josh. 10: 24: "When they brought the kings out to Joshua, Joshua summoned all the Israelites, and said to the chiefs of the warriors who had gone with him, 'Come near, put your feet on the necks of these kings'. Then they came near and put their feet on their necks."

1 Cor. 15: 25: "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet."

Ps. 110: 1: "The Lord says to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.'"

- In the bible, to *fall at the feet of someone* means *homage or supplication* (Lk. 8: 41 – Jairus begged Jesus to go to heal his daughter).

- *Sitting at the feet of someone* means *discipleship, learning* (Lk. 10: 39, in reference to Mary, Martha's sister, who sat at Jesus' feet to learn from Him).

- *Throwing something at the feet of someone* means an *offering to this one*, for example, the blind man at Jericho, Bartimaeus, who sat by the roadside, expecting people to give him some money or offering (Mk. 10: 46).

- *Washing the feet* of the visitor was to take away the dust from the roads, a *sign of cleanliness, comfort and hospitality* usually done by the lowest slaves.

- In Ruth 4: 7-8, we can also see the significance of *removing the shoes*, which was for *negotiations* between the kinsman-redeemers of someone to be rescued. And in Ex. 3: 5 and Josh. 5: 15 when the Lord said to Moses and Joshua on different occasions to *take off their sandals from their feet*, the link between *taking off one's shoes* and *surrender, sign of submission and respect* is implicit: "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." *Sandals* are related to *authority, occupation, material possessions*.

Thus, in addition to teach humility to His disciples in this act of washing their feet, Jesus was showing them that God desires to lead us by rights paths, clean from the contamination of the world; in other words, teaching us to walk in holiness and reverence to Him, and thus, having the authority to trample the enemy's head and take possession of our blessings.

The second teaching is in verses 6 to 11. When Jesus was washing Peter's feet, he refused. At first, it seemed an attitude of recognition of the superiority of Jesus, who should not do a thing usually done only by slaves. This showed, in the first place, the ignorance of Peter about the spiritual things; so much that Jesus told him, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." He meant that what He was doing was a prophetic act, not only for an immediate future when He explained to them the meaning of having washed their feet with water, but also referring to a distant future where all believers would have to repeat this same act towards one another, that is, to serve one another with love. In the second place, the attitude of Peter came to show us what happens to every human being. Arrogance and pride (which manifest in the desire to be independent of God, in doing everything without His help) are part of our carnal nature since the fall of Adam and Eve, starting with the desire to have the same knowledge and the same wisdom as Him. Even when we go through hardships and distress, our flesh resists the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Jesus drew the attention of Peter to this detail when answered him, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." He wants us, even imperfect, to seek sanctification, in order to continue in the position of

children who give real value to salvation that they received. In other words, the act of washing the disciples' feet was a symbol of spiritual purification. Without purification there is no communion with Jesus and therefore He said that phrase to Peter. Therefore, the *second teaching* can be summarized in few words: *when we have lack of knowledge of the spiritual things, there is also a lack of knowledge of the deformations of our own flesh and vice versa*. Jesus continues the conversation with Peter, saying, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean." This is to confirm the revelation given to us in the first teaching: *for them to depend only and exclusively on the Father and could stand firm in what they had learned in the three years of pilgrimage with Jesus; so that they could walk in the right ways, clean from the contamination of the world, to store all they had received and achieved and to have the authority to trample the enemy's head, in order to take possession of their blessings*. He said, "I know whom I have chosen", that is, He knows the inmost of our hearts.

The third teaching is: we are divine instruments, and who receives us, also receives Him; and he who receives Him, receives the Father. Who rejects His Word through us, is rejecting the Son and the Father, therefore, the eternal life. Jesus had already said in previous verses (Jn. 12: 48-50), "The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge, for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me."

The fourth teaching is that in the kingdom of God things are different from the things of the world. Here, the smallest is the one who serves and who is strong is in command. In the kingdom of God who serves is the greatest of all, for he resembles Jesus. The bible says that if we suffer with Him, we also be glorified with Him (Rom. 8: 17 b). It is also written (Mk. 10: 42-45): "So Jesus called them and said to them, 'You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'" Therefore, this item teaches us *to be servants in order to be great before God*.

The fifth teaching is to have faith and trust in God and in His judgment. What we do not understand now we will understand later, because everything has a purpose. Sometimes we do not understand His work in our lives and why we go through certain experiences; however, if we surrender totally to Him, we can be sure that all things will become clear later. What He is doing is to prepare us for something big and that will be good for us, also bringing His blessing upon others.

The sixth teaching is to know that being humble is to be conscious of the lack and the dependence on God; is to be like children and be aware of the need to grow and learn always from Him. It is to know that only He is able to supply us. It should not be confused with servitude, slavery, ignorance, poverty or any other evil situation that can reach our financial life; insecurity, indecision or lack of authority. It does not depend on social class, but on the true spiritual growth that comes from the knowledge of the divine character, acquired in constant contact with the Holy Spirit. Even using all the divine power that He had, Jesus was humble because He knew that as a man, what He did and taught came from the Father and He depended on Him for everything. He Himself said, "My teaching is not mine but his who sent me" (Jn. 7: 16).

The disciples needed to receive these teachings and many others that have been given by Jesus until He arrived to Gethsemane, in order to go through the pain with

dignity and to face, like us, their own crosses. The cross was Christ's calling. To exercise our calling we also need to know what surrender, humility and holiness are.

7

The Canaanite woman
Matt. 15: 21-28; Mk. 7: 24-30



The Canaanite woman

Reference texts: Matt. 15: 21-28; Mk. 7: 24-30

“Jesus left that place [*Gennesaret, a village by the Sea of Galilee*] and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, ‘Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.’ But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, ‘Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.’ He answered, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ But she came and knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, help me.’ He answered, ‘It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dog.’ She said, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.’ Then Jesus answered her, ‘Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.’ And her daughter was healed instantly.”

The Canaanites (as well as the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, the Jebusites and the Girgashites) were the first inhabitants of the Promised Land before Israel arrive. They lived in the region near the Great Sea (Mediterranean Sea) to the north, so were also called Syrophenicians. In the times of the Old Testament, Phoenicia was called Canaan, and its inhabitants, Canaanites, which means ‘traders’, ‘peddlers.’ In Greek, Phoenicia is called Phoinikē, Φοινίκη, ‘land of the palm trees.’ The woman was from Greek origin, therefore, non-Israelite. A god worshiped in that land besides Baal was Eshmun, which in Greek was called Asklepios and, in Latin, Aesculapius, the god of healing. The Jews called the Phoenicians dogs. The nations knew they were the chosen people; the problem was that most of their race took on a proud and arrogant stand, despising all human beings that were not sealed by their God, and it contributed considerably to the rivalry between the two peoples.

Therefore, *our first teaching is that false gods do not bring any solution to our problems, only make them worse.* The presence of these Canaanite gods probably perpetuated the rivalry between Jews and people of Greek origin, not allowing the light of understanding come to them. However, that woman had her heart’s eyes opened, like the blind man at Jericho, to see Jesus as the Son of David, the promised Messiah. She was not part of the Jewish people, but believed in Him, and at that moment it was not only repeating what happened in the past with Elijah and the widow of Zarephath (district of Sidon, in Phoenicia, the same land where this woman lived), who, by believing in the God of Israel in the person of the prophet, got deliverance for her shortage of food and for the life of her son, later resurrected by the man of God (1 Kin. 17: 8-24); here, it was also a prophetic act of the calling of the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; The Canaanite woman must have thought for long about the revelation she had in relation to the person of Jesus, in order to make a so bold decision such as to come to Him asking for help. She began to realize that the gods her people served were false gods who could do nothing to rescue her daughter from that torment. *It was more likely that they were the cause* of the demonic possession of the girl. The sin of idolatry had generated a curse on her life and her family. Certainly, her understanding was opened by God Himself, allowing the healing of the child to exalt the name of His Son, dethroning the idolatry in that region and contributing to increase the woman’s faith. The healing made her a living testimony not only among her people as well as among the Jews themselves, giving them also a lesson of faith and humility. The same way, the widow of Zarephath had given them the same teaching in the past.

The second teaching comes almost along with the first, in the sense that a rivalry between nations was certainly being aggravated by the presence of the entities that reigned there. This, for us, means that within a family, *when there is not the worship to the true God but an idolatry of many gods, there is separation, division, hatred and strife, preventing love from entering the hearts bringing union.* It is a sign that Jesus has to pass by there. Besides, someone in this family must have the courage to follow Jesus and dethrone the ‘altars of Baal.’

In the third place, when there is a problem that bothers us for a long time, we cannot have fear of being ridiculous; on the contrary, despite all the comments and obstacles around us, we must cry to God for help, seeking Him insistently until we get the victory. The woman surely was seen as crazy, irreverent, at least, inconvenient, because she went screaming after Jesus to the point of disturbing even the disciples. She didn’t care about what they thought of her; however, she focused on her need and cried out to the Lord. Our faith can be misinterpreted by the unbelievers, but when it is honored by Jesus blessing us with healing and liberation it becomes vehicle of transformation to those who are around us, and breaks rivalries and prejudice.

In the fourth place, faith in action makes us overcome all internal and external obstacles. The woman’s faith made her overcome first the *internal obstacle* of pride, the social conventions placed within her, the personal prejudice, the hurts and other negative feelings that might be in her heart due to the feud between nations. She had faith in the power of Jesus, but could have the uncertainty of how He would treat her; yet, she chose to take the risk of being mistreated, provided that her daughter was free. In second place, her faith led her to overcome the *external obstacles* like the crowd, the collective thought existing in her nation in relation to the Jews and their pride, thinking themselves better than other peoples (calling them dogs).

Fifth: the Lord often challenges us to want more of Him and tests our perseverance and our faith. He also makes us sure that we are truly healed. Jesus may have seemed cruel at first, for His answer seemed to be provoking the woman who already felt humiliated to be there talking to Him. However, her healing had been achieved before, when her pride was broken by the will to seek the Master in His passage by Sidon. Jesus’ answer tested the perseverance and faith existing in the spirit of the woman, at the same time that made it clear that her inner healing was already a reality. She believed, accepted the challenge and was honored.

Sixth: The Lord uses us as instruments of discipline and teaching for others too. When Jesus came to carry out His ministry on earth, God was not happy with His people. They were very far from Him, both by religiosity and idolatry. In this text, He used the most unlikely person to teach and to discipline the Jews. The active faith of that woman confronted them with their unbelief and revealed to them what He would like to see in Israel. Moreover, He revealed to them what He would do in the future with the other peoples who believed in His Son. In fact, He showed them that He had come for both, Jews and Gentiles, finally, to all who received Him. We can also say that, as a man, Jesus was comforted by that woman’s faith and felt His soul relieved from the persecution and hostility of His own people who rejected and affronted Him with their unbelief (read the previous bible text, where Jesus faced a discussion with the Jewish elders about their traditions; they came from Jerusalem to Galilee simply to trouble Him in His mission). Praise be to Jesus who suffered for us and felt our humanity in His own body and is the only one who frees us from persecution and justifies us from the affronts of carnal people who, even without knowing, become an instrument in the hands of the devil against us. It is comforting to know that someone believes in us, and Jesus felt this too.

Seventh: a disciple must have spiritual discernment and compassion. The disciples were probably so concerned about their own safety in that territory that they forgot that Jesus was in control of that situation; wherever He took them, there was always a lesson to be learned. At first they felt very uncomfortable being followed by that woman screaming behind them. Furthermore, she was a woman and didn't have so much freedom to talk to a Jew, even more because He was a Rabbi. They did not have the spiritual discernment to realize that Jesus would do something and was allowing this kind of thing; otherwise, He Himself would have already rebuked her. Nor they had compassion for a demon possessed child. They thought more about themselves than on the needs of their neighbor. They should have been surprised to see Jesus meet the woman's pleas. Most likely, the harsh reply of the Master must have caused a shock on them, making them silence their own souls to hear and see things through the eyes of spirit. Often, as servants of God we stay at first somewhat disturbed by the reaction of those who come to us, for we don't understand why we're going through this situation. However, in quieting the voice of the flesh to give place to the work of the Spirit, we can realize that by obeying the Lord and accepting His challenges, we are the first to be benefited. Therefore, *a disciple must be alert to the signs of God and see His blessing hidden in what appears to be a curse.*

8

The instructions to the twelve
Mk. 6: 7-13; Matt. 10: 5-15; Lk. 9: 1-6



The instructions to the twelve

Reference text: Mk. 6: 7-13 (Matt. 10: 5-15; Lk. 9: 1-6)

“He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits [Luke completes: ‘And to cure diseases’]. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics [In Matthew it is written: ‘Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food’]. He said to them, ‘Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place [Matthew completes: ‘As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you’]. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them’. So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.”

- When Jesus sent His disciples to preach in His name, He was giving them, and also us, important guidelines for our lives as Christians and disciples. When He appointed them to go in pairs, it was to reinforce in us the idea of unity of purpose as an important factor in every activity field that we play, i.e., we work more effectively when we can share the same vision. When two agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it will be granted by the Father in heaven, for where there are two or three gathered in His name, He will be among them. It was Jesus Himself who said these words to His disciples in Matt. 18: 19-20. Thus, for us this means that without concordance of purpose, one cannot succeed. This is valid for each area of our lives, not only for a ministry in God’s work.

- In *second place*, Jesus told them not to take anything except the staff. They should not take money, or two tunics, or bags, or bread or extra shoes (sandals); probably that’s why we see the difference between the two gospels (Mark’s and Matthew’s). It’s obvious that to walk on the stony land of Galilee and Judea, the disciples would need sandals to protect their feet. Jesus Himself wore sandals (remember the statement of John the Baptist, “John answered all of them by saying, ‘I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire’” – Lk. 3: 16). Therefore, as well as the guidance about not to take two tunics, this would apply equally to the sandals, that is, not to take extra sandals, whose meaning we will see later. The learning for us is that *when we are willing to do God’s work, we should depend entirely on Him, not on human resources to supply us*. The mere fact that someone dedicate only and exclusively to this type of work that requires dedication, abnegation and surrender, by itself makes him worthy of a salary, as Jesus says, because His work is necessary, not to say *essential* to humanity, implying a constant struggle for the spiritual ransom of souls. We can complete this reasoning by saying that the instructions above summarize the attitude of a true Christian to accomplish the work that He has entrusted to him on earth, whatever it is: selflessness and trust in God. A Christian must go wherever the Lord commands, be a selfless person and trust Him totally. Doing the work, he is worthy of his wages, as Jesus says, and need not worry about what he sowed; will receive multiplied. What we sow in the harvest of the Lord will be reversed for our own benefit and it is He who takes responsibility for the supply of our needs. Step by step:

a) He told them to take with them a *staff* because the staff, also used by the prophets and shepherds, was used to defend the sheep, and symbolized *authority*. So when we put ourselves in the service of the Lord to accomplish His work, *we need to have His authority with us*. The difference between Matt. 10: 10 and Mk. 6: 8 can be explained as ‘not looking for a staff’ if they didn’t have one, but they could take one with them if they already had it.

b) Jesus also gave His disciples other guidelines; for example, not to take any bags or money or bread. This means that we should *not support ourselves on human resources for our survival or depend on the rules and values of the world (its fame, its ostentation, its demanding parameters, its mercantilist spirit [money], the culture of the people, their titles, their age, especially their youth, etc.), but the values of God*. Money is necessary for all of us, there is no doubt; however the meaning of this ordinance of the Lord would be: *not to use the force of the world to conquer our victories*. Money is the force that acts in the world to make us buy and acquire what we need and, when it is lacking, our life is limited, because even our most basic needs we cannot meet anymore, let alone carry out any kind of ministerial call. Nevertheless, the deepest teaching is that *money helps us to evangelize, but does not buy lives for the kingdom of God*.

c) The *bag* is a symbol of our *inner resources*, that is, what we have and know in order to do any work. Jesus did not want them to take their knowledge or their human wisdom, much less their worldly experience to fulfill the mission He had given them; however, they should depend on His wisdom and on the particular revelation of His Spirit to each case, trusting only in Him. Thus, they could find out the strength within them.

d) He also told them not to take bread, that is, the food of the flesh, only the spiritual food, because they would lack nothing, materially speaking, if they followed these guidelines to the letter. The Lord Himself would raise people to supply them in their physical needs. If they were worried about it, they would not have the time or ability to concentrate on the spiritual portion, which was the goal of the mission. Thus, we do not deny our human need for supply, but we should not be totally worried with it; otherwise we cannot concentrate on the things of God. Therefore, fasting puts our flesh at a level of silence and calm so that our spirit may be in tune with the spiritual things. The basic teaching here is that *everyone who wants to be a servant of God must depend more on the Spirit than on his flesh to do things*.

e) Jesus commanded them to wear sandals, but not to take with them extra sandals or two tunics. Here, He speaks of *being on dependence of God* and not to make store as a security measure because it would undermine the faith in the divine manna. In second place, *sandals* (or shoes) speak of *occupation, material blessings and authority*, as well as taking them off means *surrender, a sign of submission and respect*; and the *tunics* speak of *spiritual protection and moral positioning before life*. As written in Eph. 6: 15 about the *sandals of the gospel of peace*, we must walk on a single direction, which is the gospel of peace given to us by Jesus. Our direction is no longer the knowledge of the world, but the living word of the Spirit that makes us bring peace and truth wherever we go. Thus, we cannot have two words, God’s and the world’s word living simultaneously within us to direct us. Only one of them shall prevail; and a servant of God should have only one direction to follow, the gospel. The *tunic* should only be one, that is, our clothing should only be spiritual; our appearance should be that of Jesus Himself, our way of living should be just one, rather than live one moment in one manner, another time of another. We should not have ‘two faces’, we should not preach what we do not live; we must be consistent with our faith. We should not clothe ourselves with feelings contrary to the love of God; otherwise, we would live with the

dirty clothes of sin. *Our garments should be of holiness, that is, we should be always covered with the blood of Jesus, which is poured on those who are faithful to Him, and He, in turn, justifies them from all sin and frees them from all charges of the enemy.*

- *In third place*, the bible says they were instructed to remain in a house until they were ready to leave the place and should greet it when they entered it. However, if they did not receive them there, they should go out and shake off the dust from their sandals. This means that when we enter some place or in contact with other persons we should wish them the peace of the Lord as a way to prepare our path to what we'll accomplish in the name of Jesus. He also said that if in that place or house there was a child of peace, it would rest on him, but if the house was not worthy, His peace would return to the disciples. This means to us that when we are sent by Him to a person or a place, we must allow His peace go ahead for things begin to develop; however, by noticing that in the place or in that heart there is a refusal to receive the word of God, we should not insist or get angry with the situation because our peace no one can take away from us. The peace of the Lord rests only on those who want it and on those who wish to exercise it as well. Where there is strife, division, hatred and rejection there is no place for the loving relationship that comes from God. Contentious hearts, living for separation and division, do not let there be an action of the Spirit leading to reconciliation. The disciples should stay in one place until the work of God was fulfilled there, that is, *we must sow and invest in some lives and in some places until the Lord fulfill His plan*. The bible also says that if people did not welcome them somewhere, they should go out and shake off the dust from their feet as a testimony against them. At that time, when a person did not feel welcomed in a land, by leaving it, he shook off the dust from his sandals as a sign that he didn't want to carry the contamination of the place. So if we are taken to some place where we are rejected (therefore, they reject the word of God), our part is to get out and let the evil there. A little further, in Lk. 10: 1-16, when Jesus sends the seventy and gives them similar orientations, the evangelist writes, "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me" (Lk. 10: 16).

Although with the difficulties they might have faced, the bible says, especially when it talks about the return of the seventy (Lk. 10: 17-20), that the disciples were successful and many healings were performed everywhere. Therefore, *with us there will also be success and victory when we are ready to serve Him, for it is God Himself who entrusts us of this mission*.

9

Jesus calms the storm
Mk. 4: 35-41; Matt. 8: 23-27; Lk. 8: 22-25



Jesus calms the storm

Reference texts: Mk. 4: 35-41; Matt. 8: 23-27; Lk. 8: 22-25

“On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, ‘Let us go across to the other side’ [*To Jerash, in Decapolis*]. And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?’ And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’”

This is one of the texts where we can see a miracle of Jesus challenging the forces of nature and showing everyone His sovereign power over all that was created under heaven. He and the disciples had been preaching to the crowds in the cities of Galilee, so the bible says that was evening when Jesus told them to go up to the boat in order to pass to the other side. Perhaps by the tiredness and because it was already late that we can read in the biblical passage: “They took him with them in the boat [*in this case, Peter’s*], just as he was.” The impression we have here is that they took Him carelessly as if hastily parting from somewhere because it’s too late. They did not ask Him if He needed something or if He intended to do something, if He would like to rest before leaving, or even if He wanted to go up the mount to pray alone.

This brings us to *the first learning*: when we are hearing the voice of the Lord whether in prayer or after a sermon or after praise, we should not go out as those who run away from somewhere. We must pause to reflect and assimilate what was ministered in our spirit. A practical example is when we are in spirit at a time of prayer, where we open our hearts to Him, we feel His anointing involving us as a sign that we are being heard, we receive His direction, but we quickly interrupt this contact because of someone who rings the doorbell or the phone, and when we attend is nobody; or the contact is interrupted because the children begin to cry or to do tantrum or because the husband or wife has just arrived and wants to eat, and so on. Then, we leave Jesus or bring Him with us carelessly (‘just as he was’ – as wrote in the bible), because the worldly needs speak louder. The spirit leaves the ‘connection’ and we enter quickly ‘in the flesh’, forgetting the revelation God had given; there was no time to save it carefully in the spirit or in the soul to reflect on that later. With the disciples the same thing happened. They had just received valuable lessons for a whole day and suddenly turned to the natural things, forgetting what had happened. It is as if the alarm clock rang and they had to wake up. Therefore, *when we come into contact with the Lord we should not take Him carelessly; in fact, when we begin to follow Him as disciples, we can never take Him carelessly for the rest of our lives. He becomes a priority.*

Second: The bible says that they put Him on the boat and left. Overcome by tiredness, He slept. It seems that they ignored Him, because they were worried about the storm that approached. The storm came and they could not do anything to control it. Only then they remembered to call the Lord; and yet they woke Him up as if He was wrong to be sleeping or as if it was an absurd to sleep in the face of such a danger. But the Lord knew all things. They had received enough anointing for a whole day to be able to stop the storm if they wished, but were not in the Spirit to realize they had the power within themselves. Jesus had yet to show them visible signs, so the Lord told

them, “Have you still no faith?” They were confronted with their own wrong attitudes, because if they had not taken Jesus carelessly (‘just as he was’), and reflected about all they had heard, perhaps they were in a different spiritual level to understand that they had already received divine empowerment to perform the miracle. Many believers receive strength and anointing from God that already prepares them for a test that is coming; however, they don’t give them enough value and relinquish them. So when the test comes, they find themselves deprived of the strength to endure it. Brother! Learn one thing: *when God pours much anointing upon you, store it and meditate, because it can be an empowerment for you to be able to overcome a possible storm later. It’s just exercise faith in the word that is already in your spirit.*

Third (still connected to previous learning): *it is necessary to exercise faith and have courage to overcome the storms that come to our lives to intimidate us, in the certainty that Jesus is with us “in this boat.”* Even though He seems to be asleep, apparently without talking to us, His word is awake and well alive in our mouths so that we use it in our behalf. His apparent sleep is a way to test if we are vigilant and willing to use the authority He has given us. What comes from outside cannot intimidate or frighten us when we know that what is within us is greater.

Fourth: when we take Jesus carelessly, that is, when our relationship with Him is not complete and the physical and material needs seem to take on the priority, we let Him sleep, i.e., we extinguish the flame of the Spirit in us; then, when the violence of the enemy comes to bring us down, we feel adrift without support, so the despair. In other words, the contact was broken and the faith and the hope were gone. Therefore, this fourth teaching is: *not to let Jesus sleeping in our lives, not to forget to keep our intimacy with Him.* Then it happens what happened to the apostles: their vision was distorted and they thought that Jesus did not care about them (“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”).

Fifth: the word of God has the full power to calm the fury of the enemy. Jesus just stood up and said, “Peace! Be still!” And all the turbulence of the sea and the winds and thunder from the sky ceased. Spiritually speaking, He roared louder than the other lions, and peace returned to reign. So when the lie of the devil tries to make us see a catastrophe, we should ‘scream louder’ than him, releasing the Word in our favor, for it is written that the Lord’s voice is like the voice of many waters, such as voice of thunder that breaks the cedars of Lebanon: “The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord, over mighty waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon... The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire. The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare; and in his temple all say, ‘Glory!’ [KJV: “The voice of the LORD maketh the hinds to calve, and discovereth the forests: and in his temple doth every one speak of his glory.” NIV: “The voice of the LORD twists the oaks [Or LORD makes the deer give birth] and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, “Glory!””] The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits enthroned as king forever. May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace!” (Ps. 29: 3-11).

Sixth: when Jesus performs a miracle, His authority and His honor are recognized. By experiencing the miracle, the apostles feared and respected Jesus even more, because His power and authority was confirmed again. So when we are faced with a situation totally impossible to be resolved, humanly speaking, and Jesus performs a miracle, we must recognize that the glory and the honor of this achievement belongs to Him and to nobody else.

10

Jesus walks on the waters
Matt.14: 22-33; Mk. 6: 45-52; Jn. 6: 16-21



Jesus walks on the waters

Reference texts: Matt. 14: 22-33; Mk. 6: 45-52; Jn. 6: 16-21

“Immediately [*referring to the first multiplication of loaves and fish*] he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning [*NIV and in Greek, the fourth watch of the night, i.e., between 3:00 and 6:00 a.m.*] he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.’ Peter answered him, ‘Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.’ He said, ‘Come.’ So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt?’ When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’”

This text follows the first episode of the multiplication of the loaves, when Jesus sent His disciples to the boat, while He dismissed the multitudes, and telling them He would go up the mount to pray. The bible says that, when the evening came He was alone and the boat was now many miles offshore (in Jn. 6: 19 the bible says that they had rowed about three or four miles offshore – NRSV; NIV: “they had rowed three or three and a half miles, [Greek: rowed twenty-five or thirty stadia (about 5 or 6 kilometers)]”). This makes us think that it was not simply the early evening (or twilight), for the episode of the loaves took place in late afternoon (Matt. 14: 15), probably around 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. when the day ended for the Jews. Until they have finished eating, collected twelve baskets with the leftover bread, sent the multitudes away, Jesus went up the mountain to pray, the disciples took the boat and were about three or four miles offshore, we can conclude that it was already night when Jesus was alone on the beach. The bible says that only in the fourth watch of the night He met His disciples, that is, between three and six o’clock in the morning, so to come to them right now, it took some time to walk on the sea. He didn’t run but He walked, which again makes us think that it was night and not late afternoon when He came down the mount and saw the boat in the distance. This has a very interesting metaphorical meaning for us. He was alone, because His followers were far at sea, and the crowd was no longer with Him, because they had returned home. It was dark and there was no one with Him. However, the Father was with Him. He had just come down from the mount; therefore, He was full of anointing. The night means, biblically speaking, a period of darkness not only physical but spiritual, where there may be trouble in our lives and we do not have anyone around to help us but God, so we need to be filled with His power. The same way as with Jesus, our friends or acquaintances leave us alone in times of “darkness” of our lives, when we find only difficulties. However, if we are filled with the anointing of the Spirit with us we can face the challenges that we see ahead without wavering, for He guides us. Apparently, it was not a quiet night and illuminated by moonlight, because the three evangelists describe that the wind was contrary, and in Jn. 6: 18, it is written that the sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. So it was very unlikely

that Jesus as a man could have complete security for knowing where He went; perhaps He could not see the boat anymore. This means that He was alone, only under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, surrounded by darkness, and still had to do something humanly impossible, which was to walk on the sea to be reunited with His disciples. Therefore, we often *in our times of trouble, when we do not have clarity of what is happening and there's nobody on our side but Jesus, we need to be filled with His Spirit to face the obstacle ahead, which are the spiritual barriers raised in the moment we try to proceed with our goals.*

In the *second* place, Jesus was in the Sea of Galilee, also called Sea of Tiberias (Jn. 6: 1) or Lake of Gennesaret (Lk. 5: 1: Gennésaret or Gennēsaret (Strong #g1082), in Greek, Γεννησαρέτ; a fertile district by the lake of Tiberias, which was in consequence sometimes called the Lake of Gennesaret) or Sea of Chinnereth (Num. 34: 11; Deut. 3: 17; Josh. 11: 2; Josh. 12: 3; Josh. 13: 27; Josh. 19: 35; 1 Kin. 15: 20, Kinaroth, Kinneroth, Kinnereth, Chinnereth – Strong #3672, in Hebrew, כנרת), which, in turn, comes from the word kin·nō·wr, כנור, Strong #3658, meaning harp, lyre. It's really interesting to notice the harp-shape of the lake.



The Sea of Galilee separated the northern region of Israel from the territories under Roman rule to the East, a region occupied by ten Greek cities called, together, Decapolis; therefore, gentile cities, ungodly, whose major god was Baal and that the superstitious said he was who commanded the forces of nature in that region. Their names were:

- Scythopolis (Now Beit She'an or Beth-shean, in the Northern District of Israel).
- Damascus (Now capital of Syria).
- Canatha, also Kanatha (Κάναθα in Ancient Greek), is now Qanawat, in Syria; today inhabited by an Arab esoteric group (the Druze community).

- Raphana (Ραφάνα in Ancient Greek) itself was unidentified. It seems that it no longer existed after 106 AD.

- Hippos (in Greek; or Sussita, in Aramaic; the two words means “horse.” It lasted until 749 AD. Today it is an archaeological site between the Sea of Galilee and the Golan Heights).

- Dion (ancient Capitolias (Καπιτωλιάς, romanized: Kapitolias) or modern Beit Ras, in northern Jordan).

- Philadelphia (today Amman, capital of Jordan)

- Pella (its original Semitic name of Fihl, variant of Pihil), was totally devastated by the massive 749 Galilee earthquake. Now it is an archaeological site close to the modern village of Tabaqat Fahl, North of Amman

- Gerasa or Jerash (Part of it was destroyed by the great Galilee earthquake of 749 and subsequent earthquakes, but was rebuilt in the 16th century by the Ottomans. Today’s archaeological site is located next to modern Jerash).

- Gadara (Today are ruins inside the modern city of Umm Qais).

According to other sources, there may have been about eighteen or nineteen Greek-Roman cities counted as part of the Decapolis. For example, Abila is very often cited as belonging to the group as well as Kursi, Al Husn and Arabella (Irbid). Spiritually speaking, Jesus was entering enemy territory (territory of Baal), overcoming the spiritual barriers (symbolized by the waters) to meet His friends who were in the boat. Likewise, we have to go into enemy territory (the spiritual world) in order to achieve a blessing that is reserved by the Lord, ‘on the other side.’ The bible also says that the wind was contrary, that is, besides having to overcome the gravitational forces to walk on the waters, Jesus still had to overcome the opposing forces of the wind at high sea, which is usually strong, especially when the storm comes. The word ‘wind’ in this text in Greek is anemos, Strong #g417, which means, wind; (plural) by implication, (the four) quarters (of the earth), that is, the four winds of the earth (the four cardinal points). It is equivalent to the Hebrew word ruach or ruwach (Strong #7307), which not only refers to the Holy Spirit (*Ruach haKodesh*) or the Spirit of God (*Ruach Elohim*), but also to ‘spirits.’ This means that the spiritual world was against Him and from it spirits came and opposed His walk; however, He began walking in the power of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps He has taken longer than necessary; Jesus would come faster if it was not dark, if it was not night and the wind was not contrary but He did not give up and managed to get near the boat. For us, the parallel is that *when we have to go through these difficult times just on the strength of God, with the demons and the spiritual world making opposition to us, we should not let be intimidated or give up, but continue in faith, knowing that God is seeing far and guiding us with His hand.* Jesus also overcame the natural forces like gravity so that He could walk on the waters. We also have to overcome the natural forces, such as human opposition, the time, the weaknesses of our own body and soul and others in order to achieve our targets.

The *third* teaching in this text is that the disciples were in the boat, symbol of the ark of God, that is, His presence among men, as was the Ark of the Covenant and Noah’s Ark. The ark keeps the project of God and the disciples were, at that moment, a divine plan for humanity; however, they were feeling the lack of the most important thing that it was Jesus. The boat can also symbolize our soul, therefore the disciples were afraid and emotionally empty because they were facing the rough sea around them, the wind that was against them, and they needed the presence of Jesus with them. For them, it was also a time of trouble as it was for the Master. The only difference was that He, even in the flesh, had faith to overcome it and show to His disciples that they could do the same thing if they had the same faith in the Father. Because it was dark, their

vision was distorted, and the fear gave gap to fantasy; that is why they thought that Jesus was a ghost. Likewise it is with us when in these periods of struggle where we cannot see the things around us clearly, our emotions and our thoughts become vulnerable and we distort things, giving them a bigger size than they actually have, even transforming them into what they are not. In these moments, the firmness of the Word within us, just as faith in God's promise, are the most important factors for us to move on without fear and let the Spirit act freely to heal our soul, body, spirit and show us His truth. Hence, false doctrines kept within us for a long time acquire the form of demons and come to afflict our emotions and our thoughts, if we make room for them. Having the habit to read God's word daily strengthens us so that we can discern between right and wrong in relation to the information that reach us from all sides. Today, they are like the darkness and the rough waters faced by Jesus and His disciples: darkness, a bunch of garbage and lies. In short, the disciples were as in an ark, tossed from one side to another, missing Jesus. We, likewise, *in times of trouble and darkness, can only feel safe when we bring the presence of God to our interior through prayer and praise, because they revive the Holy Spirit in our spirit. In other words, it's necessary to bring Jesus to "our boat."*

Fourth: Jesus managed to meet with them before dawn, between three and six o'clock in the morning, that is, at the end of the time of fight, when He had gotten to overcome the difficulties and when they were about to give up. This means that *Jesus always arrives on time, when our limit has already been reached and when we were already approved by God for having resisted evil.* Then He comes and strengthens our faith, saying, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." This not only strengthens our vitality to finish the test, but also shows us that He will never forsake us. Although under darkness, for the sunrise was not yet come, now they had the true light there with them, Jesus. Therefore, they no longer had to fear anything. In other words, despite the darkness around, the *light* was with them and the darkness could not touch them. In Jn. 1: 5 it is written, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." Likewise, *when the Spirit of God is strong in us, the darkness move away and cannot touch us.*

Fifth: Peter was the one who risked experiencing more of Jesus at that moment, because he asked to leave the boat and go to Him. His loyalty to Jesus and his desire to please the Master perhaps have stimulated him to do a so risky request; however, He granted him and said, "Come", i.e., Jesus encouraged the disciple to test his own faith lest to feel so defeated by what he had lived until then. While he looked at Jesus, Peter walked on water but when he felt frightened by the force of the wind, his flesh prevailed and his faith weakened, making him sink. For us the teaching is to *keep looking to Jesus* so that we can walk in victory despite the affronts on our side. *While we are concerned about the power of the enemy we will be defeated, but if we remain in the faith of the promise and the vision that has already been given on the very word of God, which is Jesus, we will be ready to overcome all obstacles and be respected by ourselves, by our fellow men, by the spiritual world and by the enemy.*

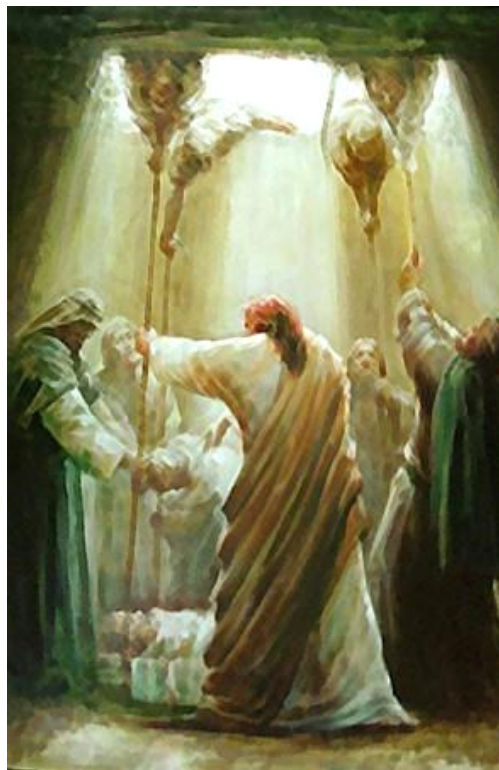
Sixth, the bible says that Peter, when sinking, he had Jesus' hand *readily* extended to rescue him. Even when we temporarily fail in our walk because of the deficiency of our faith, *Jesus is always ready to reach out His hand to rescue us.*

Seventh: the text ends by saying that when Jesus came aboard, the wind stopped and the boat soon reached its destination (Jn. 6: 21). This means that *when Jesus enters powerfully in our lives*, in particular into the problem that tormented us, *the wind disappears, that is, Satan (the threat) ceases to affront us* and we can complete our journey (Our boat reaches its destination). So if you have struggled against many

contrary forces that insist on not letting your blessing come, persevere, because it is almost in your hands. Cry out to Jesus and when His power descends, the enemy will be driven out of this territory. You will reach your destination, in the name of Jesus.

11

The healing of the paralytic at Capernaum
Mk. 2: 1-12; Matt. 9: 1-8; Lk. 5: 17-26



The healing of the paralytic at Capernaum

Reference texts: Mk. 2: 1-12; Matt. 9: 1-8; Lk. 5: 17-26

“When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them [In Lk. 5: 17 it is written, ‘One day, while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting near by (they had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem); and the power of the Lord was with him to heal’]. Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’ Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ‘Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, ‘Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic’, ‘Your sins are forgiven’, or to say, ‘Stand up and take your mat and walk?’ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’—he said to the paralytic—‘I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.’ And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’”

In the chapter in which we meditated on the *healing of the paralytic at Bethesda*, we described some important topics. Let’s recall them:

- 1) When we are sick, whether of body, soul or spirit, we must seek a place where God’s mercy can flow and touch us with healing (Bethesda means House of Mercy).
- 2) Sin paralyzes us.
- 3) Faith goes together with action.
- 4) We should not wait for others to do the work that is up to us to do. We mustn’t wait for someone to lead us to the truth. What we must do is let Jesus touch us and heal us by our faith, and seek Him by our own will and initiative.
- 5) Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath.
- 6) God continues working, shaping His creation until today through our lives.
- 7) The word of God heals us from any disease.

In this text, we can find other teaching that is complementary to those described above; moreover, it shows us that even when dealing with similar physical cases (paralysis), the causes and motivations here were different. Therefore human beings with similar diseases have inside themselves a different cause for it and so they are treated individually by Jesus.

1) When Jesus heard of the arrest of His cousin John, He left Nazareth and made His home in Capernaum. The city was located northwest of the Sea of Galilee. Its name comes from the Hebrew *Kephâr Nahûm* (“*village of Nahum*”); *Nahum* (*comfort, consolation*). It was the seat of tax collectors, and the presence of a centurion there (Matt. 8: 5; Lk. 7: 2), may have meant that there was a Roman military post in the city. Jesus condemned it several times by its lack of faith. The bible says that in the house where Jesus was, the Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes (Lk. 5: 7) gathered around. The *Scribes* (from the Hebrew word, *Sōpherîm*), also called *doctors or teachers of the law*,

were technicians in the study of the Law of Moses (Torah). They emerged after the Babylonian exile, and exerted influence especially in Judea, but could also be found in Galilee and among the Jewish dispersion. They were the originators of the worship in the synagogue, along with the Pharisees. Some of them were members of the Sanhedrin, which was a tribunal established by priests, elders and scribes who judged the ceremonial and administrative issues relating to a tribe or a city, as well as important political crimes. It corresponded to the Jewish Supreme Court or Court of Justice. The scribes had their importance increased after 70 AD. They transmitted faithfully the Hebrew Scriptures and expected of their students a greater reverence than that they rendered to their parents. They had a triple function: a) they preserved the law. They were professional studios of it, their guardians, and they copied the manuscripts many times. b) They had disciples and made conferences in the temple. c) They were called the doctors (lawyers) and teachers of the law because they were judges of the Sanhedrin. They were not paid for the service they did in the Sanhedrin, so had to make a living by other means. They belonged to the party of the Pharisees, but as a body, the scribes were distinct from them. The *Pharisees* controlled the religion in the State. They were experts in religion and wanted to achieve spiritual ends *by political means*; the *Pharisees* never stopped thinking about the public interest. They believed that the oral law existed and was so authorized and inspired by God as the Torah (the written law). It was a Jewish religious party which was characterized by opposition to others, fleeing from the contact with them, and by the rigorous observance of legal prescriptions and traditions they established. They were hypocrites pretending a sanctity that they did not have. Most of the Pharisees were not of the priestly class and therefore did not depend exclusively on the Temple for their living. They were generally middle-class people who worked in various professions, such as merchants, artisans, and farmers. Some Pharisees were wealthy, but most were middle class and lived off their work. The *Sadducees* were opposed to the teachings of Jesus and the Pharisees'. They held political power in the council (Sanhedrin) and denied the resurrection, angels and spirits. Most of the Sadducees were wealthy and did not need to depend on ordinary secular work to survive. They fulfilled various political, social and religious functions, among which were the sacrifices and the administration of the Temple funds.

Therefore, Jesus was facing a triple political and religious opposition. The Word says that He was in Capernaum, a 'village of comfort, of consolation', if we translate the Hebrew name of the city. So it was a perfect place to be healed and to meet God, for someone could find His comfort there. Furthermore, Luke says at that time the healing anointing was upon Jesus [*the power of the Lord was with him to heal*']. He was doing at first, something risky: teaching the word of God, not only to the people but to whom was already quite understood about it; they were all around Him: Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes, not to learn, but to discuss. It was like a wall in front of those truly needy of healing, because they did not feel free to ask questions or to touch in Jesus and receive His comfort; the powerful had priority, and spiritually speaking, they were raising a barrier against the understanding of those who needed light. Probably, the crowd pressed behind them and around the house, trying to listen to Jesus, so the paralytic had no chance to get closer. *Thus the first lesson is: religiosity, disbelief and pride of those who think they are superior and knowledgeable of the Word prevents the minors from receiving the blessings of God, for they create a difficulty to the flow of love, comfort, mercy and compassion.* Jesus expressed this thought in other words in Matt. 23: 13: "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven. For you do not go in yourselves, and when others are going in, you stop them."

2) Directing our thinking to the paralytic, we can imagine that he was in that situation for some time and yearned for a cure. Probably he heard of Jesus and tried to be touched by Him anyway, not measuring efforts to do so. The bible says he tried to approach, but could not because of the curious (represented here by the crowd) and because of the religious ones who sought to have the full attention of Jesus to discuss what had no interest. The paralytic should have called his friends and acquaintances to help him to come to the Master whatever the way. We can imagine the desperation of this man approaching the house and not seeing even the least possibility of meeting the Lord. He must have cried and begged to help him to be healed. The gospel says that, then, the four men who had brought him there, possibly the closest friends, climbed on the roof of the house and made an opening right there on the place where Jesus was preaching, in order to put the paralytic face to face with *the Lord of healing*. The houses did not have much difficulty in being opened through the roof, for it was commonly made of a thick layer of clay, spread over a covering of reeds resting on beams. This makes us think that it was not so hardened like those of today, which contains concrete; therefore, the four men did not actually have to break the roof, just remove the beams and straw. This act by itself must have interrupted the discussion between Jesus and the teachers of the Law, because some noise was made. Jesus waited for the sick man that was coming down from the roof, and the Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes must have considered it disrespectful to be interrupted in something ‘so important.’ But Jesus was there to teach the truth and heal the sick, so He must have rejoiced at the sight: the daring to stop what really had no importance, in order to release the power of God to accomplish what He had come to do there. The *number four* is the number of the *gospel*, the *Word*, the *relationship between man and God*; for the Jews it is a symbol of the *perfect number*, the man united to the Trinity: the four sides of the New Jerusalem, four orders of tribes, four letters in Hebrew name of God – YHWH. In other words, those men were armed with *faith in the Word*, seeking a closer union between Jesus and their friend; in fact they acted as intercessors, that is, through their faith in action they opened the way for the divine healing to come upon a needy. *So the second teaching here is: when we need a blessing too much and we are not managing to overcome the spiritual barriers alone, we need intercessors to open the way to the throne of God for us, where our salvation and our healing are. Our faith, joined to the faith of those who intercede for us, generates the miracle, breaking down the barriers of religiosity that impose us rules to speak with Him and the barriers of false teaching that distort the simplicity of His Word.*

3) “When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’” Jesus saw the faith of the man in Him and rejoiced, because this movement not only broke the barrier of religious discussion, but also allowed the release of the anointing of healing that was upon Him, ready to be poured. Of course, Jesus knew that the paralytic would come but waited for the right moment to reveal His power to everyone and to ruin the pride of the teachers of the Law. He could heal the man physically first, however, He forgave his sins first, in order to stir with what was in the heart of the religious ones. Much probably, His theoretical teaching so far failed to change their hard way of thinking, so this was the time to put theory into practice. The man’s faith made Jesus touch directly on the wound, in the cause of that paralysis, which was the sin, and that explained the paralytic’s anxiety in being touched by Him. The guilt and the feeling of accusation should be torturing him more than the physical illness itself. For us, the teaching is: it is no use to seek only a superficial cure (in the body) through doctors and medicine, but a deep healing of the soul, receiving the forgiveness of Jesus, if it is the case, or receiving His justice and deliverance of

anything that may be trying to paralyze us. In other words, the Pharisees speak pretty, their prayers have appearance of healing power, but only heal superficially; they do not reach the profound because they do not maintain intimacy with the Holy Spirit and do not know God's heart, who sees everything. *The Lord does not want apparent cures in His children but deep and definitive ones. "God does not put band-aid on an open fracture. He puts the scalpel immediately."*

4) The Lord knows the deepest of our heart. With the attitude of forgiving the man Jesus started to touch deeply in the wound of the Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes, which was the hypocrisy (Matt. 16: 12; Lk. 12: 1) and He exposed it before their own eyes. He wanted to show them that what they did (to heal people superficially through deceit and futility of their teaching and doctrine) was easy, as it is easier for many people today to run to the doctor and take a medicine for any symptom or make a quick surgery just to get rid of the problem quickly, rather than seek the true healing in God. It is not wrong to seek help from doctors, for the Lord blessed them and put them on earth for our benefit; what is wrong is to turn them into gods and think that it is their responsibility to solve our case. With pastors is the same thing; they are transformed into lifeline for those who does not want to fight for themselves to get out of sin. On the contrary, *God does not want us to have "crutches", whether they are doctors, pastors or anyone else. He wants us to take on the responsibility for our actions before Him and men, knowing that, if they are wrong, will cause problems and diseases and it's not in a blink of an eye that we heal them; if they are deep, it will take much time to restore us again and it is up to us to have the will to be healed.*

5) *When the spiritual barrier is overcome the physical body is free to be restored.* That's why Jesus healed the man spiritually first. With the spiritual barriers broken down, the physical was open to the blessing.

Do you understand the reason for this statement? Didn't Jesus rebuke Capernaum and these two cities for their lack of faith and lack of repentance? In Matthew 11: 21-24, it is written: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades. For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you."

The same thing happened in Nazareth (Matthew 13: 28: "And he did not do many deeds of power there, because of their unbelief."). These types of sins of the flesh are aggravated by the action of demons, who trap people's thoughts and emotions, preventing the reception and understanding of the Word of God, the softness of heart and, consequently, faith. For it was by faith that Jesus' miracles happened and He said, "Go in peace, your faith has saved you." So, when through the action of the Holy Spirit and the will of the people, their thoughts were changed and their eyes were opened to the truth, healing took place. The spiritual blockage was removed and the physical body received the healing anointing of the Holy Spirit through Jesus. Even though today we often do not see instant cures through God's miracles, He uses the methods available through science to heal lives, their faith, gradually. His name is magnified anyway.

Jesus said, "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven', or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk?' But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic—"I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home."

When we meditate on that phrase, we can see that there are two points of view. From the point of view of God, who knows the secrets of the spiritual world and knows how much sin can hold a life forever, including robbing him of his salvation, it was easier to heal him physically, because no one but Him and His Son has the authority to forgive sins and deliver a person from the devil's captivity. But from a human point of view, especially from the scribes who questioned him, it was easier to say that the man's sins were forgiven because anyone could say that and no one could prove whether it was true or not, since it was not something visible. But physical healing was visible and would be a sign that he who physically healed the paralytic also had the authority to forgive sins.

12

The resurrection of Jairus' daughter
Mk. 5: 21-24; 35-43; Matt. 9: 23-26; Lk. 8: 49-56



The resurrection of Jairus' daughter

Reference texts: Mk. 5: 21-24; 35-43; Matt. 9: 23-26; Lk. 8: 49-56

“When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, ‘My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.’ So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him... While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, ‘Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?’ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, ‘Do not fear, only believe.’ He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, ‘Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.’ And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, ‘Talitha cum’, which means, ‘Little girl, get up!’ And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.”

The story of Jairus (leader of the synagogue who came to seek for help in Jesus) can be divided into two parts, so to speak, for the first part came to deal with him, in particular, and the second with his daughter.

In the first part, the treatment comprised the emotional and spiritual healing of Jairus. As a ruler of the synagogue *he exposed himself in public, showing his faith in Jesus*, above the traditions and rituals that he knew and practiced; he also challenged his fellows, Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes, for before them he assumed his belief in the Son of God, that He was the only One who could do something for the girl who was dying. He came and fell at Jesus’ feet as a sign of humility, recognizing the lordship of the Master. *The first important learning* in this first step is that *when we want to see a miracle and we know exactly who is able to do it (Jesus), we must strip ourselves of everything that is old*, of all traditionalism and prejudice, including the opinion of religious people who may think that what we are doing is crazy. Jairus exposed himself before all the Jews, assuming his faith in Jesus and passed over all the obstacles that could stand up in his way.

The second learning is that, despite having faith in the Lord, *we must watch so that the “envoys of Satan” do not try to steal our blessing*. Probably many people there were ‘betting against’ and thought they could achieve their purpose by taking away the hope of Jairus with a bad news; tangible and evident news that was the fact of the child being already dead. We must remember that what stood between the request of the leader and the healing of his daughter was the woman with flow of blood, who touched the edge of the robe of Jesus and stopped Him long enough to cure her, but apparently to delay the blessing of Jairus. Jesus certainly knew everything that was happening and allowed that there was such interruption, not only to honor and benefit the woman, but also to show Jairus two more things: *1) He never comes late for any occasion* and *2) God is no respecter of persons*. Because he was an important man, he probably thought that Jesus would help him first, instead of interrupting his story to cure an unknown woman.

However, the Lord showed him that when God has a project, there is nothing that can stop Him from accomplishing it; besides, we are all equal before God and He chooses the priority. At that moment, the woman with bleeding was a priority, so He paused to listen to her, to honor her before everyone and to give Jairus a little time to rethink about many things. While he thought, Jesus removed from him the anxiety, the false hopes and fears, increasing his faith in God in the true way and showing him that even with the contrary forces trying to shame him, He was still in command of all things and that there would be a good end. We can imagine the inner conflict of that man by seeing the apparent impossibility that he had before him, by knowing that only one was able to solve his problem; however, seeing himself apparently forgotten and despised, moreover receiving a bad news such as that the Jews brought to him. His faith and hope, possibly, collapsed at the time. That's when he must have felt the Lord's hand pulling him by the wrist to his house, restoring them (faith and hope) by saying: "Do not fear, only believe." The bible says that Jesus called only His three closest disciples, who always followed Him when the Lord was about to give a great revelation. They went with Him: Peter, James and John, symbolizing the warriors who do not conform themselves to the evil and defeat and that keep firm their faith despite the apparent annoyances. *The number three*, besides symbolizing divine perfection through the "Trinity" also means holiness. Hence, *to His saints God reveals His miracles*.

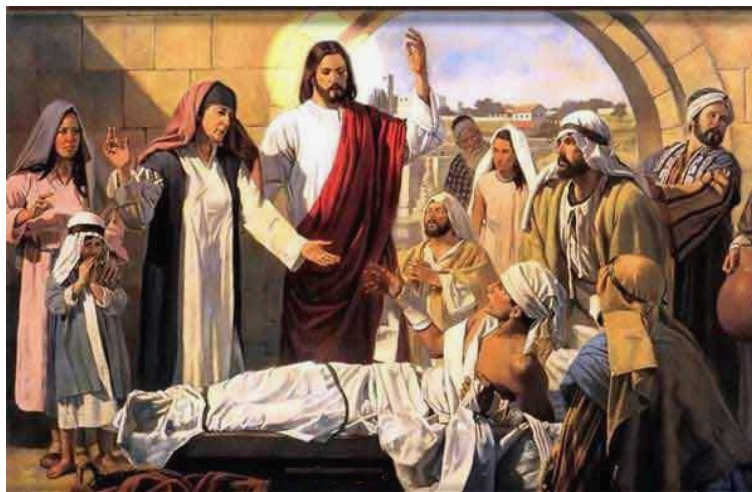
In the second part of the story of Jairus, the Lord begins to deal with the unbelief of those people, besides to *show His sovereign power over the only force that we cannot overcome, only the Son of God, namely, death, as it is written in bible* (1 Cor. 15: 24-26; Rev. 1: 18). At this point, Jairus, already worked internally by Jesus, is honored by the Lord to see her dead daughter being resurrected before his eyes. There is an important phrase here, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." What Jesus teaches us is that the eyes of the flesh always see the destruction and defeat, *but the eyes of the spirit see the reality of what God thinks about the projects and dreams that He Himself placed in our hearts*. When the bible speaks of a son, a child, it may be referring to a dream, a desire and a project of ours. We can take years to achieve a dream; however, when it was already determined and blessed by God, there is nothing that can kill it. It may be sleeping, waiting for the right time to manifest, but it's not dead. Let us remember once again that the child was twelve years old, that is, she was symbol of something that had been chosen and elected by God Himself for a purpose; so, she did not perish. *The number twelve* means the number of *the divine election, the number of God's call*; therefore *when our dreams are the dreams that God placed within us for a special purpose, they will never die because through them the Lord will show His sovereignty and His power among men*. An interesting finding is that 'Jairus' is the Greek form of the Hebrew name 'Jair', meaning 'God enlightens, he who spreads light.' We can extrapolate this reasoning by linking it to the previous one and saying that the resurrection of Jairus' daughter symbolizes the resurrection of God's dreams for us, because they enlightens, they spread light, that is, *through them the Lord will show His light to men*. Another interesting revelation is that Jesus told them to give the girl something to eat. Nobody knows what disease had led her to death; however, it was obvious she needed now to regain her strength. This means that *when our dream comes to life by the hands of Jesus, He commands us to give it food, that is, to nourish it with the best we have so that it can be strengthened and grow*.

One more thing about Jesus' phrase: "The child is not dead but sleeping." He was saying that what they called 'death', for Him meant only 'to sleep', because her body was dead, but her soul and spirit were predestined to salvation, therefore, to eternal life. "God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all are alive." (Lk. 20: 38), because

whoever believes in Jesus does not die (death = 'hell, definitive separation from God'), but has eternal life.

13

The resurrection of the widow's son at Nain
Lk. 7: 11-17



The resurrection of the widow's son at Nain

Reference text: Lk. 7: 11-17

“Soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, ‘Do not weep.’ Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, ‘Young man, I say to you, rise!’ The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has risen among us!’ and ‘God has looked favorably on his people!’ This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.”

Climbing the mountain of Galilee toward the south of Nazareth, there is a city called Nain. *Na'in*, in Hebrew means ‘*pleasant, delightful*’, perhaps by the temperate climate of the region. Jesus was going to that city. The bible does not say that He did other miracles there or that He took longer in the city, what can make us think that He heard the cry of anguish of that woman and went there to turn her weep into laughter. *The resurrection of the widow's son may symbolize the resurrection of laughter and joy in the hearts of all who feel distressed because of a loss.* The woman lived in a pleasant place, but for her, that day did not seem to be *pleasant or delightful*, since by burying her only son, she was also burying her whole joy and all her chance of survival. The word *widow* in the New Testament in Greek, means, *destitute, devoid*; therefore, that moment, the widow was more destitute than she already was; she had lost her husband and, now, her only child. It's interesting to think about the situation of widows in the Old and New Testament, for they became a problem for society; if they had no family, someone should sustain them. If there was nobody, they would be beggars in order to survive, so the Law of Moses had a determination from God as to give support to the orphan, the widow and the foreigner who lived among the people of Israel (Deut. 26: 12-13; Deut. 14: 28-29 – the second tithe; Deut. 25: 5-10 – the levirate law). The bible does not say what was the condition of this woman, however her anguish seemed extreme. Jesus had compassion on her and comforted her, restoring her hope in life, for He was the resurrection and the life. The Lord stopped the funeral, resurrected the boy and gave him back to his mother. Therefore, this passage *can mean for us God's restitution of something that we lost and we would never see the possibility of having back.* In this episode of resurrection, unlike the daughter of Jairus, the Lord has not spoken about the boy be sleeping. He was really dead, his mother had actually lost him; therefore, when our dream was certainly dead, or when something that was precious to us was completely destroyed Jesus comforts us, restoring what was ours. Often, we may think how it was possible to see physical resurrection in the past and not nowadays, except in some sporadic reports of miracles. But if we look at the gospels, not all dead Jesus resurrected physically, only a few, to teach us important lessons about what is a priority for God, which is our soul. We often concern ourselves more with the physical body and the material things, but if we think of someone who was loved for us and died, we can see that even in our sorrow, God comforts us, resurrecting our faith, our hope and bringing sometimes great spiritual changes in the family, resulting in salvation, our most important asset. So, even when we cannot see the apparent miracles we would like to see in our lives, we can be sure that *God continues working in our soul and our spirit,*

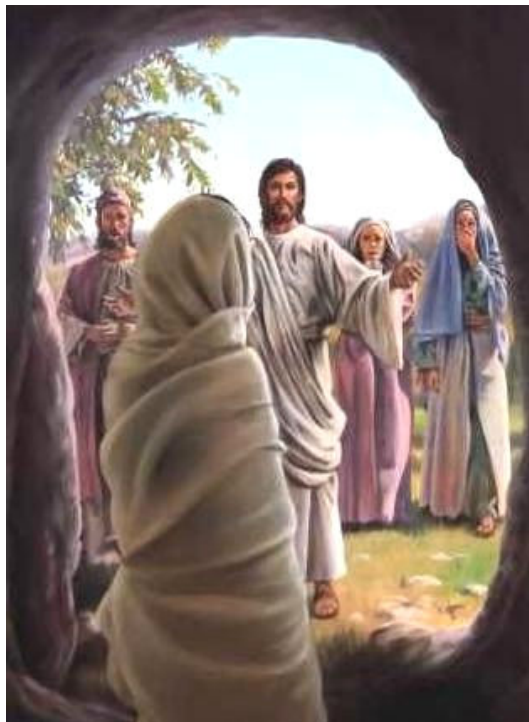
restoring us from things deeply more valuable like salvation, the intimacy with Him and the spiritual blessings, which no money in the world can buy. In this case, the widow had the return of her joy, for her only child seemed to be her greater joy in life, besides that *the possibility of having material sustenance was restored to her*, because she could not work like women today. Anyway, whether spiritually, emotionally or materially, Jesus is the only one who can restore what we lost and we must always seek Him, not specifically because of interest in restitution, but by knowing that even what we have never had He can give us when our heart is sincere.

Another teaching of this text is that the people were seized by fear when they saw the miracle and believed in Jesus as a prophet. This means that *when the Lord performs a miracle, it is often to arouse awe in the hearts of His people and remind them that He is God and can do everything.* His people must revere Him above all other gods. Jesus was considered by those people as a prophet, for His attitude reminded them of the prophetic deeds of the past, where Elijah and Elisha resurrected the sons of widows. Therefore, it means that *the word that comes from the mouth of God is alive and effective and continues to exercise His purpose of raising the dead, spiritual or physical ones.* Thus, when there is some kind of death in our lives, something that is 'stuck', 'balked', that 'does not go ahead', we can be sure that the Word is able to break all the chains and shackles and bring life to our dreams and projects.

Finally, the bible says that the people glorified God for having visited His people. This means that *when God visits us, is always to bring us life, to give us joy, to give us back what we lost and to receive from us the praise and worship for His deeds.*

14

The resurrection of Lazarus
Jn. 11: 1-46



The resurrection of Lazarus

Reference text: Jn. 11: 1-46

“Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, ‘Lord, he whom you love is ill’ [*Jesus was on the other side of Jordan River, where John the Baptist baptized at first, probably in Bethany (other than the Bethany of Lazarus) in the region of Perea, ruled by Herod (Jn. 1: 28; Jn. 10: 40) or in Enon (ainôn, from Arabic ‘ain = fountains), near Salim, on the western side of the Jordan River, about eight miles to the south of Scythopolis in the region of Decapolis – Jn. 3: 23*]. But when Jesus heard it, he said, ‘This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.’ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, ‘Let us go to Judea again.’ The disciples said to him, ‘Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?’ Jesus answered, ‘Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.’ After saying this, he told them, ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.’ The disciples said to him, ‘Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.’ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.’ Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him.’ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’ She said to him, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.’ When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, ‘The Teacher is here and is calling for you.’ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him!’ But some of them said, ‘Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?’ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, ‘Take away the stone.’ Martha, the sister of

the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.' Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done."

The bible says that when Jesus received the news about the disease of Lazarus He said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." But the bible also says that He stayed two days longer in the place where He was. The reason for this delay had a purpose, such as to fulfill the prophecy that He Himself had made, that is, that illness and all the consequences that it would entail would be only for the glory of God to be manifested through the Son, and the name of God was feared and honored. All this was to increase the faith of those who believed in Him and to generate faith in the hearts of those who didn't yet believe. Soon after the statement above, He tells His disciples that those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them. He also ended up making a play on words that confused the disciples. First He said, 'Lazarus has fallen asleep'; then He said, 'Lazarus is dead.' Jesus had to explain it clearly to the disciples in language that they could understand. Physically speaking, it was evident that he was dead, and his resurrection would be for the glory of God through Jesus.

But as Jesus saw something that other people could not see, let's give a metaphorical interpretation to this passage, so that we can continue our reasoning. The explanation of God's view about what we call death is that for Him it is called 'to sleep' (1 The. 4: 13-14).

When we meditate on this text, we can see that Jesus was a friend of Martha, Mary and Lazarus, so he should have felt, as a man, the pain of the death of His friend. Unlike the previous two cases (of Jairus' daughter and the widow's son at Nain), Lazarus was already dead for four days and it was practically impossible to bring back to life someone who had entered the process of physical decay. Here, there is the teaching in regard to sin. Jesus wanted to reveal to us what happens to those who walk away from the light, or who do not yet know Him. Even though they were friends of Jesus, they still needed to be touched more deeply by His healing; therefore, each of them had their particular moment with the Lord. Martha was touched by Jesus in her home when she tried to prevent Mary from hearing the Master's words. What He said was something strong that made her see the priorities of God for those who are called to His kingdom. Mary had a particular healing with Jesus when she anointed the Lord's feet with ointment made of pure nard (Jn. 11: 2; Jn. 12: 3; probably the same woman described in Lk. 7: 37-38; 44-46; Matt. 26: 6-13; Mk. 14: 3-8); and Lazarus had his special moment with the episode of his resurrection. Lazarus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Eleazar, which means 'God helped.' He needed God's help to get rid of the bonds that the enemy had prepared against his life. His story somewhat resembles that of Jonah, who in turn is a mirror of Jesus' death and resurrection. For the two men, that experience was a period of isolation. The only difference is that Jonah was alive and conscious and could acknowledge his error and cry out to God for deliverance. Lazarus

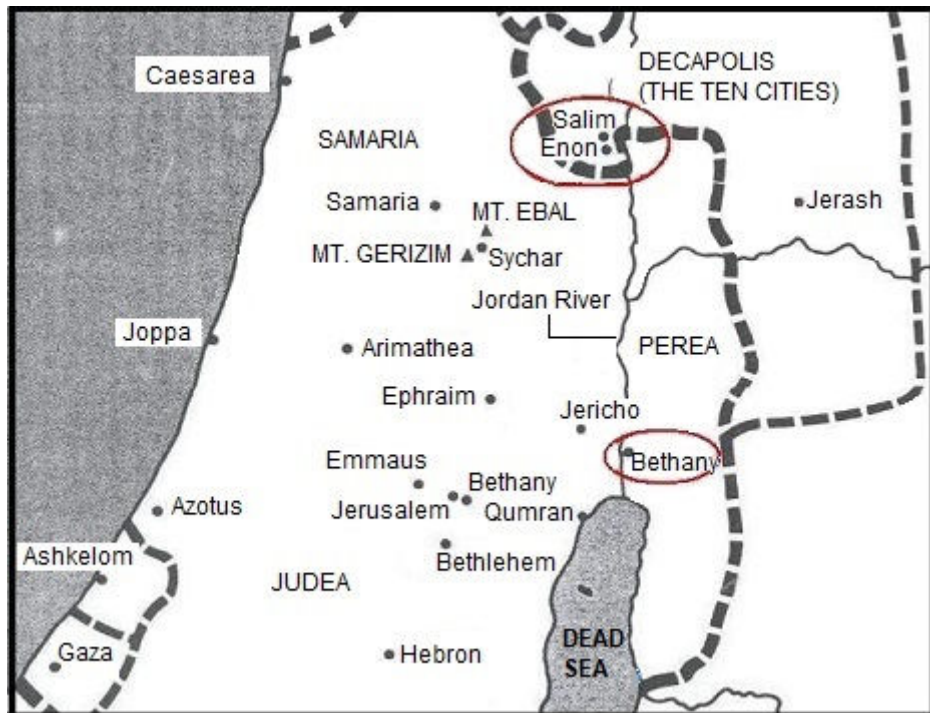
went a step further, for by the weakness of his flesh and spirit, the enemy acted in a more destructive way. Jonah was subjected to that trial by the hands of God Himself. Lazarus had God's permission to go through that trial, so that the enemy was shamed and unmasked, and the name of the Lord could be exalted. Therefore, Jesus said that this illness did not lead to death, that is, the spiritual death, the loss of salvation. He is powerful to save those who are His.

It is not known what kind of disease led Lazarus to death, but for us it has a metaphorical meaning.

The bible says nothing about the character of Lazarus. Assuming that Lazarus was quieter, more timid and even spiritually more vulnerable, he depended on the physical presence of Jesus there to keep steadfast, without falling into sin. Perhaps, because of this the Lord has said that he had fallen asleep, that is, he did not watch, and without the presence of the light of Jesus there with him, the darkness overcame him. He had not walked in the light but 'at night', so he had stumbled. What can we draw from all this so far is that Jesus is giving us a lesson about what happens when a person leaves His presence for some reason and weakens spiritually. First, he gets sick, falls asleep and then die, i.e., the flame of the Spirit gets cool and goes out. Then he is placed in a 'cave', oblivious to the spiritual things; therefore, the light, and is bound with strips of cloth that hinder him from walking and living in a normal way.

Theoretically, the core of the teaching is that Lazarus behaved like one who sins and 'buries himself' for the things of God, moves away and begins to live in darkness. The bible says that Mary and Martha cried a lot, as well as their friends. This attitude moved Jesus and He began to weep; perhaps because He saw there unbelief and human frailty preventing the children of God from being free and victorious, giving gap for the destruction of the enemy. However, He told Martha that if she believed, she would see the glory of God, that is, if she believed that He was capable of all things, the power of the Holy Spirit would come back into the spirit of Lazarus and he would reborn spiritually (following our metaphor to the death of Lazarus). Jesus showed that the Father was able to lift up all who sought Him again, so He said, "Take away the stone." He said to men to take away the stone, that is, it was not for Him to do it, but for Lazarus' friends. This means that through the intercession, the barriers that have been raised by the enemy may fall so that, then, His power can act. First, it is the human part claiming the power of God; then His power at work doing the impossible. He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" This means, "Lazarus, come out of the cave of sin, of isolation, and return to the ways of the Lord; restore your intimacy with God." Lazarus came out of the cave, but was still bound with strips of cloth, so Jesus said, "Unbind him, and let him go." When the power of God went into action resurrecting again that dead spirit because of sin, the strips placed by the enemy to tie him were exposed; the snares against him came to light; then it was just throwing everything away through a change of attitude to return to the bliss of the presence of the Lord.

We can summarize the teaching by saying that the resurrection of Lazarus means the restitution of the communion with God.



Places of baptism of John the Baptist

15

Martha and Mary
Lk. 10: 38-42



Martha and Mary

Reference text: Lk. 10: 38-42

“Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.’ But the Lord answered her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.’”

The story of Martha and Mary shows us the two ways to serve the Lord: the human and the spiritual one; or, then, two ways of seeing life, two priorities in life: things of the earth and things of heaven. Martha seemed to be a more practical and determined woman, more concerned with things of the flesh rather than the things of the spirit. Mary, in turn, was more sensitive to the fact that before serving the Master, one must learn from Him, so she absorbed His teaching. She knew that she needed to be filled with His power to accomplish something for His work. So the Lord said to Martha, “There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.” In fact, what He meant was that He needs true worshipers, children who feel pleasure to be in His presence, for this way He can act on their behalf. He who keeps the good habit of prayer feels the anointing that is poured out on him in the presence of the Lord. He knows he is being heard and, therefore, attended in their requests and can also hear what God is trying to tell or teach him. Thus, Martha didn’t understand what ‘tied’ Mary so much to Jesus. She cared so much about the tangible things that she could not perceive the invisible, that is, the spiritual.

Therefore, what Jesus teaches us in this passage is that the most important thing is not doing things for Him in the strength of our arm, but to let His Spirit use us, for it is He who does things. Learning from Him, rather than learning from men, puts us in a position of greater intimacy with Him and makes us understand the spiritual realities, which perfects within us the knowledge of His word and gives us wisdom to act according to it. The true Christian realizes that walking with God comes to be a personal way in which the learning is unique and adjusted by Him to each of His children. The person realizes day by day that activism leads to nowhere and begins to discover the privilege of entering directly on the altar whenever he wants, simply for being His child. When we try to do the work of God without the Holy Spirit’s direction, simply because we want to please Him, we do not get effective achievements, only weariness and frustration because we are putting our energies on the wrong focus. So there comes a time in the life of every child of God that he needs to stop and ask the Lord what He really wants. The bible says in Jn. 4: 23-24 that the Father seeks worshipers who worship Him in spirit and in truth. It is what Mary did. To sit at Jesus’ feet, learning from Him, was a way to give Him honor and be healed of her frailties and wounds. When we manage to enter God’s presence through praise, we not only leave His presence with our souls strengthened, but healed and freed because while our hearts are open to devote ourselves completely to Him, He comes and touches us with healing and blesses us with everything we need. Another way of being in the presence of the Lord, besides to be in praise, is to read His word, in order to meditate and learn from it. We began to discover that every day it brings a new revelation and goes washing us internally, putting His truth in our soul. It is as if we could see things that others cannot,

simply because the constant contact with the word of God teaches us to think and see everything His way, not the human way.

Returning to the comment about Martha, which I wrote in the text on the resurrection of Lazarus, about being touched by Jesus to be able to see the true priority, this text also shows us two ways of living: worrying about earthly things or valuing spiritual things. Martha was more concerned with the earthly and practical things of life, and so she spent a lot of energy on things that were not as valuable, and deprived herself of the comfort, refreshment, and guidance of God through Jesus, the Living Word. God does not mind that we work and take care of the natural things of life, but He always warns us to be careful that the distractions of the world do not take us away from His true plan for our lives, which is our salvation and our position as His instrument of blessing for His work. Our priority must be in the will of the Lord and not in earthly things; in the values of His kingdom and not in the values of the world.

Finally, we see a promise of protection from Jesus to all who want to be like Mary: nothing will take them away from this contact with the Lord. Martha tried to take Mary away from her place, using the authority of Jesus Himself, because she asked Him to order her sister to come to help her with household chores. If Jesus granted the request of Martha and said to Mary to obey her sister, it's logical that she would have to meet the orders of the Master, but Jesus didn't do that. He made it clear that He is the only God who deserves our attention and no other god or subterfuge has the power to separate us from Him.

16

The woman of Samaria
Jn. 4: 1-30; 39-42



The woman of Samaria

Reference text: Jn. 4: 1-30; 39-42

“Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, ‘Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John’—although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized—he left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink.’ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food). The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?’ (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans). Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?’ Jesus said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Go, call your husband, and come back.’ The woman answered him, ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus said to her, ‘You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband;’ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.’ The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am he, the one who is speaking to you.’ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, ‘What do you want?’ or, ‘Why are you speaking with her?’ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ‘Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?’ They left the city and were on their way to him... Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me everything I have ever done.’ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.’”

Before talking about the woman of Samaria, I would like to explain the opening verse of Jn. 4: 1-2, about Jesus baptizing. John wrote: “Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, ‘Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John’—although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized—he left Judea and

started back to Galilee.” While Jesus was on earth with His disciples, the baptism they performed in His name was the same baptism as John, the baptism of repentance, preparing people’s hearts for the coming of the Messiah, because the work of forgiving sins had not yet occurred with His suffering on the cross. But after His death and resurrection, baptism began to be performed in His name, that is, baptism in water, which brings the new birth, and baptism in the Holy Spirit, not properly administered by the laying on of the apostles’ hands, but by the determination of God Himself (Acts 8: 14-17; 36-38; Acts 10: 44-48; Acts 11: 15-16; 18; Acts 16: 33; Acts 19: 1-6). Two of Jesus’ apostles (Andrew and John), who followed John the Baptist at the beginning, were certainly baptized with the baptism of repentance (Jn. 1: 35-37; 40).

Jesus had entered the territory of Samaria, the bible says, to return to Galilee. Samaria was the northern kingdom of Israel. The capital was also called Samaria. It had been built by Omri, the seventh king of Israel after the division of the country into two kingdoms, which happened after the death of Solomon. It was built on a hill seven miles northwest of Shechem and dominated the major trade routes that crossed the plain of Esdrelon. Omri bought the site for two talents of silver (approximately sixty-eight kilograms or 150 pounds), and gave it the name of its former owner, Shemer (1 Kin. 16: 24). The hill was one hundred and nine yards high. It was unassailable, except by the siege. Its Hebrew name, *Shōmrôn*, can be connected with the word that means ‘lookout post.’ It was dominated by the Syrians, then by the Assyrians, falling into their power in 722 BC. Its inhabitants were deported, while others exiles from other parts of the Assyrian and Babylonian empire were transferred to there (later it was taken by the Babylonians). Those Jews who were left in the city remained faithful to YHWH, while other cults were established. After the exile, it was re-colonized by the Greeks in 331 BC and later the Romans took it. It was up to Herod to beautify it and it received the name *Sebaste*, Greek (in Latin, *Augusta*) in honor of Emperor Augustus. Some faithful Jews remained worshipping in Jerusalem; the others worshiped on *Mount Gerizim* and *Mount Ebal* near *Sychar*, southeast of Samaria. Therefore, through generations there was an antagonism between Jews and Samaritans. The Jews considered the Samaritans as schismatic (dissenters, a group that split from the Jewish community), but not Gentiles (other non-Jewish people), and trusted them, for example, concerning the tithes and the impurities coming from the graves. The main point of contention was the temple on Mount Gerizim.

Jesus stopped in Sychar and ordered the disciples to go to buy food, while He would stay there waiting, because He was a little tired of the journey. Around noon, He sat next to a well near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. By this time a Samaritan woman came to draw water. Then the conversation began between them, leading her to know herself better and to know the Messiah. *The first teaching here is that Jesus comes into enemy territory where there is antagonism, even if it is to rescue a single life.* The Lord knew that there the Father would do a work through Him not only in that woman but also in the other citizens, for she would be His witness in that place.

What happened there was a little strange, for Jesus, a Jew, stopped to talk to a Samaritan woman. Women used to come together to the well in the cooler hours of the day, i.e., very early in the morning or late in the afternoon. They came always together, but that one was there alone and in an hour completely inappropriate, which makes us think that she was rejected by the other women and even by the local inhabitants. The bible tells no details of her past life, except that she already had five husbands. We also do not know whether she was widow of the five men or had separated of them for some reason. Some commentators say that she was a prostitute. No one knows for sure.

Perhaps she was a woman devoid of support, an insecure woman, who sought help for her loneliness in the wrong places and in the wrong people. She did not say how all started to 'fall down' in her life, but Jesus knew; maybe He have purposely made His disciples to go together to town to buy food, in order to be alone with her and rescue her from that life. What we can notice is that her relationships were superficial and unsatisfactory. But Jesus could transform that. She felt the concern of Jesus for her and saw that in His eyes there was no prejudice or accusation. Then He told her about true worship. She acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah and received a greater understanding of her own life, in order to rebuild it in the right way. She ran back to town to tell the citizens of that place what she had experienced through the conversation with Jesus. The bible says that many were converted by her testimony, and others, by seeing Jesus personally, began to believe too.

With this passage written above we can understand *the main teachings* for us:

- Jesus comes into 'enemy territory' where there is antagonism, even if it is to rescue a single life.
- Jesus knows totally our inner self and the real motives of our hearts for us to have acted a certain way in our past and our current motivations for us to be acting today.
- His compassion for our suffering is real and makes us open our interior completely to Him, because we can be sure that in Him there are no accusation, but forgiveness, liberation and true healing.
- Everything in our lives can be rebuilt when we give ourselves truly to Him and believe that He alone is the Lord.
- The presence of Jesus opens our understanding, throwing away the religiosity and idolatry, leading us to know the true worship of God.
- The Father seeks true worshipers, for the worship places us before the throne and makes us know His secrets. Through worship, many victories are won because on the altar of the Lord the enemy cannot be and cannot touch us.
- Our living testimony is primary factor to the sincere conversion of many lives, because the transformation that occurred in our interior is visible and undeniable. The bible says that many were converted by her testimony, and others, by seeing Jesus personally, began to believe too.
- When we are deeply healed by Jesus we are ready to be more helpful vessels in His hands.

17

The poor widow's offering
Mk. 12: 41-44; Lk. 21: 1-4



The poor widow's offering

Reference texts: Mk. 12: 41-44; Lk. 21: 1-4

“He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny [KJV: And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing]. Then he called his disciples and said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.’”

The bible says that Jesus stood at the court of women in the outer court of the temple, where there was the temple treasury. This one consisted of thirteen offering boxes in the shape of a trumpet, two of them for the temple taxes (the half-shekel tax for the current and previous year; 1 shekel is equivalent to 11.5 grams or 20 gerahs – Ex 30: 13) and eleven for the voluntary offerings (9 for the obligatory offerings of the worshipers and 2 for freewill offerings), that is, the offerings (their equivalent in money) for the burnt offering and for the sin offering, offering of birds, guilt offering, the offering of the Nazirite, the cleansed leper, contributions for the wood used in the temple, contributions for the incense, for the golden vessels of the temple and the voluntary offerings (charity offerings). The trumpet was of hammered silver. For Jews, the trumpet was a symbol of convocation. The word used for hammered silver trumpet is *Chatsotsrah* (Strong #2689), the same word used in Num. 10: 10-10, when God commanded Moses to use this instrument to summon the people and decamp. Other times, in the Old Testament, it was used the ram's horn trumpet (*shophar* or *sofar*), which urged the people to repent from their wicked ways and turned to the Lord. The word *shophar* (שׁוֹפָר, Strong #7782, Josh. 6: 4; 5; 20) comes from the Hebrew root sh-f-r (שִׁפַּר), meaning ‘improve, reform, recover.’ But the noun, *shofar* (שׁוֹפָר), means a corroded horn of a ram. Traditionally, Sephardim use a short horn, Ashkenazim prefer a longer, curved horn. The shofar can only make a single sound, with higher or lower tones depending on the strength of the blowing of the man responsible for blowing it, the Baal Tokea, compressing his lips. There, in front of the temple treasury, Jesus watched people give their offerings and pay the temple tax. He saw the rich men casting their offerings into it. Suddenly, there came a poor widow and, in a trumpet of voluntary offerings, she put in two small copper coins.

‘Two small copper coins’ or ‘two mites’ means two leptas, plural of leptos or lepton (λεπτόν, Strong #3016), which means: a small piece of money, probably the smallest piece of money, i.e. a small coin. It corresponds to a penny [in KJV, farthing], which in Greek is κοδράντης, kodrantés, Strong #2835, meaning: a quadrans, the smallest Roman copper coin, a quarter of an ‘As’, the sixteenth part of a sesterius. Of Latin origin; a quadrans, i.e. The fourth part of an ‘As’ or ‘Assarion.’ A quadrans is a Roman copper coin corresponding to 1/64 of the denarius or drachma, which were silver coins, Roman and Greek, respectively, equivalent to a day's wages. In this case, the quadrans are worth a few cents of our money.

She did not realize she was being watched, but Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

The lesson for us, although it seems simple and unique, exemplifies the behavior that the Lord wants to see in the life of every Christian, *the total surrender to Him*. That widow seemed to value the things of God before herself, for what she laid there was her living, that is, what she had; more or less like the widow of the Old Testament who hosted the prophet Elijah in her home, but was soon saying, “As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.” In obedience to the prophet, she made the bread and first gave one to him. Thus, she experienced the miracle of seeing her food be enough to keep them (she, her son and Elijah) for many days. The widow who put the coins in the temple treasury could be worried about what she would eat later or the next day and, unless she received help from somewhere, she would perish. However, she knew there was someone greater than she, God, and that this money she carried belonged to Him, so she gave it in the temple. Apparently, she lived by faith in the divine supply. The most interesting is that Jesus did not stop her of offering because of her poverty, for He wanted to give another lesson to the disciples and the Jews who heard His comment about the widow. Certainly, He would pray to the Father and the Father would provide her anyway, because she had been faithful. It is not known exactly if was being fulfilled the commandment of the Law which ordered the people to support the Levite, the foreigner, the orphan and the widow (Deut. 26: 12-13 cf. Deut. 14: 28-29) with tithes.

Thus the attitude of a true Christian is to *surrender unconditionally in the Lord's hands* without worrying about the earthly things like the wicked, because for them the visible things are their security. For the Christian, security is in God and *this attitude of faith and reverence* sometimes may seem crazy to those who don't understand the spiritual mysteries. This woman was poor and widow (which in Greek means *destitute, devoid*). This means that she had nothing as emotional or material support; however, she seemed to keep the spiritual part still intact by her faith in the Lord. And certainly He honored her.

18

The healing of a woman with flow of blood
Mk. 5: 24b-34; Matt. 9: 20-22; Lk. 8: 43-48



The healing of a woman with flow of blood

Reference texts: Mk. 5: 24b-34; Matt. 9: 20-22; Lk. 8: 43-48

“And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, ‘If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.’ Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched my clothes?’ And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.’”

The story of this woman who stood between Jesus and Jairus’ daughter on the way of the Master to the house of the synagogue’s leader shows us what faith can do for someone who apparently has no chance of receiving a blessing. Faith is a powerful fuel that gives strength to those who seem to no longer have it, so that they can fight, even for the last time, for something that is extremely precious. This woman, according to the bible, suffered this bleeding for twelve years and had spent all her money on doctors who could do nothing to cure her. The bible does not say whether she was married, single, widow, separated, if she had family, children, or if someone supported her financially, but we can infer by her symptom that she was almost about to die, for a bleeding for twelve years had physically depleted her. Probably she was extremely pale, with all the physical symptoms resulting from anemia as shortness of breath, acceleration of heart rate and breathing, extreme weakness, dehydration, hair loss, dry skin, poor absorption of food due to lack of cellular energy, lack of memory and changes in reasoning and so on. For having spent all her money on doctors she had no adequate food to compensate her for the loss of blood or to meet her other basic needs. Possibly, she spent most of her time lying down because of weakness. However, having heard of Jesus, a new hope and a new force emerged in her spirit, which awakened her faith to make one last attempt.

She lived in Capernaum, where the healing of Jairus’ daughter took place and where Jesus made His home for a long time of His ministry, when He began to preach in the region of Galilee (Matt. 4: 13) after the arrest of John the Baptist. Because she lived in the same city as Jesus (even if a long time had already passed since His exit from there to preach in other places of Israel), she could hear many testimonies of healing that were made by Him, so her faith increased to the point where she made a decision. She felt inside herself that, if she only touched the edge of His cloak, would be healed. Having this kind of faith in mind, it was a step towards healing. So, when Jesus came with the crowd to the house of Jairus, the woman must have crawled between the people’s legs until she managed to touch the edge of His cloak. It was then that the Lord stopped and asked the question, “Who touched my clothes?” He knew that this was necessary not only for the crowd to participate in one more miracle, but so that the healing of the woman was complete. We spoke of the material deprivation that she had been suffering, but the emotional deprivation that came with the disease was obvious,

for she seemed to have no one to help her get to Jesus. The family, if she had any, wasn't even mentioned as a factor of support for her. This could have taken her also to the complete loss of her faith in God; however, despite all that she had gone through so many years, she still maintained some degree of spiritual strength. By not having health, she could not work or participate in a normal social life. Due to the bleeding she was labeled as a person ceremonially unclean by the Law of Moses, therefore, her self-esteem should be completely impaired. Hence, Jesus wanted to heal her in body, soul and spirit, showing those people that it was necessary to make an effort to achieve a complete and permanent healing: to have active faith and perseverance.

That woman had behaved like a disciple, that is, she wanted to get closer to the Master, to touch Him, not only receive His healing like the lazy and ungrateful crowd received; she took a step further, she took risks; therefore, demonstrated that she was spiritually able to have a blessing and a greater revelation of God's character. She was honored and rewarded by Jesus when she had the boldness to speak in the middle of the crowd and tell her story. She was rewarded when, publicly, the Lord commended her for her faith and touched her with compassion (it is likely that Jesus has knelt beside her and touched her face or held her by the shoulders to hear her case). She had sought physical healing and was healed in all areas of her being; she had been deeply touched by Him. While she reported her case, the emotional healing was occurring, because the Lord made her see that the suffering was no longer needed in her present; it was now thrown in the past. Her present and future would be of health, life, strength, emotional, sentimental and spiritual restoration and her personal testimony would be a way to evangelize others and to kindle in them the faith that was dead. Thus, the most important lessons for us in this text are:

1) *Nothing is impossible for he who believes, for he is able to overcome all difficulties* to touch Jesus in search of a solution to his problems. *Faith is the fuel that makes us receive our blessings*, because when we put it into practice and go to action, everything starts to work together for our good.

2) *We don't need to feel ashamed to expose our problems to God*, even if others around us do not give credit or ridicule us. Religious acts do not bring the solution to our problems. Being a woman and considered unclean because of the bleeding, she was probably judged by many around her because she had touched the Teacher, but she did not care about what they thought of her; she told Him the whole story in front of everyone, which was not only honor to herself, helping her overcome shame and fear, but it was also a way of giving glory to God publicly in the person of His Son, *ascribing to Him the merit for her healing*.

3) *When the Lord heals us He heals us completely* (body, soul and spirit) and shows us that certain cures must come first from the spirit in order to reach to the material world. The victory of the woman began when she had the spiritual discernment to abandon the old strategies of healing, in order to seek for the real cure in Jesus. She understood that in Him was all the power; hence, she changed the way of behaving and thinking and clung to faith.

4) *God deals with us individually and with interest, not with negligence*. Jesus, like in all other relevant passages of healing described in the bible, stopped, looked into the eyes of the 'patient', heard him with attention and performed the miracle. He did nothing in a hasty or careless way, walking and talking at the same time with those who sought Him, simply because He was late for a meeting at the home of a Pharisee or because He was in a hurry to do anything else and was not in a mood of hearing nonsense. The world overburdens us with false needs, imposing a haste and a false efficiency (aiming only financial profit), causing us to despise the 'moments of eternity'

that the Lord puts in our way when He wants to use us for His work. When we lose the 'moments of eternity' from God, they probably will not return and then we will repent of having neglected them. We should take advantage of all the good moments that that Lord provides for us to do something more constructive, such as, to love our neighbor and help him in his needs, to talk, to relate well, to preach God's word to who is in need of it, to dedicate ourselves to the mission He gave us, and most of all, to develop our inner growth and work out our sanctification, giving value to our personal conversations with Jesus.

19

The healing of the man born blind
Jn. 9: 1-41



The healing of the man born blind

Reference text: Jn. 9: 1-41

“As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam’ (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, ‘Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?’ Some were saying, ‘It is he.’ Others were saying, ‘No, but it is someone like him.’ He kept saying, ‘I am the man.’ But they kept asking him, ‘Then how were your eyes opened?’ He answered, ‘The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.’ They said to him, ‘Where is he?’ He said, ‘I do not know.’ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, ‘He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.’ Some of the Pharisees said, ‘This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.’ But others said, ‘How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?’ And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, ‘What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.’ He said, ‘He is a prophet.’ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, ‘Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?’ His parents answered, ‘We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.’ His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, ‘He is of age; ask him.’ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, ‘Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.’ He answered, ‘I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.’ They said to him, ‘What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?’ He answered them, ‘I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?’ Then they reviled him, saying, ‘You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.’ The man answered, ‘Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.’ They answered him, ‘You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?’ And they drove him out. Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ He answered, ‘And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.’ He said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshiped him. Jesus said, ‘I came into this

world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.’ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, ‘Surely we are not blind, are we?’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see’, your sin remains” [cf. Rom. 4: 15: For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation].

1) Jesus saw in Jerusalem a man born blind and the disciples immediately asked who had sinned so that he was born blind; that is because, for the Jews, any birth defect meant sins of ancestors in that family. However, Jesus told them this was not the case; it would be so that God’s works might be revealed in him, that is, so that He might heal him and people could see once again that He was the Son of God. *The first learning here is that diseases have many different causes and it is up to God to reveal them to us; but it is not up to us to judge our brothers.*

2) *In the second place*, Jesus reaffirmed to be the light of the world and said that one must do the work while it is day, because at night it is not possible. This has two meanings: one related to Himself, another to us. While He was exercising His ministry on earth, He could do the Father’s work, however, when the time came for Satan to prevail upon Him to take Him to the cross, the work would be another and He could not perform what He was doing at this moment. There on the cross, His work would be of redemption and He would carry on Him the darkness (sins) of us all. The second meaning is to us, that is, while God is pouring His Spirit upon our lives, He is also pouring the anointing to accomplish His work; however, when Jesus comes back, leaving on earth only those who will go through the plagues, we shall no longer do the work because it will be the time of the judgment of God upon sin. As a teaching remains the idea that *we should do God’s work while we have opportunity, because His Spirit is pouring His anointing.*

3) *In the third place*, Jesus spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread it on the man’s eyes, sending him to wash in the Pool of Siloam. It was a practice known by medicine at that time that there was something in the saliva that could serve as a medicine for those with visual problems, but I think that was not because of this that the Lord did what He did with the man. We can notice that He healed three blind men differently to show that nothing is repeated with Him; He does as He wills. When we studied about the healing of the blind man at Jericho, we saw that Jesus simply asked him (the Gospels of Mark and Luke) what he wanted and he asked Him to be healed. In Matthew it is written that the Lord touched his eyes, but there is no reference to the use of saliva, only in healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (Mk. 8: 22-26). So here we can think that by using saliva and mixing it with the clay, metaphorically speaking, Jesus was uniting His word of power (represented by saliva) to the human weakness (mud, clay or ground) and bringing healing and restoration to that man. Once again, this would demonstrate *the need that the human beings has for God to have life*, as He breathed His breath of life into Adam so that he became a living soul (Gen. 2: 7).

- In the case of the blind man of Bethsaida, it is not known whether he had ever seen before. Jesus healed him with saliva (the true and liberating word of God) and took him away from the village, that is, from the negative external influence that brought unbelief.

- In the case of the blind man of Jericho, Jesus healed him only with His word, because there was no sin, but only true faith in him. He restored sight to someone who had already seen before.

- In the case of the man born blind, Jesus healed him with mud and saliva; it was not a question of sin either, but to manifest the works of God. He opened the eyes of

someone who had never seen before. There was a physical healing and a new spiritual birth. Water symbolizes life.

4) The Lord told him to wash in the Pool of Siloam, which was a pool built by King Hezekiah to bring water to Jerusalem. Without water, the city would die, which makes us infer that water is a symbol of life. The fact of Jesus send the man to wash his eyes in the pool symbolized that *it was necessary for him to imbue himself with the vision of God, washing himself of the human vision, in order to have life*. The word 'Siloam' (Shilôah, in Hebrew שִׁלּוֹחַ) – translated as "Sent" – is written in Greek in the NT (Greek Textus Receptus) as Siloam (silôam, σιλωαμ) and can be found three times in the bible: 1) Neh. 3: 15 ('Pool of Shelah', NRSV, or 'Pool of Siloam', NIV; in Hebrew in this text of Nehemiah – 'Fountain of Shelah'– shelach – שִׁלּוֹחַ); 2) Isa. 8: 6 ('the waters of Shiloah'); 3) Jn. 9: 7 ('pool of Siloam'). This also makes us think about *obedience*, that is, the Lord did His part and sent the man to do his. He obeyed Him and came back seeing. If he disobeyed, probably he would remain blind. *Jesus is the one who sends us where He wants so that we may be healed; He traces our path of healing*. The pool of Siloam was also a place of ritual purification, and therefore a place of life and restoration.

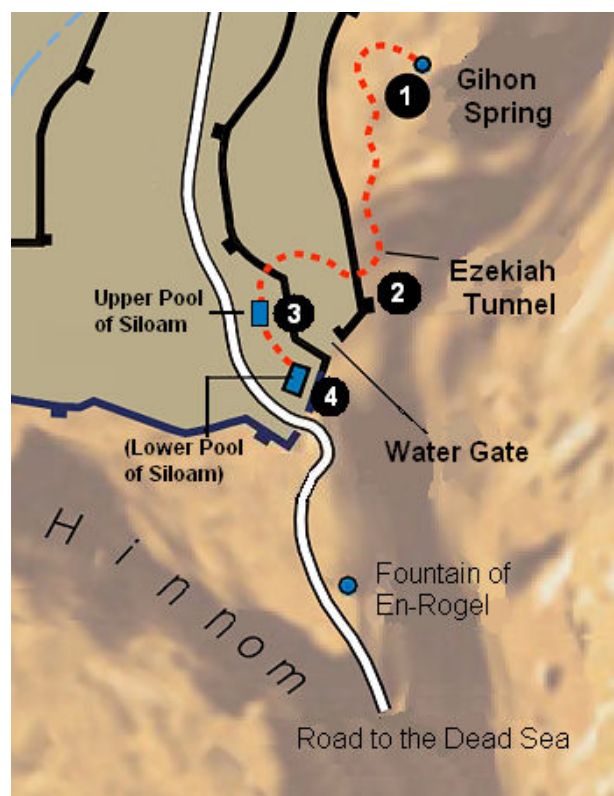
5) Here comes the dissension among those who believe and those who do not believe in Jesus in face of a clear healing, showing once again, *the disbelief and religiosity disturbing the belief of many*, even because the healing took place on the Sabbath day. This means that when we receive a blessing from God, it may appear those who, for hardness of heart, will question the origin of it; however, they cannot deny it or steal it because it was sealed by God Himself. So the teaching is: *not to listen to lies, but remain firm, confirming the cure* before of all people, as the man did, even if his own parents had forsaken him for fear of the Pharisees.

6) *Jesus does not abandon those who are His and reveals Himself to them so that their faith is grounded in Him*. When they expelled the man from the synagogue because he had confessed Jesus as the author of the miracle, the Lord met with him and showed Himself personally to him, strengthening his faith.

7) "Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see', your sin remains.'" Jesus meant that *He came for those who are aware of their sin and repent of it; then, under His blood, forgiven and justified, they no longer suffer charges*. However, for those who are blinded by pride, arrogance and rebellion, the Lord makes His light shine and their sins become evident before their eyes. We can also give another interpretation: *to those who are blind to the truth, but seek it with a pure heart, the Lord opens their eyes so that they can see it*; those who know everything, see everything and can do everything, trying arrogantly to know His mysteries, the Lord blinds them, because the bible itself says that the Father reveals His secrets to the poor in spirit and covers them from the wise and knowledgeable. It also says, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that 'they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven'... For this people's heart has grown dull" (Mk. 4: 11-12; Matt. 13: 15a). In Rom. 4: 15 it is written: "But where there is no law, neither is there violation", which, in other words, Paul said, "God has overlooked the times of human ignorance" (Acts 17: 30). When we don't know the truth and commit a sin, this sin has less weight than when we know what is right and do wrong knowingly. This is why Jesus said, "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be

required” (Lk. 12: 48). This teaches us *to care for the salvation given to us by faith in Him*.

8) The Bible says that the man was blind from birth, that is, he never knew what it was like to see. When he was healed, he was not only “born again,” knowing reality, but he also had to adapt to his new life. Before, he had been a beggar, like Bartimaeus (the blind man of Jericho); now, he would be responsible for his own sustenance, since he could work. Before, he depended on others, but now he was free to lead his own life. His self-esteem was restored, as well as his sense of what it was to be a helpful person to society. Likewise, when we are saved by the Lord, we come to know a new reality, we discover who we are and for what we are born; we have our self-esteem restored and realize that we are helpful. In short: we discover our true identity and now we have to adapt to this new reality; this is the new birth. The bible says we are a new creature, that old things have passed away and all things have become new.



What we see above is the map of Siloam, more precisely the tunnel that King Hezekiah built to divert water outside of Jerusalem into it, so that the Assyrian invader, Sennacherib, could not use it. Hezekiah reigned (as sole occupant of the throne) from 716 to 687 BC. In the 14th year of his reign – 701 BC – there was the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib. The reign of Sennacherib, king of Assyria goes from 705 to 681 BC. Hezekiah was troubled by the Assyrian yoke. By preparing for the invasion, he built the defenses of Jerusalem (2 Chr. 32: 3-5) and safeguarded the city’s water supply, building the tunnel of Siloam (2 Kin. 20: 20; Isa. 22: 9). *Siloam* (*Shilôah, sent, in Hebrew*) was one of the major sources of water supply of Jerusalem, linked to the Gihon Spring, to southeast of the city, which, in turn, poured water in it through an open channel. From Siloam, the channel flowed into the *old pool or lower pool* (*Birket el-Hamra*). When Hezekiah was faced with the threat of Sennacherib, he stopped all the fountains, streams

and all subsidiary channels that led to the river that flowed through the land (2 Chr. 32: 3-4). The king then sent the waters of the upper Gihon through an aqueduct or tunnel two meters high to a cistern or *upper pool* or pool of Siloam (*Birket Silwān*) at the west side of the city of David (2 Chr. 32: 30). He defended the new source of supply with a ramp.



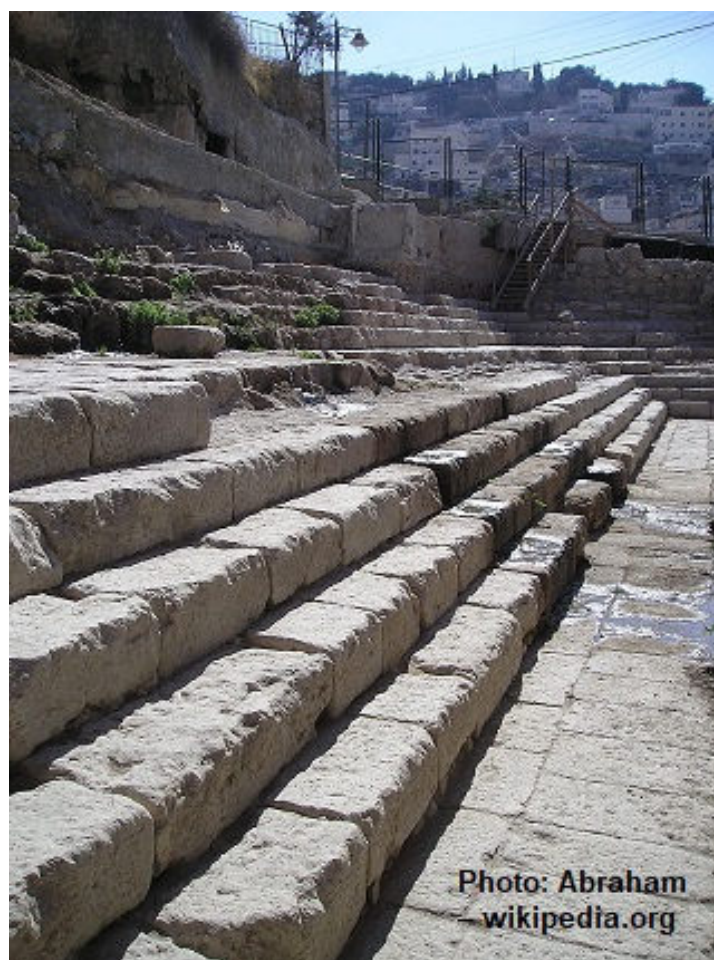
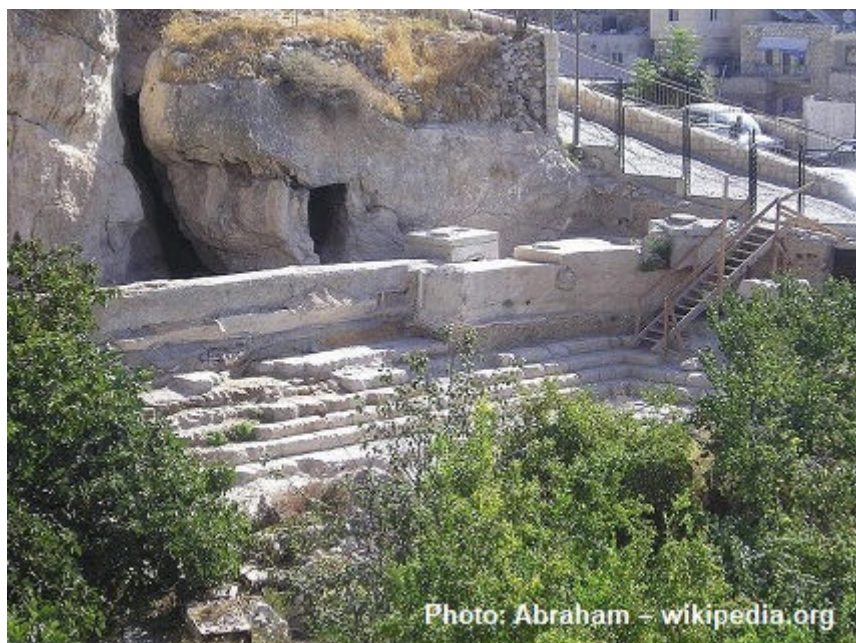
Pool of Siloam in the Byzantine Era (the exit of the tunnel in the pool).

In the 5th century (around 440 AD), a pool was constructed at the end of the Siloam Tunnel, at the behest of Empress Aelia Eudocia (421-450 AD), wife of the Byzantine Emperor Theodosius II (402-450 AD). This pool survives to the present day, surrounded on all sides by a high stone wall with an arched entrance to Hezekiah's Tunnel. This pool is around 70 yards (64 meters) from the Second Temple era Pool of Siloam, and is significantly smaller. Until the discovery of the Second Temple era Pool of Siloam, this pool was wrongly thought to be the pool described in the New Testament and the Second Temple sources.

The Pool of Siloam of the Second Temple

The Pool of Siloam was first built during the reign of Hezekiah (715–687 BC). The pool was reconstructed in the reign of Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BC), but it's not known if this pool was in the same location as the earlier pool built by King Hezekiah, for all traces of the earlier construction have been destroyed. There are three sets of five steps before the bottom is reached, to the water level. A portion of this pool remains unexcavated, for the land above it is owned by a nearby Greek Orthodox church and is occupied by an orchard known as the King's Garden (Neh. 3: 15, where he speaks about the Fountain Gate, the wall of the Pool of Siloam – Shelah – by the King's Garden to

the steps going down from the City of David). The pool is not perfectly rectangular, but a soft trapezoid.



Ruins of the Pool of Siloam – Photo: Abraham, September 2005).

The excavations also revealed that the pool was 225 feet wide (68.6 meters), and that steps existed on at least three sides of the pool. The pool remained in use during the time of Jesus, and where of the healing of the born blind man occurred. Strong's Concordance writes the Greek word for 'pool' as 'kolumbéthra', κολυμβήθρα, Strong #2861, which means (lit: a diving or swimming place), a pool. A diving-place, i.e. Pond for bathing (or swimming).

20

The miraculous fishing
Lk. 5: 1-11



The miraculous fishing

Reference text: Lk. 5: 1-11

“Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.’ Simon answered, ‘Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.’ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!’ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.’ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.”

This episode can be considered, so to speak, a landmark in the lives of John, James and Andrew, and especially in Peter’s, as a new birth, in which they stopped being simple fishermen and became chosen for the kingdom of God. Shortly before, the Lord had passed by the beach and called them to follow Him; however, from this particular episode they began to have real and tangible experiences with the power of God. The bible says that Jesus, not to be pressed by the crowd, got into Peter’s boat and put out a little way from the shore in order to preach. After the preaching the personal treatment with His disciples began. They had remained at sea throughout the night, trying to catch some fish, but caught nothing, so they were surprised at the Master’s order to let down their nets again. They were experienced fishermen and, certainly, knew the conditions of the sea where they had tried to fish all night. But Peter obeyed and cast the nets, by his faith in the words of Jesus, “Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets,” he said. This makes us think of some things:

1) *There is a difference between to work alone and work under the approval of God.* They had worked like ordinary men to get the ‘daily bread’, but after a whole night trying, they caught nothing, which must have brought frustration and weariness, for it was necessary a good physical fitness to keep rowing during many hours and cast the nets so many times. So our *first teaching* is that we often get exhausted trying to produce something on the strength of our arm, during the ‘nights’ of our life, where Jesus was not present, and all we got was tiredness and frustration. However, when He gets into the boat with us, things change their appearance, because now it is no longer night for us, but day. Thus, the Lord needs to be working together with us so that our work may be fruitful.

2) Peter, even tired, obeyed Jesus and believed, despite the contrary evidence. He exercised faith, similarly to Abraham, believing only in one word, even if the sea seemed ‘barren.’ Why is that, from night to day, the sea got filled with fish? We may think that during the night, when they worked without catch nothing, their heart was filled with the natural concerns of life, such as to get food not only for them, for their own sustenance, but to sell on the beach and get some money to take to their homes. On

the other hand, in the morning the circumstance was different. The bible does not say how long Jesus stayed preaching to the people, but when He finished and ordered Peter to take the boat to deeper water, those men were not concerned with material needs anymore (probably they had conformed to the defeat of the night before). They had heard the preaching for the same time as the crowd; therefore, their hearts were now filled with the word of God, which filled them with faith and opened their understanding to an experience of miracle. Thus, by obeying the word given by Jesus, that is, by exercising the faith that was already inside him, Peter had the restitution of what he lost the night before. *Our second teaching is: by putting aside the concerns about natural things, we make room in our hearts so that faith comes in, and thus, we can witness the miracles of God. We achieve restitution of the personal fulfillment we seek through our work.*

3) *The Lord is mighty to do immeasurably more than all we ask or think*, according to His power that works in us. This word written in Eph. 3: 20 is fully accomplished in this episode of the miraculous fishing, because the bible says that there were so many fish that their nets began to break and Peter, astonished by what he saw, fell down before Jesus and recognized His lordship over all things. Thus, when Jesus is in our boat, we can expect much more than we can think of winning because He surprises us.

4) *Jesus gives us a prophetic experience for us to walk in faith by the way that He leads us.* The miraculous fishing, more than a physical miracle, was a prophetic experience of what they would live, following the Master: they would be fishers of men, of souls for the kingdom of God and in the same way that the material abundance they saw surprised them, the Lord would surprise them even more when they saw the extension of the ministry that He was giving them. The number of souls reached by the gospel because of their work would be countless. Therefore, when Jesus calls us to His work, we can be sure that the 'fishing' will be great, whatever the position He puts us, for our nets will reach as many as He prepares to fall into them. There is room for everyone; there is no need for competition in His kingdom.

5) *With the certainty of their calling, they made the right and conscious choice.* After what they witnessed, they could be sure of the Lord's call, and consciously, they left their past lives to begin a new journey with the Master. When we are certain of the Lord's call for us, we can take the attitudes that are necessary with complete confidence, because we are aware of what we are doing.

21

Peter is restored by Jesus
Jn. 21: 15-19



Peter is restored by Jesus

Reference text: Jn. 21: 15-19

“When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you’. Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my lambs’. A second time he said to him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you’. Jesus said to him, ‘Tend my sheep’. He said to him the third time, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ And he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you’. Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go’. (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, ‘Follow me.’”

We all know how much Peter was loved by Jesus to the point of entrusting him the leadership of his brothers. We also know how much this man was emotionally weak, insecure and unstable, ending up by denying the Master before those who interrogated Him in the House of Caiaphas the high priest, when the Lord was accused by the Sanhedrin and sentenced to death. Peter denied Him three times, as prophesied by Jesus. He suffered the pain of remorse and was confronted with his own weaknesses, fleeing from the coexistence with the other disciples, isolating himself until receive the divine healing in Galilee. Jesus honored him and healed him so that the mark of guilt no longer weighed upon his soul and he was not seen by the others as a second traitor of the Master, even because the motivations of his heart were different from those of Judas Iscariot; in addition, the other disciples, each one on his way, also ‘ran away from his post’ for fear of reprisal of the Jews after the crucifixion of the Lord. All had denied Jesus in one way or another, but Peter needed a deeper touch to recover, perhaps because his love was more openly shown, which exposed him to certain attacks and wounds. In Galilee, the Lord was on the beach and they all in the boat trying to fish, which they did all night, however, without being successful. Then they saw a man saying for them to cast the net to the right side of the boat, very similar to what happened at the beginning, when they were called by the Master and had the experience of the miraculous fishing. However, they did not recognize Jesus. Obeying the order given, they cast the net and saw again the power of God, filling it with fish. John told Peter that he who was on the beach was the Lord; and Peter jumped into the water and swam to Him. They made a fire and ate. That’s when the healing of the disciple began. The strategy of Jesus was surprising because the same way that Peter had denied Him before a burning fire, the Lord was also stood before one and, the same way as Peter had denied Him three times, three times he heard the Master’s question, “Peter, do you love me?” Here we’ll see three direct guidelines of Jesus to His disciple:

1) In the first time, the word used by Jesus in Greek for ‘love’ is *Agape* (God’s love). Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me with divine love that I love you?” Peter said yes and Jesus answered him: “Feed my lambs.” This meant, “Give the best of living (‘feed’) to the small (lambs), to the youngest in faith.”

2) For the second time, the Lord asked him, “Peter, do you love me?” The same word used in the first question (*Agape*) and the same answer of the disciple, “Yes, Lord, you know I love you.” Jesus answered him again, “Tend my sheep”, that is, discipline,

teach, exhort, correct, take care ('tend') of the oldest ones, those who have already grown and know my word.

3) For the third time Jesus asked him, "Peter, do you love me?" However, this time the Greek word is not *Agape*, but *Philia* (*brotherly love*); that is why Peter wept and acknowledged his failure and his deep need for healing, because he was not able to love Jesus as a friend. Jesus answered him, "Feed my sheep", that is, "Give the best of livelihoods, also to the oldest ones who have grown, for they also need my love." His human love had failed and then he discovered that if he had not even the human love, how could he love someone with the love of God and lead a church? He would need a greater amount of love derived from divine empowerment through the Holy Spirit, for only this would be strong enough to take him to the same donation and surrender with which Jesus had loved him. Hence, the Lord in the beginning of the gospels repeats the two greatest commandments of the Law, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But later, at the Last Supper, He says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you", that is, with the *Agape*, a bigger challenge than the first, for they were already prepared to climb this step else, after walking with Him for three years, being prepared for the ministry. By touching the deep wound of Peter's heart, in his basic need, Jesus restored him, showing him that all the love he needed was being poured on his being, and therefore the Lord could trust him to give him the leadership of His Church. By sowing this love, his strength would increase and he could face death on the cross, years later, as Jesus faced. The only thing he should worry about at the time was to follow the Master for real, not with indecision, but with the certainty that now he was a new creature, and after Pentecost, there would be no barriers to his work. He would never feel afraid of anything because God's love, *Agape*, with which he would be clothed, would cast out all fear.

The basic teaching for us is:

Doing the work of God requires something beyond human love to sustain us on our journey, for this is limited and depends a lot on emotions, for it involves "to like" (fondness), that is, the natural human affinity for some people and little affinity for others. To like is human, to love is divine. In other words, "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26: 41), as Jesus said in Gethsemane. The spirit is strong to receive and obey the divine commands, for it is clothed with the Holy Spirit; however, the flesh needs to be strengthened in the same manner, to be imbued with the Spirit of God, letting be touched and be cleansed so that the *Agape* can flow completely. *Agape* is unconditional, it does not depend on our will, but on the very Word in action without partiality of persons, so that the righteousness of God already accomplished on the cross be also made among men, liking them or not. Therefore it is difficult the exercise of the *Agape*, because the leader has to deal with people who often he does not like (with human love, brotherly love), but need liberation, healing and care, whether beginners in the faith (lambs) or not (sheep). Only God can put that kind of love in our being and it takes a lifetime to be perfected; we just can't give up. We are leaders only when we have *Agape*, for it is the kind of love that brings the power of God to overcome the darkness, since it relates to God Himself in action. Peter may have not felt able at first, but began to experience this strength after Pentecost when He was baptized with the Holy Spirit as the other brothers, receiving anointing for the work of God.

22

The adulteress
Jn. 8: 1-11



The adulteress

Reference text: Jn. 8: 1-11

“But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women [*Lev. 20: 10; Deut. 22: 22-24*]. Now what do you say?’ They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, ‘Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.’ And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, sir.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.’”



This episode of the adulteress is one more of those where Jesus shows His mercy to the afflicted at the same time as He fulfills the Law. When Jesus said that He came to fulfill the Law, not to abolish it and that not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, would pass from the Law until all that was written by the prophets was fulfilled, no one could imagine the depth of what He was saying. The Law was given at a time quite different from that of Jesus to a people newly released from captivity, from rebellion and idolatry and that should return to obey God and believe in Him and His promise given to the patriarch Abraham that he would generate a great nation on earth and that from it would be born the Messiah to save His people once and for all from the oppression of sin. Humanly speaking no one could fulfill all the commandments to the letter. However, these people did not understand that it would be simpler if they obeyed only the two of them: “You shall love the Lord your God above all things, and your neighbor as yourself” Just as a man, Jesus could not fulfill so many precepts, but as the Son of God, yes, because His blood would replace the sacrifice of so many animals. The bible says that only He managed to live here on earth in a body of flesh, yet without sin (Rom. 8: 3; 2 Cor. 5: 21), being tested in His soul like all other human beings (Heb. 2: 18).

Jesus had the divine nature within Him, as the Son of God, but also had the nature of the flesh, for He was born physically from a woman; so He knew the struggle of the flesh against the Spirit and the Spirit’s against the flesh. By devoting Himself and remaining faithful to the Father’s will, He managed to succeed in His mission and could

understand what was happening in the heart of every human being. He knew every weakness of the flesh, at the same time He was aware of God's mercy to those who were weak and could not master themselves. Jesus was not conniving with sin with the excuse of exercising mercy, but at the same time He was not conniving with the hardness of the law that led man to commit another kind of sin: a cold religiosity which exercised the commandments with cruelty. He knew the punishment for the sins of adultery. He was not conniving with this attitude either. However, in the case of this woman, He wanted to give a lesson to men.

What did Jesus write on the ground and why did He forgive the woman?

An interesting question is: what did Jesus write on the ground? While the Pharisees were concerned of reminding Him of the law against the sin of adultery, He might be writing what the Law said about the atrocities committed by men and that were also subject to divine punishment; or He might be writing the sins of all of them, or else the sin of idolatry committed by all the people of Israel throughout the ages and, because of it, He had come to earth to put an end to this separation and this enmity against God. Therefore, He replied, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

Accused by their own conscience, the bible says that they went away, one by one, from her oldest accusers to the newest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman. Something had spoken within all of them, enough to recognize that, despite all their efforts to rigidly follow the religious precepts, they were failing because it was not possible to comply with them fully. When He was left alone with the woman, He asked if anyone had accused her and she replied that nobody did, so He said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again." As a man susceptible to sin, He was not able to accuse her; however as God, He had the power to forgive her transgression.

The best answer to the question "Why did Jesus forgive her?" is simpler than one might imagine: He had the global vision of things, for He was God; He knew all reasons of a person and also knew how to apply the Law with wisdom and mercy and, therefore, was able to judge impartially. "For man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." (1 Sam. 16: 7b – 21st Century King James Version).

Let us now turn to the woman who was there. First, we must understand the position she occupied in the marriage at the time, for women did not have freedom of choice or expression as they have today. We do not know if she felt loved by her husband, if she loved him, we even know if she was now committing adultery with a man that was also married. Probably she felt oppressed or rejected, and this may have been a reason for doing so. One thing was certain: she was caught in the act and this placed her in a position of extreme frailty. The fear that she was feeling was probably great, as well as the shame of seeing her sin brought to public. So she must have been surprised by the reaction of Jesus and His way of defending her. By hearing the voice of Jesus forgiving her, surely it was a landmark, calling her to change habits and being born again. So it is with all those who repent of their sins and end up having a deep and true encounter with Jesus; they never return to the old life, for a transformation occurs inside them and the blood that was shed on the cross comes to cover the wrongdoing, extinguishing it in the eyes of God. When He forgives us and gives us His Spirit our story is recreated, as surely was with that woman.

23

Jesus anointed by a sinful woman
Lk. 7: 36-50



Jesus anointed by a sinful woman

Reference text: Lk. 7: 36-50

“One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee’s house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner’. Jesus spoke up and said to him, ‘Simon, I have something to say to you.’ ‘Teacher,’ he replied, ‘speak.’ ‘A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?’ Simon answered, ‘I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt’. And Jesus said to him, ‘You have judged rightly’. Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little’. Then he said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven’. But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’ And he said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace.’”

In the Middle East, the custom of welcoming a guest into one’s tent was done with great pleasure and courtesy. The kiss and the act of washing the feet was not only a customary ritual, but a sign of cleanliness and civility (Matt. 6: 17). The host poured fragrant oil on the visitor’s head to bring comfort and relief from the heat and dust (Eccl. 9:8). The oil brought relief to dry skin. The head anointed with oil is a common biblical figure for abundance of joy (Isa. 61: 3; Ps. 45:7). The guest was also kissed on the cheek and had his feet washed (Gen. 18: 4-8; Lk. 7: 44-46). Washing the guest’s feet was a sign of cleanliness, comfort, and hospitality, usually done by the humblest slaves, a thing that was done willingly by the sinful woman and by Jesus Himself (Lk. 7: 38; Jn. 13: 5). The kiss (in the NT written as ‘holy kiss’ – 1 The. 5: 26; Rom. 16: 16; 2 Cor. 13: 12: “Greet one another with a holy kiss”) was a form of greeting, an expression of brotherly affection and unity among Christians. In Antiquity and in the Bible, the kiss was a common form of greeting and expression of affection. The kiss is also mentioned in Lk. 7: 45, when the sinful woman kissed Jesus’ feet. Simon had not done anything of this, but Jesus said nothing until the right moment, when He spoke to honor the woman that was there. The bible also says in Jn. 11: 2, “Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill” and in Jn. 12: 1-3, “Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume”, which makes us think that is the same woman described in the gospel of Luke. Taking into account the biblical passages

from Lk. 7: 36; 39-40; 43; Matt. 26: 6-7; Mk. 14: 3 and Jn. 12: 3, and assuming that it was the same Mary who anointed the feet and the head of Jesus (Jn. 11: 2), we can say that these are two different moments: in one moment she anointed Jesus' feet and was cleansed from her sin. Now (Matt. 26: 6-7 and Jn. 12: 3), already forgiven and more aligned with spiritual things, she performed a prophetic act regarding the death of Jesus. She might not know exactly why she anointed Him (perhaps she felt touched by God to do so), but her spirit was certainly in tune with Jesus. The evangelists suggest that the host of the house was Simon (Matt. 26: 6; k. 14: 3; Jn. 12: 1-2). The names "Lazarus", "Simon the Leper" (Matt. 26: 6; Mk. 14: 3) and "Bethany" appear together in all these texts, did you notice?

In this biblical text (Lk. 7: 36-50) we can see a typical case of inner healing that was achieved by a woman who was not afraid to expose or humble herself before people, simply because her need to touch Jesus and be touched by Him was greater than everything else.

She had gone there with something in the heart that made her feel unclean, but Jesus understood her. No one knows exactly what kind of sin she practiced, probably illicit sexual practices. The most important is that she was touched by repentance and sought her cure; in a shameful way to some and ridiculous to others but appropriate to her and acceptable to Jesus. The fact is that she had the opportunity to be cured and did not relinquish it. She was humble enough to perform an activity which was usually made by the lowest slaves, as a demonstration that she truly surrendered to the Lord. She also had the courage to show her love for Him in public, because as it seems, she was a loving woman, but needy, so much that all her sins had occurred by the human deformation of this love. It was not directed to the correct target. She recognized her mistake and her cry showed the anguish of her heart in wanting to get rid of that conflict. When Simon began inwardly to mock Jesus, thinking He had no idea who was touching Him, it was when the Lord gave him an answer that showed not only the prophetic discernment into Him, but also the wisdom to interpret and deal with a case like that. The Lord honored that woman before everybody, simply because she had something that, despite having made her fall into sin, they, as teachers of the Law, didn't have and that was love; that's why she could reach Jesus heart, and Jesus could reach hers, bringing true healing.

For us, this text provides the following teaching:

1) *When something bothers us a lot, we should go straight to the source of healing that is Jesus, no matter what people say or think of us.*

2) *Demonstrating our deepest feelings to God* can be embarrassing for the religious, but makes us be used by God Himself to put to the ground the religiosity that prevents the true healing of the soul.

3) *We must not miss the opportunities to be healed*, even though the place and conditions may seem inappropriate. If Jesus is there, everything becomes propitious to us. Our faith in action opens all doors.

4) *Love that is misdirected leads often a person to sin.* Unmet emotional needs can lead many people to do things they don't want to do, simply because they can't stand loneliness anymore and don't know how to seek their supply from God. The Lord said, "Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." Then he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' And he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'" This makes us think that people who has a

loving nature are most often abused and deceived, which makes them getting into situations that lead to sin, because the enemy uses the bonds of emotional blackmail, illness, sexual pleasures, lack of other human beings and so on, to entrap them in a sentimental dependence that often becomes sick, because their loving and gentle nature does not allow them to be more direct and objective, freeing themselves soon of embarrassing relationships not to hurt others. Therefore, our heart must always be dependent on God and under the dominion of the Holy Spirit, for He alone can teach us the proper way to love not to fall into traps of the devil. Love cannot be something lax, careless, too complacent with what does not deserve it, but often firm and strong lest to let those whom we love get lost. It's a mistake to think that who loves is always nice and does not rebuke, for this would deny the very word of God which says that He is love, but also says that He rebukes the son He loves. If God allowed us do everything our flesh wanted, we would all be in sin and not saved. It was for love of us that He has allowed the torture of His own Son on the cross. And it is for love of us that He disciplines us lest we lose our salvation. This does not mean that He punishes us with hatred or violence, but that His discipline is tempered with mercy.

Therefore, the phrase said by Jesus is important: "Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little" (Lk. 7: 46-47). This means that being aware of her any sins and of how much she was forgiven, she was able to love God much more, for she valued her healing and her deliverance; much more than a person who had not sinned as much as she. Even though she had sinned because of her wrong way of loving, she was more receptive to the touch of the Lord than those who could not love because their hearts were closed. From that moment, Jesus was correcting his way of loving, and that love would make her a strong and balanced person.

5) *The Lord still cares about having the honor due to Him.* Simon despised the social courtesy, for he thought himself very important; however, the Master commended that woman for having practiced it in His favor, because He deserved it. Therefore, everything we do to Jesus has to be with love and for love of Him, so that the honor and glory may be only His and no one else.

6) *One cannot give something to God with greed in the heart.* In all the three Gospels (Jn. 12: 1-8; Matt. 26: 6-12; Mk. 14: 6-8) the disciples' indignation by the apparent waste of oil by the woman is described, because it was of pure nard and too expensive. But Mary was not thinking about finances, but in true worship. It was a way to show to Jesus and to all there that she was giving Him the best she had, the more precious, to honor He whom she loved, and who was the Son of God. The nard refers to the plant whose scientific name is *Nardostachys jatamansi*, a perennial plant of the valerian family, but endowed with roots even more fragrant. It is native of northern India, where even today it is used to perfume the hair. In the biblical times, the nard, besides expensive, was imported in sealed jars of alabaster, which were only opened on special occasions; so maybe the indignation of the disciples by its apparently undue use. Spiritually it means to us the presence of Jesus with us every day and worship to the Lord.

7) *This act of Mary had a spiritual significance of confirming Jesus as the Messiah, the Anointed of God.* In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus told everyone that she was doing it for His burial and that the poor, they would always have with them, but Him, they would not always have (Matt. 26: 11; Mk. 14: 7-8; Jn. 12: 8).

24

The parable of the Good Samaritan
Lk. 10: 25-37



The parable of the Good Samaritan

Reference text: Lk. 10: 25-37

“Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he said, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What do you read there?’ He answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself’ [*Deut. 6: 5; Lev. 19: 18*]. And he said to him, ‘You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.’ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ Jesus replied, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’ He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’”

Jesus was once again put to the test by a lawyer who asked Him about what he should do to inherit eternal life and the Lord answered him that if he observed the two greatest commandments of the Law, he could enter the kingdom of God. However, he pretended he did not understand and asked Him who his neighbor was. Then Jesus replied with the parable of the Samaritan, showing to the scribe that fulfilling faithfully the entire law as the religious ones did in order to enter heaven was not the correct path, but open his heart to help the needy that was on his way. The Jews despised the Samaritans because they thought they were worshiping in the wrong place, instead of Jerusalem; however, they did not put into practice what they preached. They accused innocent, they judged all people, they were strict in the compliance of the Law leaving mercy aside, and still thought they would inherit the kingdom of God. Jesus used the example of the priest and the Levite, who also served in the temple, to show that precisely those who should bring the love of God to the people were the most distant for feeling so holy and, therefore, untouchable. On the other hand, the Samaritan who was considered unworthy by the religious was who put into practice God's love toward the wounded man he found on the road. It's the kind of reaction that the Lord expects to see in those who bear His name, who call themselves children of God, but should exercise true love in order to grow spiritually. The spiritual growth of someone is not measured by the degree of intellectual knowledge he has of the Word, but by how much he is able to put it into practice for the benefit of his fellow man. The more one loves, the higher the spiritual level he has. Jesus said, “But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing”; this means to do good quietly, with purity of heart, simply because it is good to be helpful, this, yes, brings the reward and the approval of God. Acting with hypocrisy or indifference in relation to a cry for help is to behave like the priest and the Levite who passed by on the other side, leaving alone the man who fell into the hands of robbers to mourn his own pain.

There is an interesting thing in this text on the Samaritan: he poured oil and wine on the injured man. Jesus was there and is there today as the Good Samaritan on our side, when many do not want to stretch out their hands in rescue. He pours on us the fresh oil of the anointing of His Spirit that, as our Counselor and Comforter, comes to heal the wounds of our soul, and pours His new wine of forgiveness and joy on our afflicted heart. His blood cleanses us from our sins and casts out the enemy of our lives. At that time, the wine had certain medicinal value as antiseptic and mild disinfectant. The oil was used in the preparation of ointments to treat wounds.

This parable shows us that our way of serving God can be simple, helping anyone He puts in our path and doing what is within our grasp. The impossible He does. Sometimes the simple disposition of our heart to serve Him is enough. We are used by God without knowing that He is doing this. No one needs to see what we do. Just His gaze and His approval are enough.

Who loves knows how to respect the neighbor; does not invade his space and knows to show affection in a discreet and sensitive way.

25

The healing of the bent woman
Lk. 13: 10-17



The healing of the bent woman (the crippled woman)

Reference text: Lk. 13: 10-17

“Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, ‘Woman, you are set free from your ailment.’ When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, ‘There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the Sabbath day.’ But the Lord answered him and said, ‘You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?’ When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.”



Again, Jesus challenges the religious rules to free His chosen from the prisons of the enemy. The woman was in the synagogue and, probably, she went there for years; however, without a solution for her case. That's when Jesus decided to go there to preach, for where it seemed to there be light, it was where someone needed it most, where religiosity and human rules prevented those who were there to have the freedom to express themselves and ask for the Lord what they truly needed. There were many words, little devotion and no anointing, so much that the woman remained under oppression. The bible does not reveal what she had done to stay in that state; Jesus did not care about what she had done wrong but with the evil that made her remain bent. From the emotional and spiritual standpoint, that situation should be a torment to her; she was forced to look down, molding her mind to see things in a small and depressive perspective. She could not even stand up to cry out to God in a more open way. Probably she had already conformed to the physical pain, because that uncomfortable position should make her suffer in body as well. However, the fact of still going to the synagogue makes us think that her spirit still kept hope in God that one day He would put an end to that captivity. Being a woman, she should remain on the side where the women sat [J. D. Douglas – The New Bible Dictionary, 2nd edition 1995 – about separate seats for men and women], and they were quiet throughout the religious

service, except to repeat the precepts that were read. But it was unlikely that she could even get close to one of the teachers of the Law to ask for help.

When we read the gospel paying attention to the details, we can see how many times Jesus entered synagogues precisely on Sabbath, seeming to take pleasure in provoking the religious ones and put down the empty traditionalism that prevented the people of the Lord from knowing the life and the truth. We know that every Jew had to go to the synagogue on Sabbath, so Jesus did so, but when He went to any of them, something different happened. This was one more case that transgressed the rules of the Sabbath to show again to everyone that He, Jesus, was the lord of the Sabbath. The bible does not say if He was arguing with the Pharisees, if He was preaching, if the religious ceremony had started or not, only that the Master saw her and called her among many.

The expression “daughter of Abraham” not only confirmed that the woman was a Jew, but that she had great faith in God, that she was a believer like Abraham. If God had allowed Satan to oppress her, as He did with Job, it was to show once again His glory over all the works of the evil one and His sovereignty over all things, His power to bring healing and life and restoration.

This attitude of Jesus was a way to honor her and show her that even though many did not care about her life or her suffering, He cared and was there to heal her and free her from that torment. He also reaffirmed His authority over all things, including the spiritual world, something that nobody had done until that moment, which was to expel evil spirits from people. Just a touch of Jesus and she straightened up. This must have caused a real commotion in the synagogue, because many other sick should have come out of their seats in order to touch the Master; hence, the synagogue leader rebuked them for coming there on the Sabbath to be healed instead of coming during the week; however, Jesus would not be there. What a pity!

This shows us the spiritual jealousy and the power struggle that can affect the experts on religion. They cannot do any kind of miracle, their words and their prayers are empty and useless, but begin to feel jealous and envious of those who really have the presence of God and have love to put into practice the power that He has given them. Jesus did not allow to be overwhelmed by the false religious authority that was there, trying to block Him in His mission; on the contrary, He used His authority, confronting them with the very Law. They could not say anything before the veracity of His words and the evidence of the miracle. Apparently, Jesus did not cure only that woman; He healed others, so that the Father’s name could be magnified. With the healing, the woman could straighten not only her physical posture, but straighten up emotionally and spiritually, showing that the impossible with men are possible with God.

As I wrote above, from an emotional and spiritual point of view, that situation must have been a torment for her; she was forced to look down, molding her mind to see things through a small and depressive prism; more than that, it must have made her feel accused, guilty, without anyone to defend her, without being able to live righteousness as a virtue and a moral standard that she probably aspired to. She could not even stand up to cry out to God in a more open way.

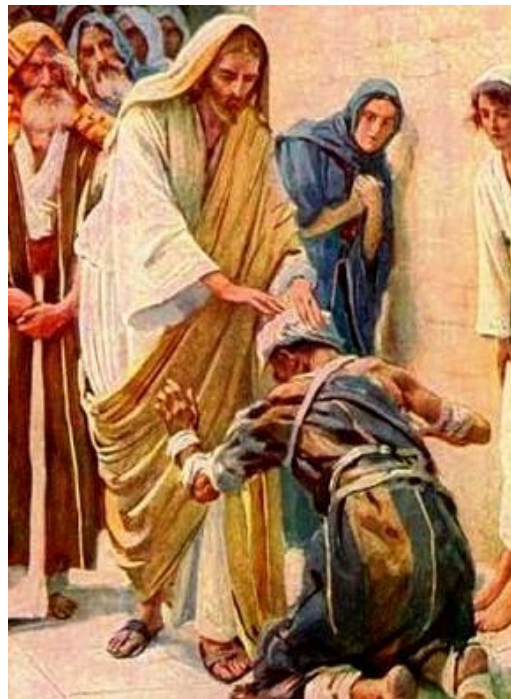
But from that moment, she could live God’s righteousness. She had gained much more than physical healing; she had conquered the security and authority over evil. No one else would dominate her or would influence her with poor and limited ways of seeing life. Jesus had given back to her the dignity before everybody. Now she would walk with her head held high. Her testimony of life would bring revival to that place, putting to the ground the disbelief and smallness of thought. More than anything, her

testimony was breaking all the works of idolatry that could have caused that problem, making it clear to all who the true God was. Nothing could destroy what He determined to a child of His. His beloved Son had come to earth to destroy the works of the devil and she was a living witness of that. Now she could walk in righteousness before Him, bringing His light to those in darkness.

The greatest learning for us in this text is that Jesus is not hindered by anything, by no man, no demon, no rule, and all that He wants to do to magnify His own name and release His children He does. The bible says that He subjected everything under His feet.

26

The healing of the leper
Lk. 5: 12-16; Matt. 8: 1-4; Mk. 1: 40-45



The healing of the leper

Reference texts: Lk. 5: 12-16; Matt. 8: 1-4; Mk. 1: 40-45

“Once, when he was in one of the cities, there was a man covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground and begged him, ‘Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.’ Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, ‘I do choose. Be made clean.’ Immediately the leprosy left him. And he ordered him to tell no one. ‘Go,’ he said, ‘and show yourself to the priest, and, as Moses commanded, make an offering for your cleansing, for a testimony to them.’ But now more than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad; many crowds would gather to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray.”

It’s worth remembering that in biblical times, various skin disorders were grouped under the name of leprosy; however, many were evident, causing the person to start to lose sensitivity in some parts of the body due to the disease, leading to formation of wounds that, infected and treated improperly, made him (her) progressively lose members. Hence, when a person was diagnosed with leprosy, he (she) was labeled as ceremonially unclean, besides being a danger to society, being forced to live outside the villages, surviving on what nature could give him (her) or what travelers threw from afar. Therefore, the diagnosis of leprosy brought to the person a complete spiritual and social isolation, affecting greatly his (her) physical, emotional and family life. When, however, by some miracle of God they were cured, they should return to the temple and show the wound to the priest and offer sacrifices for their purification. Thus, both in body and soul and spirit, leprosy left marks, so the leper was expelled from home and society, and forbidden to enter any city. He should wear torn clothes, let the hair disheveled and cry “unclean, unclean!”, if someone approached (Lev. 13: 45-46, “The person who has the leprous disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be disheveled; and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean.’ He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp”). Hardly anyone could see his face completely. When Jesus came and began to perform miracles, people affected by this evil came to Him for healing, because if they were healed, everything else would be restored in their lives. For us, leprosy can have the meaning of physical disease itself (leprosy or Hansen’s disease), emotional wounds that isolate us from normal living with our neighbor, or sin (spiritual leprosy), which leaves terrible spiritual marks, creating separation between the person and God. That’s why Jesus came to heal us from the scars left by the leprosy of sin.

That man who sought Jesus was aware of his uselessness as a human being, for it was impossible to live that way any longer; he felt rejected and impure. However, he had the boldness to approach begging for healing. Humbly he submitted to the will of Jesus and said to Him: “Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean. Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, ‘I do choose. Be made clean.’ Immediately the leprosy left him.”

The first teaching here is: when we recognize our sin and submit to God’s will, asking Him for forgiveness, He touches us with healing. The bible says that Jesus touched him, what for many might have been unwise, because He could contract the disease, but His touch was to free the man, not to be contaminated by him; even because the disease is not transmitted this way. So, *the second teaching is: even though many*

people feel disgusted of us or repulse by the evil that befell us, Jesus never rejects us, because He does not have fear or disgust of wounds; He came to save us from them. Leprosy affects thin nerve roots, which makes that the person has no more sensitivity in that region of the body that is affected. This is what sin does to those who are its captives: they become insensitive to the truth; they no longer feel the presence of God. So the third teaching is: when the Lord touches us with deliverance, the “scabs of the wound” fall and we come back to be sensitive to His voice and His presence. Thus, we are able to resume our companionship not only with Him, but with our brothers, for we return to love and feel compassion for others. We begin to feel helpful because the experience that we had empowers us now with anointing to treat those with the same problem. Many think it’s wrong that the man did not obey Jesus’ command about not to tell anyone, but people would know anyway that it was He who had healed him, because He had already made other cures, and His name was beginning to be known. The man would be an evangelist from that moment. His testimony would confirm to all the presence of the Messiah among His people. Interestingly, it’s not only in this biblical text that it is written, “But he withdrew to deserted places and prayed”, which means that even as the Son of God, Jesus had come in the flesh and needed, like all of us, to be renewed in the presence of the Father to continue the Work. This was an example for us because if we want to have anointing to do the same works that He did, it’s necessary to have our private time with the Lord, away from others. It is in His presence, away from the noise and the demands of the flesh, where we fill ourselves with anointing and receive the particular revelations to all areas of our lives. Therefore, the last teaching is: a disciple needs his moments of intimacy and private conversation with God, in order to continue in his Christian walk safely. It is in the silence of His altar that the Lord speaks to us.

27

The healing of a blind man at Bethsaida
Mk. 8: 22-26



The healing of a blind man at Bethsaida

Reference text: Mk. 8: 22-26

“They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, ‘Can you see anything?’ And the man looked up and said, ‘I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.’ Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Then he sent him away to his home, saying, ‘Do not even go into the village.’”

This is another healing of blindness performed by Jesus when, once again, He used a different method from the previous ones, as He did with the blind man at Jericho and the man born blind. Here, He comes to Bethsaida and people bring Him a blind man to be healed. Then Jesus took him by the hand and, to everyone’s astonishment, He took him out of the village. The Master did something that may have shocked many; He spat on His hand, applied the saliva to the eyes of the man and laid his hands on him. At that time it was customary to think that saliva had healing power over eye diseases, especially blindness, but it was not why Jesus once again used the saliva to heal this blind. He laid his hands and asked, “Can you see anything?” And the man looked up and said, “I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.” Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Then he sent him away to his home, saying, “Do not even go into the village.”

The question is, “Why did He apply saliva to his eyes, why did He lay His hands twice on him and why did He command him not to return to the village?”

Perhaps, Jesus answered, “I wanted him to see the power of my word on his vision. The main cause of his blindness was not physical but spiritual. His inner discernment was blunted by bad influences of that place, where the stubbornness and unbelief prevent the eyes and hearts from believing in the Son of Man. The two steps made him to recover both the physical and spiritual vision and showed him that often, the healing process is gradual. His vision was distorted by the corrupted sight of sinners (He saw men as trees, that is, in a distorted way). I gave him back my sight, but he needs to be alone for a while, away from sin, to be strengthened and to walk again with the Father.”

In Matthew 11: 21-24, the Lord rebukes Bethsaida, Chorazin and Capernaum because of their unbelief and lack of repentance (“Woe to unrepentant cities”): “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades. For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you.”

The eyes and the brain work in an integrated way, that is, the eyes show us the images of objects, but it is the brain that gives us the understanding, the comprehension of what the images really are.

The cause of physical blindness is not known, but this is a worthwhile comment: when the spiritual barrier is overcome, what is material is free to be restored. That is

why Jesus healed him spiritually first. With spiritual barriers broken down, the physical was open to the blessing.

Do you understand the reason for this statement? Didn't Jesus rebuke Capernaum and these two cities for their lack of faith and lack of repentance? The same thing happened in Nazareth (Matthew 13: 28: "And he did not do many deeds of power there, because of their unbelief."). These types of sins of the flesh are aggravated by the action of demons, who trap people's thoughts and emotions, preventing the reception and understanding of the Word of God, the softness of heart and, consequently, faith. For it was by faith that Jesus' miracles happened and He said, "Go in peace, your faith has saved you." So, when through the action of the Holy Spirit and the will of the people, their thoughts were changed and their eyes were opened to the truth, healing took place. The spiritual blockage was removed and the physical body received the healing anointing of the Holy Spirit through Jesus. Even though today we often do not see instant cures through God's miracles, He uses the methods available through science to heal lives, their faith, gradually. His name is magnified anyway.

When we start to walk with Jesus, our eyes begin to be open so that we see what we had not seen before in our lives. Many situations begin to make sense and we begin to realize that our vision was blinded by the enemy so that we could not see the truth, because when we know it, everything acquires a new meaning; especially, we are no longer victims of circumstances and we come to hold within us the power of choice: to continue in the old habits that we inherited from family, society, etc. ('village'), or to fight in order to put down the traps of the devil and show him 'who is the boss.' We understand that many wrong attitudes committed in the past are the cause of many current problems and we find out the weaknesses of our soul and of those around us, weaknesses that the enemy always uses to create strife, separation, hatred, violence and all kinds of carnal attitude that moves us away from the blessedness of God. That's what probably happened to this man; he was in a place where the pettiness of the flesh prevented him from seeing life clearly, distorting his way of thinking, not only about himself but in relation to other people as well. The sin of that place was a bad influence, taking away his communion with God, and probably bringing anguish to his soul. It should have been weird for those who were witnessing the healing to see the Lord moving away with him, seeming to need to be alone with the blind to tell him a secret. However, the attitude of the Master, by itself, already showed the blind what was necessary for him to keep the blessing that had been won: to leave the village, i.e., to leave the bad influences of the past, the external contaminations and the heritages, and 'come back home', that is, to the true spiritual communion with God. Only then he would be truly healed and would never lose his miracle.

Thus, the main teachings of this text are:

1) First, a word from God must 'wake us up', that is, touch our vision to open it to a new level of understanding.

2) We must separate ourselves from the 'crowd' and from the things of the flesh in order to see spiritual things ("He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village," that is, before healing him, Jesus removed him from the source of his illness and spiritual blindness).

3) In God's truth, we see things and people as they really are, without the distortions brought by the enemy.

4) Divine healing in us happens gradually, which implies, on our part, a process of constant and personal searching until we can have everything clear in our minds.

5) After achieving healing, it is best not to return to old habits (“return to the village”).

Information about Bethsaida

Bethsaida comes from the Ancient Greek: Βηθσαϊδά, Bēthsaidá; from Hebrew: bēth çayyadhâ or Bēt̕ Saydā, lit. ‘House of the Fisherman’ or bēth çaydā’ = ‘House of Fish,’ and was located northeast of the Sea of Galilee in the territory of Philip the Tetrarch, who named it Julia (Ancient Greek: Ἰουλία, romanized: Ioulía), in honor of the daughter of Emperor Caesar Augustus (Julia the Elder) [Flavius Josephus, ‘Antiquities of the Jews’, XVIII, ii, §1].

Josephus also makes it clear that this ‘Julia’ of Philip, that is, ‘Bethsaida’, was located in an administrative district known as Gaulonitis, in modern-day Golan Heights, that is, in the region north of the Sea of Galilee. Philip the tetrarch also rebuilt the city of Paneas, which was renamed Caesarea (or Caesarea Philippi) in honor of Caesar Augustus. Josephus writes: “ Herod built the city of Tiberius in Galilee (He means Tiberias, after Tiberius Caesar), and in Perea [beyond Jordan] another that was also called Julias.” This ‘Julia’ of Herod was named after the wife of Emperor Caesar Augustus (Livia Drusilla, called Julia Augusta after 14 AD), not his daughter Julia the Elder [Flavius Josephus, ‘The Wars of the Jews’ II, ix, §1].

Bethsaida no longer exists, but archaeologists think it may have been located in three places: the Bedouin village of Messadiye; the small, deserted settlement of El-Araj; and the archaeological site of Et-Tell. Research is ongoing.

“Lord, I know that people’s lives are not their own; it is not for them to direct their steps” (Jer. 10: 23 – NIV).

28

The parable of the sower
Matt.13: 1-23; Mk.4: 1-9; Lk. 8: 4-8



The parable of the sower

Reference texts: Matt. 13: 1-23; Mk. 4: 1-9; Lk. 8: 4-8

“That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: ‘Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!’ Then the disciples came and asked him, ‘Why do you speak to them in parables?’ He answered, ‘To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have in abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. The reason I speak to them in parables is that seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand. With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn – and I would heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it. Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.’”

When we read this text it seems well clear to us the meaning of the parable, not having anything else to add to what was explained by Jesus:

1) “*What was sown on the path:*” they hear the word of the kingdom and do not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart.

2) “*What was sown on rocky ground:*” this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away.

3) “*What was sown among thorns:*” this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing.

4) “*What was sown on good soil:*” this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.

Lessons learned:

I) This parable teaches us, in the first place, to make our deposit in heaven. Jesus said: “For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have in abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.” (Matt. 13: 12 cf. Mk. 4: 25; Matt. 25: 29; Lk. 8: 18; Lk. 19: 26).

“For to those who have , more will be given, and they will have in abundance” means: for those who have treasures in heaven, gained through the understanding of the revealed word; in other words, a spiritual life with God, learning and growing with Him;

“From those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away” means: those who do not have treasures in heaven, that is, a life on the altar with God, they will lose even the little interest that they have in God. That’s why to His disciples had been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to others this had not been given, precisely because their heart was hardened, and they didn’t have treasures in heaven, that is, they didn’t have intimacy with the Lord. Thus, the more our lives are in communion with God, the more we receive His revelations and the understanding of His word, and the more we will desire to be with Him.

II) *We should sow abundantly in the three most important areas of our lives so we can reap fruit in all of them.* Let us explain:

We are body, soul and spirit. Our *body* requires what the material world has to offer: money, food, material comforts, medicines etc. Our *soul* is not satisfied with this, because its food is different: love, tenderness, compassion, good words, comfort, friendship, good relationships, peace, family stability, etc. Our *spirit* also needs other type of food that is the revealed word of God, which makes us aware of whom we truly are and our purpose for being born, beyond what it will show us where we are going back when our carnal body dies. Thus, to avoid shortage in any of them, we need to make an investment in these three areas. Therefore, Jesus paid the price for our salvation by dying on the cross. However, there is something more to watch over than our salvation: our spiritual integrity here on earth in order to exercise the authority delegated to us by Jesus in the heavenly realms. The spiritual area cannot have gaps; otherwise, we will live in bonds of the enemy, who starts to destroy other areas of our lives.

Jesus set us the example, as a man, of what we have to do:

In the material area, we must protect our money from the destruction of the devil by giving tithes and offerings in God’s work; thus, the financial gap that may exist in our lives is closed. And here is where there’s our biggest fight against the works of the flesh, especially avarice or greed, which the bible considers as a form of idolatry, because the god of money will want the glory for him. But Jesus says (Matt. 6: 33): “But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” In the end of the previous verse He says, “and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things”, namely, the material things; however, He makes a point to say that they will come to our lives if we put His things as a priority.

Also, it is necessary to invest *in the emotional area* and here there is also a great human barrier preventing the flow of God’s love. We need to nourish friendship as who cultivates a plant that likes a lot. If we cease to water it, it dries and dies. The bible is very clear on this matter: “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow... So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at

harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith” (Gal. 6: 7; 9-10). Giving and sharing is synonymous with maturity. If we want friends, we must make friends.

Finally, it is necessary most of all to invest *in the spiritual area* and this does not mean simply to pray once in a while, make a vow or promise at the ‘dark hours’; it means to have an intimate, daily and deep relationship with the Lord as if one expects to have in a marriage, opening the heart without secrecy so that nothing is hidden. Above all, to take care of our salvation, as mentioned above. Therefore, Jesus bothered the Pharisees so much. He had such intimacy with God to the point of calling Him Abba [אבא, in Aramaic = Father; in Greek, Ἀββᾶ, Abba, Strong #G5; father as a vocative; daddy, Of Chaldee origin (ab)] and declare Himself as His Son (cf. Mk. 14: 36; Rom. 8: 15; Gal. 4: 6). When He withdrew to lonely places and prayed, it was to keep up this healthy relationship with the Father.

There is an interesting passage regarding sowing in Lk. 6: 37-38: “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

The word above teaches us the true sowing in the spiritual, emotional and material area. Who has the authority to judge is God; it is no use to condemn someone that He judged innocent; so, in this area (spiritual), instead of judging, the seed is to pray; in the emotional area the seeds are: emotional support, the word of encouragement and forgiveness. Withholding forgiveness kills the seed. In the financial area, the Lord advises us to give the best we have, because who will do the calculations is He Himself and His weights will be fair. For Jesus there is only one weight and one measure: love.

Each area, being sown with the right seeds, will also yield the right fruit. Thus, we’ll know the abundant life that the Lord planned for us. It is the Holy Spirit who teaches how to do this.

29

Jesus teaches Nicodemus
Jn. 3: 1-15



Jesus teaches Nicodemus (Baptism)

Reference text: Jn. 3: 1-15

“Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus [*in Greek: ‘people’s victory, conqueror of the people’*], a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.’ Jesus answered him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, You must be born from above. The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can these things be?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.’”

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a teacher of the Law, but something inside him had already moved him to learn more about the doctrine preached by Jesus, and then he sought Him at night, probably in secret because of colleagues. He was amazed with the miracles that the Lord was doing and knew that only a man of God could make them. But his mind was not yet fully opened to understand some spiritual things. That’s when Jesus told him: “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” What He was saying is that, if he wanted to understand more about the mysteries of the kingdom of God, he would need to be born again, that is, to start spiritually all over again and be willing to learn a new way of thinking. The power of the Holy Spirit needed to operate fully and freely in his soul. Nicodemus did not understand, and insisted, asking if a man could return to the womb. Then the Lord explained to him again, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, You must be born from above. The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” What the Lord meant with this is that there was a very big difference between being born as a human being of flesh and be born of the Spirit by divine action. What Nicodemus needed to do was to believe that Jesus was the Son of God who had come into the world to save it from its sins and that he, Nicodemus, was a sinner in need of His forgiveness to be able to receive salvation. Nicodemus knew the baptism of repentance preached by John the Baptist; however, as a Pharisee, it was very difficult to accept that he was a sinner like all men. Jesus went on speaking a little about the characteristics of those who were born again (“being born of water”) and received the Holy Spirit. He used the word *wind*, which in Greek also means ‘*spirit*’; He said that no one knows where the wind comes from or where it goes and that it blows where it wills.

*This symbolizes the freedom that the children of God have to move on earth, for they are driven by the Holy Spirit to be where He wants and to do what He wishes. Being born of the Spirit is to let oneself to be filled with the power of the Spirit of God, causing a true inner transformation as occurred with the disciples after Pentecost. In other words, it is to change radically the way of being, receiving all the power that God has to pour and be an instrument in His hands to do the same things that Jesus came to do among us: to teach, to free, to bring understanding of the Word and so on, in short, to destroy the devil's work. It was still hard for Nicodemus to understand, so Jesus told him that if he was seeing all that He performed in Israel but could not understand a metaphor on the wind and about the other earthly things that the Lord explained in parables, how could he understand the spiritual things? However, He finished speaking figuratively about His death on the cross. At Calvary, whoever accepted the sacrifice of the Son of God would also be cured of all diseases and illnesses and would receive eternal life through the salvation of his sins. When Jesus used the expression *Son of Man* (Jn. 3: 13), He was speaking here of His double portion: earthly and divine, that is, although living in the flesh, He lived spiritually with the awareness that He was the Son of God and came to earth to a specific mission. The spiritual portion in Him prevailed over the carnal; therefore, He was able to perform all the wonders and miracles.*



Let's now introduce an explanation about baptism, the water baptism and the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Why does everyone who gives his life to Jesus need the seal of the baptism in the waters to continue the Christian walk?

In Matt. 3: 11; 16-17 it is written: "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire... And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'"

The statement above was from John the Baptist, who came as a forerunner of his cousin Jesus to preach repentance and thus prepare people's hearts to God's word. John, then, preached the baptism of repentance, where people who understood they were sinners, repented of their sins and were dipped in the River Jordan and, with the purification of their spirit, they were prepared to receive the Messiah and begin a new story with God. John's baptism convinced man of the need for repentance and prepared hearts for the coming of the Messiah (Matt. 3: 2; 6; 11). Whoever received this baptism was recognizing himself as a sinner before God. The baptism of Jesus Christ ('water baptism') cleansed from sin and conferred new birth, that is, eternal life (Matt. 28: 19; Jn. 5: 21; 24) – Acts 19: 1-7. John knew that the Kingdom of God that would come with Jesus would be marked by the great action of the Holy Spirit in people's lives (Isa. 32:

15; Isa. 44: 3; Ezek. 11: 19; Ezek. 36: 26; Ezek. 39: 29; Joel 2: 28-29; Acts 2: 16-18). But those who rejected Him, He would baptize with fire, which is probably an allegory of God's judgment.

In other words, *water baptism* performs in us the new birth (our spirit is rebuilt), the stripping of the sinful body (we deny our carnal nature and we assume ourselves as spiritual beings), the burial of sin (our old life is 'buried' and we resurrect to eternal life like Jesus in His resurrection – Rom. 6: 3-4; Col. 2: 11-12), the circumcision of our heart (to overthrow the barrier to the flowing of the Holy Spirit), it assures us the condition of children of God, gives us entry into His kingdom and active participation in it (divine adoption and spiritual authority) and separates us definitely from the world (our owner now is Jesus, for the seal of His blood is on us).

After the water baptism, we need an 'extra strength' from Him in order to overcome the trials and the devil, so the Lord baptizes us with the Holy Spirit, giving us not only His spiritual strength as well as gifts, which will lead us to higher levels of anointing and knowledge of the Father. That's why Jesus was also baptized with the Spirit, to go to the desert and being tempted for forty days. Only then, approved by God, He could start His ministry and go to the cross. The characteristic of the baptism of the Spirit is to speak in tongues (Acts 2: 1-13; Acts 10: 44-46; Acts 19: 6). And in 1 Cor. 14, the entire chapter, but with emphasis to verse 4, Paul says that praying in tongues edifies our spirit. *Thus, baptism in the Holy Spirit clothes us with the power of God (Greek, Dunamis, power to perform miracles); therefore, it enables us to do His work on earth.*

Be baptized in the waters and do not let the devil rob you of this benefit by putting lies in your head, saying that you are not prepared to be baptized because you smoke, drink, have vices, and so on. Who is going to prepare you is the Holy Spirit Himself; you can do nothing to improve yourself or to become worthy of Him. So do not waste time, obey the commandment of the Lord, for baptism is an ordinance of God for all His children. In Lk. 11: 13 it is written: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Therefore, if you understood what was explained in the text about Nicodemus, also ask for the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the Lord will grant it. This way you will be able to continue on your journey. Amen?

"In him [Jesus] also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead." (Col. 2: 11-12)

30

The beatitudes
Matt. 5: 1-12



The beatitudes

Reference text: Matt. 5: 1-12

“When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Matthew used the Greek word ‘makarioi’ (μακάριοι, Strong #g3107), which means: happy, blessed, fortunate.

This speech probably caused scandal among the Jews, especially the religious and the rich, because according to the Jewish view of the time, people blessed by God were always healthy, without infirmities, had money and material goods, were honored by acquaintances and praised by other men. How could a poor crowd, without possessions, sick and persecuted, suffering, crying and unable to defend themselves against attacks and insults, feel blessed? But for the people who were there, these were words of great comfort, for it meant that they too were loved and blessed by God. He looked at them with different eyes and what they couldn’t have, materially speaking, they had spiritually and they would still have much more by believing in Jesus and practicing His teachings. They weren’t alone. These people had an advocate: God.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Being humble or poor in spirit is to be aware of the lack of God and the dependence on Him. Those who empty themselves of their own self, of the pride of their achievements and of their selfish desires can feel the Holy Spirit filling that void. The humble receive the kingdom of heaven as a reward; and the kingdom of heaven is now, when everything is possible. It is an experience, not a place. The kingdom of God refers to God’s rule. So, humility is to know that we depend on God in all situations, regardless of our position within the Church or the society. It is to be like a child and be aware of the need to learn and grow constantly with Him, knowing that He alone is able to supply us. It should not be confused with servitude, slavery, ignorance, poverty or any other evil situation that can reach our financial life; insecurity, indecision or lack of authority. It does not depend on social class, but on the true spiritual growth that comes from the knowledge of the divine character, acquired in constant contact with the Holy Spirit. Even using all the divine power that He had, Jesus was humble because He knew that as a man, what He did and taught came from the Father and He depended on Him for everything. He Himself said: “My teaching is not mine but his who sent me” (Jn. 7: 16).

In Greek, the word used for ‘humble’ or ‘poor’ [*in spirit*] is ptóchos (πτωχός – Strong #G4434), meaning: poor, beggar, destitute, spiritually poor, either in a good (humble devout persons) or bad sense. It originates from ‘ptosso’ (to crouch); akin to ‘ptoeo’ and the alternate of ‘pipto’; a beggar (as cringing), i.e. pauper (strictly denoting absolute or public mendicancy, although also used in a qualified or relative sense; whereas ‘penes’ properly means only straitened circumstances in private); literally or figuratively: distressed.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they receive the consolation from God. And the weep that the Lord speaks here is the weep of repentance that produces desire to change one’s own life, the weep of those who were suffering under God’s work with them, allowing certain undesirable situations because of their sin, but which was a divine healing. It means to cry for divine justice to be established on earth, freeing, healing and bringing back the joy of communion with Him. Blessed are those who mourn because of their separation from Him, because He hears their cry and consoles them, restoring again their relationship and their intimacy with the Father. Blessed are those who weep and are sad over the things that grieve God [sin and all that it brought: the misery of the world, rebellion, disobedience and death (John 11: 35)]. We cannot and must not laugh or excuse that which makes God weep and causes us to go numb. When we commune with God we feel the emotions of His heart; hence we may also experience consolation from Him, which encourages and strengthens us.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Meekness [NRSV: Gentleness] means: serenity, tranquility, calm in the certainty of victory, allowing oneself to be shaped by God, being certain that everything has a solution. Being meek is to be submissive to the will of God, to His laws and the divine plan. By being His, the meek shall inherit the earth, the sea, the air and everything contained in them, because everything belongs to Him. Submission to His will brings us power and dominion over Creation. It should not be confused with self-indulgence, laziness or passivity that gives up the authority that God has already delegated to us. Moses was a warrior, however, the bible says he was the meekest man on earth, because he let himself be led by God, despite being a leader and never relinquished the authority He gave him to lead His people. He often took drastic, strong and aggressive steps to keep order among the Israelites and fulfill his mission to the end. He was not powerless or passive in the face of rebellion of the people, but he let himself be shaped by God in all these situations, exercising his leadership with wisdom and patience.

In the OT we can see the words ‘meek’ or ‘meekness’ (KJV), translated as ‘humble’ and ‘humility’ (NRSV) written in the following verses:

“Now the man Moses was very humble (צנוע = humble), more so than anyone else on the face of the earth” (Num. 12: 3 – NRSV).

“Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (KJV).

Humble or meek (Strong #6035): `anav (Aanayv – צנוע): depressed (figuratively), in mind (gentle) or circumstances (needy, especially saintly); humble, lowly, meek, poor, afflicted. Compare `aniy (עני, Strong #6041: poor, afflicted, humble – Deut. 24: 12; Zeph. 3: 12). From anah (Strong #6031): the idea of looking down or browbeating; be bowed down, be afflicted, be put down or become low; be depressed, downcast; to humble, weaken; be afflicted in discipline by God; to depress literally or figuratively, transitive or intransitive (in various applications, as follows): abase self, chasten self,

deal hardly with, defile, exercise, to force, gentleness, humble (self), hurt, ravish, submit self, weaken, be wise, have or show wisdom, experience, knowledge and good sense.

“Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the Lord’s wrath.” (Zeph. 2: 3 – NRSV).

“Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD’S anger” (Zeph. 2: 3 – KJV).

“Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD’S anger” (Zeph. 2: 3 – NIV).

Humility (meekness): `anavah (Strong #6038 – עֲנוּוּה): condescension, human and subjective (modesty), or divine and objective (clemency), gentleness, humility, meekness.

“But the meek shall inherit the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity” (Ps. 37: 11 – NRSV).

“But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Ps. 37: 11 – KJV).

“But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.” (Ps. 37: 11 – NIV)

In Hebrew, the word used is `anav (aw-nawv’), connected to the word `anah, with the same meaning described above.

Matt. 5: 5: “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”

In Greek (Matt. 5: 5) the word used is ‘praus’ or ‘praos’ (πράος = humble, meek, mild, gentle – Strong #4239). In Gal. 5: 23, the word ‘meekness’, in Greek, is ‘praotēs’ (πραότης) – Strong #4236, which means: mildness, gentleness, meekness, kindness. From praios; gentleness, by implication, humility.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

It means not to accept the injustices of the world, but to yearn by God’s will and love being fulfilled in all men. Those who feel these thirst and hunger will be satisfied. There is no need that Jesus cannot supply. Seeing the righteousness of God in action is to see people accepting His truth in their hearts and receiving salvation and eternal life. To hunger for righteousness is to apply God’s righteous standard to our lives, to hunger for what pleases God. By placing our will under the control of the Holy Spirit, we will be satisfied, satiated, filled with divine contentment. Our human discontent will give way to satisfaction in God.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Mercy means indulgence, grace and compassion aroused by the misery of others. It is to repay with good, the evil that was received. It is to be like Jesus. But receiving mercy comes after to exercise it. Mercy is like a seed that must be planted first to be harvested later.

Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

To be pure in heart is to maintain the purity and relegate the impurity, is to see God with the heart, is to keep within us the clarity and sincerity of intentions, it’s to be transparent, as Jesus said to Philip (Jn. 14: 9b): “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” Who sees through the eyes of Jesus sees the Father. The pure in heart do not keep grudge or hurt, but look at the mercy and the divine justice and trust fully in His

trial. The pure in heart flee from sin and keep within them the integrity of God's plan for their lives, not getting involved with anything that may divert them of it. They always maintain firm within themselves the pure word from Jesus.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

In order to have peace in our soul it's necessary to uproot the other nature in us (the nature of the devil in our flesh) and cultivate Jesus in our hearts. Making peace is to stand on God's side, to be in harmony with Him. The peacemakers are called children of God, for they resemble Him. To bring peace to someone, we must conquer, first of all, the peace within our own being, that is, to be harmonized with the divine plan for us. It means no more fights between our flesh, our spirit and the Holy Spirit. In a way, it is something that arises from meekness, from the fact of giving ourselves fully to the work of the Lord with us. A peacemaker is a mediator, who resolves conflicts between individuals or groups, strangers to each other. Peace begins with identifying the truth, addressing the sin, and removing conflict between the parties. God sent His Son to be our mediator, filling the gap created by our sin and granting us peace with Him. This is what He asks of us. Paul translated this as 'the ministry of reconciliation.'

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Being persecuted for righteousness' sake is to fight for what belongs to the Lord, it's 'to pay the price' for His kingdom and have total rights over it. In Jn. 17: 14-17 Jesus says, "I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." Thus, being followers of Jesus brings us, inevitably, the worldly persecution, because the ruler of the world (the devil) is not pleased for having lost us for the Son of God. However, when we are persecuted for being fighting for the truth, we have the guarantee of God's protection and His deliverance. "Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm," says the Lord (Ps. 105: 15). It is also written: "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them" (Ps. 34: 7). It is a comfort to know that if we are persecuted, it is because our name is in the heavenly list of God's children; we have the seal of Jesus on our forehead.

31

The Lord's Prayer (Our Father) Matt. 6: 5-15



The Lord's Prayer (Our Father)

Reference text: Matt. 6: 5-15

“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one [NIV, ‘and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one’]. [Some later manuscripts bring, ‘but deliver us from the evil one, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen’]. For if you forgive others their trespasses* [NIV, sins], your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses [NIV, sins].”
Note: the word trespasses does not only mean transgression, sin, but also offense, insult, affront.*

The Lord's Prayer, like the *Ten Commandments*, can be divided into two parts. In the first we magnify the name of the Lord, and in the second, we show Him our earthly requests.

The Lord teaches us to say, “*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*” This means that we must have, first of all, the awareness that *our true Father is in heaven*, for it is God Himself. And our Father in heaven is perfect; His dominion is exercised by love, placing mercy in the center of judgment.

What does “hallowed be your name” mean?

The word ‘Holy’ or ‘Saint’ (*Hagios*, Greek) means *sacred, pure, blameless, consecrated, set apart, worthy of being honored, to be like God, to have the innermost nature of God, be separated and reserved to God and for His service*. God is Holy, and we must ask Him to sanctify His own name, that is, that He reveal Himself to us, that He show us His purity and greatness and how worthy He is of honor. This phrase implies a deep respect and reverence for the name of God, preventing it from being used in a vain or profane way. And the prayer asks that He reveal Himself to all men and creatures in heaven and on earth so that His name may be recognized and treated with reverence and respect, glorified, praised and the only one to be worshipped, as the supreme being that He is. He who seeks Him with sincerity receives His revelation and knows His holiness. In this way, the closer we approach Him in prayer, the more we know His character, which is manifested through a revealing spiritual experience of the word of God in our own spirit; then, we can see how imperfect we are and radically change our concept of holiness. To have access to the Father it's necessary to be covered by the blood of His Son. *Being covered by the blood of Jesus means to let the power of the cross touch us entirely*, not only in our spirit by an act of faith, but in a deeper way in our flesh, cleaning our soul of all types of deformation and distortion that bring pain and wound, whether by sin or by other external spiritual actions, which

implies being touched on the emotions and thoughts, even in the body, breaking the bonds of the devil on our lives. Hence, it is so important to pray before the cross, for there we can make an exchange with Him, really allowing Him to take our pain upon Him and release us, shedding His cleansing blood over everything that ties us. Therefore, the act of prayer requires reverence because we are doing something that has spiritual implications. The true prayer is the one which takes place with our soul free, naked, without armor and prostrated before the cross or the throne of God. There, He makes us see who we are and tells us who He is. We can perceive, then, that the very deformed nature of our flesh is already, in itself, a contradiction with the true holiness of God. When He tells us: “Be holy because I am holy”, He refers to behave as He behaves, i.e., *full transparency and sincerity between what is preached and what is being lived*. May we show God’s holiness to others through our actions.

Another comment here is about perfection. God told to Abraham, “Walk before me and be blameless” (Gen. 17: 1). Therefore, we can think that *perfection* to God is something completely different than our human vision can achieve. In fact, it means to be complete in Him, to be true because He fills us and makes us spiritually in His image and likeness. It is not the absence of sin, but indicates fullness, maturity, by exercising the law of love for God and man.

The next sentence is: “*Your kingdom come*” or “*Come to us your kingdom*” (Greek, *Basilea*), that is, *His dominion, His power, His royalty and His authority over us*. This means to be willing to give up everything, in order to have God; it means both praying for the present moment, that people may bow in submission to Him, and crying out for the consummation of the kingdom at the second coming of Christ. This kingdom is coming into being under Jesus’ ministry, but it will only be consummated at the end of time, on the day when He reigns sovereignly in justice over all things.

After this the prayer says: “*your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*”; in other words, His will must be done on earth as it is in heaven. And in heaven there is peace, fullness, perfection, joy and absence of pain, sorrow and tears. In heaven, where God’s government is happy and unconditionally accepted by all, His will is spontaneous and cheerfully obeyed by everyone and all occasions. Therefore, the will of God for us is good, it is the best and it is within our reach. He demands the best we can give, but nothing beyond this. We should not be afraid to ask Him to do His will in our lives, because He will do the best. Just as it is obeyed in heaven it must be obeyed on earth.

The second part of *Lord’s Prayer* teaches us to ask for our material needs (“*Give us this day our daily bread*”), in addition to speak about forgiveness as a special condition, not only to the true praise to God but for our supply on earth in all areas (“*And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, [for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen]*”). The word ‘bread’ in this case symbolizes all that we really need for our earthly existence so that we can sanctify His name and do His will on earth as it is practiced in heaven. We need material support, day by day, in order to serve God fully because a sick and ill-nourished person does not have even strength to pray. Therefore, the Lord teaches us to ask Him to help us in this area, also giving Him all our afflictions and trusting that He will take care of our supply; we do not depend on men, but on Him.

After asking for this, Jesus reminds us that we must ask the Father to forgive our *debts* or *trespasses* (means *transgression, sin, offense, insult, affront*), because when we disobey His commandments, we hurt and offend Him by our sin, what creates a debt in the spiritual world and this is the open gap by where Satan can touch us. Therefore, when we ask Him to forgive our sins, His blood covers us and our debts are paid, closing our gaps. In Matt. 6: 12 (“Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our

debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”) the word *debts* in Greek, *opheilemata* or *opheiléma* (ὀφειλήματα or ὀφείλημα, Strong #g3783), is the word that describes our sins as those things that make us guilty and load us with debts before God and that we can never pay off, but only His Son. *Opheilemata* = debts. *Opheiléma* means: a debt, offense, sin; that which is owed, i.e. (figuratively) due morally, a fault. As seen above, debt or trespass means: transgression, sin, offense, insult or affront. And in Jn. 20: 23 (‘sins’, in our bible versions) the Greek word is *hamartias* (ἁμαρτία, Strong #g266), which has the primary meaning of “*to err the target*”, “*missing the mark*”; hence: (a) guilt, sin, (b) a fault, failure (in an ethical sense), sinful deed; and therefore “*to act wrongly*” and “*to break the law of God.*” In Matt. 6: 14 (“For if you forgive others their trespasses [NIV, sins], your heavenly Father will also forgive you”), the Greek word translated as *trespasses* is *paraptomata* or *paraptóma* (paraptōmata, παραπτώματα or *paraptóma* παράπτωμα Strong #g3900 = misconduct, a falling away, lapse, slip, false step, trespass, sin; therefore: fall, fault, offence, sin, transgression, trespass).

An interesting thing is that Jesus makes a connection directly proportional between being forgiven by God and also release forgiveness to those who owe us something. “*As we also have forgiven our debtors*” or “*for we also forgive* [verb in present tense] *whoever owe us*” does not mean that we should ask for forgiveness on the basis of forgiveness with that we had forgiven others, i.e., in the same quantity or quality that we can forgive someone. We can only receive forgiveness by grace. But in order to pray to God for forgiveness, sincerely and without any hypocrisy, we must be free from any feeling of hatred and revenge. Only when God gives us the grace to truly forgive our debtors is that we will be prepared to make a true prayer. Forgiveness here is not connected to feeling, but to our willingness to obey the commandment of the Lord and use the power of our words to open the paths to each other (Having been already forgiven by Him); only then His action of blessing will be completed: “For if you forgive others their trespasses [NIV, sins], your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses [NIV, sins].” In other words, the willingness to forgive within us brings us closer to God’s character, so we can also feel His forgiveness when we come to Him with our problems and sins. On the other hand, without the willingness to forgive others, access to the Father in prayer is blocked. If God forgave us for much bigger things on the cross, why not forgive our brothers for simpler things? (Matt. 18: 15; 21-22). If we release forgiveness, lives will be released, but if we withhold them, not only will others no longer have the chance to be forgiven by God, but we will also not have the release of our lives, spiritually speaking.

There is an important comment here. In Jn. 20: 23 He said to His disciples after His resurrection, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

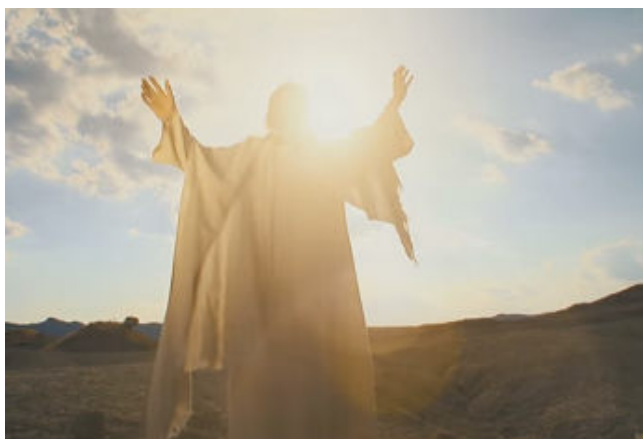
The disciples knew that Jesus’ words did not give them power to forgive sins (Acts 8: 22), for only God can do that (Mk. 2: 7; Lk. 5: 21). Neither the apostles nor the Church have power to forgive any sin whatsoever or to deny forgiveness to any individual; in other words: judging whether someone will be saved or not by the sins he has committed. What Jesus was talking about was the responsibility He was giving His Church to spread the gospel throughout the world, so that whoever believes in Him may find God’s forgiveness (cf. Matt. 16: 19 – the keys of the kingdom of heaven – open the door of evangelization), as John the Baptist came to prepare hearts for salvation. However, we can see, both in the OT and in the NT, some passages where servants of God, under a strong anointing of the Holy Spirit, uttered strong words of God’s judgment: Jeremiah, for example, prophesying the death of the false prophet Hananiah

(Jer. 28: 15-17); Ezekiel against Israel's leaders (Ezek. 11: 1-13), and the death of Pelatiah, while he was prophesying; Peter, with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5: 1-11); Paul, with Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13: 4-12).

Finally, Jesus teaches us to ask God *to lead us not into temptation and deliver us from all evil* that may befall our lives, whether from the world, the darkness or the flesh. This means that those who pray sincerely for forgiveness of sins yearn for the ability to sin no more. The Greek word *peirasmos*, translated as *temptation* means: 'do not allow us to fall into situations where we will be exposed to the temptation of evil.' The expression "*deliver us from evil*" ('*rusai hEmas apo tou ponerou*' or '*rusai êmas apo tou ponêrou*'; ρυσαι ημας απο του πονηρου) means: '*protect, shield, guard (rhyesthai), deliver*' (*rhuomai, ῥύομαι*, Strong #4506; *to rescue, deliver from danger or destruction*) against the assaults of the devil [*tou ponerou, namely, evil, the evil one*; Strong #4190, *πονηρός, ponéros: evil, bad, wicked, malicious, grievous, harmful, hurtful, evil, calamitous; facinorous (criminal); masculine (singular) the devil, or (plural) sinners*]. The phrase enclosed in brackets [*for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen*] was placed later in the manuscripts, but it was not told by Jesus.

32

Come to me, all you who are weary and
burdened, and I will give you rest
Matt. 11: 28-30



Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened
Reference text: Matt. 11: 28-30

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest [In transliterated Greek, *deute pros me pantes oi kopiōntes (κοπιῶντες) kai pephortismenoi (πεφορτισμένοι) kagō anapausō umas*]. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matt. 11: 28-30 – NIV)

“Come unto me, all ye that labour 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 ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke [is] easy, and my burden is light.” (Matt. 11: 28-30 – KJV)

In Greek, the word ‘weary’ is written as ‘kopiōntes’ = ‘those who labor’ [KJV: ‘all ye that labour’]. On the other hand, ‘burdened’ is written in Greek as ‘pephortismenoi’, derived from ‘phortizō’ (φορτίζω), meaning ‘to load, burden.’

In verse 29 Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” The word ‘yoke’ is written in Greek as ‘zugon’ = ‘yoke.’ In verse 30, He adds, “For my yoke (‘zugos’) is easy and my burden is light (in Greek, ‘phortion’ = ‘burden’).

So, the four words involved with our reasoning here are: ‘weary’, ‘burdened’ (or ‘are heavy laden’), ‘yoke’ and ‘burden’ (or load).

Jesus then says to come to Him those who are weary, that is, those who toil, those who labor, those who are tired, which means that ‘weariness’ refers to the personal responsibilities and obligations that the person will have to deal with during his lifetime, developing the correct learning and salvation. Because it depends on his free will, the person can place on or take from himself the yokes and weights he wants. That’s why the Lord said in Matt. 16: 24, Mk. 8: 34 and Lk. 9: 23, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” ‘Their cross’ means their responsibilities and obligations of natural life, their work with themselves, their task, their mission, their calling and their private learning, which will make them develop their own salvation. Thus, everyone who is walking with the Lord feels the weight of his daily obligations and his own sins to deal with (as a necessary obligation to lead him to sanctification and salvation); therefore, he feels weary and can come to Jesus to be cleansed, relieved, to receive His forgiveness, His blood and His comfort and to be able to continue.

On the other hand, the word ‘burdened’ (or ‘are heavy laden’), as we saw above, means ‘burden’ (or load). When He refers to be ‘burdened’ (or ‘to be heavy laden’) He is talking about those who are excessively and improperly carrying the loads (the weights) of others. Burden is something that comes from outside and that is placed on someone as an imposition, for example, the unjust religious and worldly laws, which limit people’s freedom to move under God’s direction; or else, the evil works of Satan, keeping them bound to his chains and bringing oppression, pain and suffering that are unnecessary; something that is exceedingly bigger than it is possible to bear. Therefore, Jesus tells them to come to Him to be free of the burden, “because apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15: 5b).

Then the next verse comes in, where Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

This means that those who are weary and burdened and want to be relieved of their tiredness and load come to Jesus and receive ‘His yoke.’

Yoke is a piece of wood that holds oxen by the neck and connects them to the cart, or to the plow. It can also be defined as a piece of wood that carriers put on their shoulders to suspend burdens. It is a symbol of subjection and oppression. Remember the text in Jer. 27: 2-22 (especially verses 6-7; 11-12), where God speaks to the prophet to put a yoke on his neck and send it equally to the surrounding nations of Israel as a divine sign that they would be under the Babylonian yoke. Whoever did so would be saved by Him. Whoever rebelled and fled would die.

In 2 Cor. 6: 14-18, Paul wrote: “Do not be mismatched [NIV: yoked together] with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? What agreement does Christ have with Belial? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, and I will be your father, and you shall be my sons and daughters’, says the Lord Almighty.”

Yoke, then, not only speaks of subjection and oppression, but of a partnership, where we are ‘yoked’ to the Lord or to sin and, consequently, to the enemy. Therefore, what makes the yoke light or heavy is who we choose to be our partner. Therefore, Jesus said that whoever was weary and burdened should come to Him and submit to His yoke, that is, be meek (submit to His hands that shapes us) and be humble in heart (to depend on God in our life as He was dependent on the Father), to accept our mission, our work, and thus find rest for our soul. In other words: the person does not need to impose unnecessary obligations on himself; just to be humble and ask for Jesus’ help and forgiveness.

Finally, in verse 30 Jesus says, “For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” In Greek ‘zugos’ (yoke), and ‘phortion’ (‘load’; here translated as ‘burden’). In the Lexicon Strong Concordance we can find the following meanings for ‘zugos’ (ζυγός – Strong #2218): from the root ‘zeugnumi’, which means: to join, especially by a yoke; a coupling, that is, (figuratively): servitude (a law or obligation), also (literally) the beam of the balance (as connecting the scales, pair of balances), yoke.

Where ‘burden’ is written, the Greek word is the same used in verse 28: ‘phortion’ (φορτίον – Strong #5413), and it literally means: a burden; the freight of a ship; diminutive of ‘phortos’; an invoice (as part of freight), i.e. (figuratively) a task or service; or then, ‘surrender, lift a weight, burden, load.’ With obedience to Jesus, in the absence of sin and longing for holiness, our lives become lighter. It is written that His commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5: 3), because it is about love. For this reason, Jesus says that His yoke, subjection to Him, is something easy, and that His burden, His load on us, is light, because it is related to the love with which we carry ‘our cross’, our calling, and He does not place a burden on us beyond what we can carry. What He gives us to perform takes into account our capacity and respects it.

Now, we can see in Paul’s letters an excerpt that says:

- Gal 6: 1-5: “My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another’s burdens (in Greek: ‘baros’, no longer ‘phortion’), and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. All must test their own

work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. For all must carry their own loads ('phortion' again)."

In the Strong's Concordance we can find the following meanings for the word 'baros' (βάρος – Strong #922): (through the notion of going down); weight; in the New Testament only, figuratively, a load, abundance, authority; (something or someone) heavy, burden, weight.

Then, we can interpret the relevant parts ("Bear one another's burdens" – Gal. 6: 2, and "For all must carry their own loads", Gal. 6: 5) as follows:

1) Bear the burden: to use authority with love and compassion, correcting the brethren in their faults and thus removing the burden of sin, putting them back on the right path so that they are not weighed to anyone and so that the temptation of one does not affect the others (taking into account the context in which the verse is found). Burden is something exceedingly bigger than it is possible to bear. Sin weighs and becomes unbearable for everyone.

2) For all must carry their own loads: in Greek: 'phortion', again, which means what we already said above: 'a task or service, burden, load'; things that are for us to resolve; that only we can take; what we do ourselves, that is, the exercise of free will. We will be judged by our own attitudes (2 Cor. 5: 10).

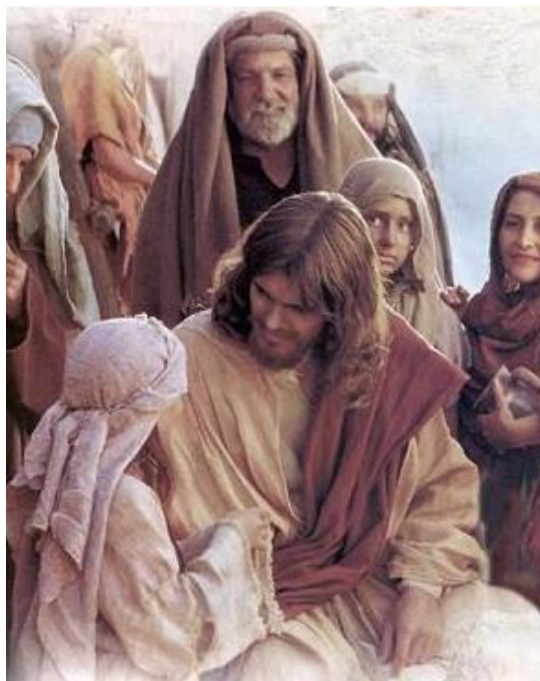
"Where should we bear one another's burdens?"

"To the throne of God, through our intercession, placing and leaving there the weights of sin and human impositions with the One who is able to give a solution for them. He has already taken these loads and other burdens on the cross of Calvary, appeasing the wrath of God the Father and suffering it in our place."

What He gives us to accomplish respects our ability. Our part, in fact, is just to sow His holy seed in the lives of those who are lost and let them exercise their own free will.

33

The healing of a deaf and mute man at Decapolis
Mk. 7: 31-37



The healing of a deaf and mute man at Decapolis

Reference text: Mk. 7: 31-37

“Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech [NIV: ... who was deaf and could hardly talk...]; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, ‘Ephphatha’, that is, ‘Be opened’. And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, ‘He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak’” (Mark 7: 31-37).

Let’s begin our introduction, meditating a little about the text we read above. Jesus had already gone out of Phoenicia, passed through the Sea of Galilee, and now came to the region of Decapolis. Decapolis was a group of ten Gentile Greek cities, outside the Jewish control, to the east of the Jordan River, ruled by Rome. Their names were: Scythopolis, Damascus, Kanata, Raphana, Hippos, Dion, Philadelphia, Pella, Gerasa (Jerash) and Gadara. Prophetically, Jesus was showing everyone that His mission would be extended later to the Gentiles. For the traditional Jews, that was at least strange, since He was entering the ‘enemy’ territory, of idolatrous people, therefore unclean. The bible does not say in which village Jesus met the man, not even let clear if He found him in the way to Decapolis. However, the biggest lesson here is that, by seeing Him, the people of that city brought the deaf and mute man to be touched by Him. Therefore, there was some faith in the hearts of those people. The word of God also doesn’t let clear if that disease was caused by an unclean spirit or if it was just due to human imperfection. Following, the biblical text says, “He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, ‘Ephphatha’, that is, ‘Be opened’. And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly... They were astounded beyond measure, saying, ‘He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.’”

First, let’s think about the meaning of this healing. *Ear* symbolizes a *receiving channel of divine revelation*. In the Old Testament ‘to listen to His voice’ or ‘to give heed His voice’ meant ‘to obey God.’ The Hebrew verb translated as ‘to obey’ is *shāma‘ bē*, literally, ‘to listen to’ or ‘to give ear to.’ In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT) and in the NT the verb is *hypakouō*, which means ‘to hear beneath’ or *eisakouō*, which means, ‘to listen inside’ (1 Cor. 14: 21: “By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people; yet even then they will not listen (*eisakouō* – to listen inside) to me’, says the Lord”). For us, this has meaning that God was acting in a non-Jewish people, but that had faith in His Son, to the point of bringing a sick man to be healed. In other words, it was a confirmation of what was prophesied in Isa. 28: 11-12: “Truly, with stammering lip and with alien tongue he will speak to this people, to whom he has said, ‘This is rest; give rest to the weary; and this is repose’; yet they would not hear [*shāma‘ bē*, ‘to listen to His voice’, ‘to obey’],” repeated by Paul in 1 Cor. 14: 21, that is, the healing of that man was God’s way of showing to His own people their unbelief and their lack of understanding of the divine miracles due to the hardening of their hearts. The voice of the Lord within each Israelite was not being

heard or obeyed. The man was going through the same process, however, it could be because of the idolatrous spiritual influences around him, not exactly by the hardening of his heart to the things of God, for he did not know Him yet.

Another interesting thing about that healing: at the beginning of the narrative, the Evangelist says that the man had '*an impediment in his speech*' [NIV: ... *who was deaf and could hardly talk...*], even because with the deafness he probably did a lip-reading, and the sound coming out of his mouth was quite different than a normal person could vocalize. At the end of the narrative, the comment of the people is that they were astounded at the power of Jesus to heal the mute. Anyway, speaking with difficulty or being mute, the most important is that the mouth of this man was prevented from saying what he wanted. So, when the Lord touched him, the bible says that "immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly." The word can be considered as a key (Matt. 16: 19: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven") or as a sword that separates the truth from lie, the will of God from man's (Heb. 4: 12-13: "Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account").

Joining the last two paragraphs, the conclusion is that this man, under the bad spiritual influences or by a disease from birth or any emotional trauma that he had already experienced, couldn't hear the voice of God properly, consequently, to speak His word in order to make his blessings come true. He couldn't bring his dreams into existence, could not open the paths of his own life, because there was an impediment. That's when Jesus touched his ears with His fingers as a way of saying that He was removing the impediment to the hearing, and touched the tongue of the man with His saliva, not with the man's, showing everyone it was the word of God that had the power to remove any obstacle in one's life, making way for the fulfillment of the dreams of anyone who believed in Him. The world was created by the word of God; therefore, by Jesus Himself, the Living Word (John 1: 1-4: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people").

Another interesting comment is that Jesus did with this man the same that He made with the blind man of Bethsaida: He removed him from the crowd to perform the healing, that is, showed him that if he wanted to have a private meeting with God and be truly cured, he had to move away from the world and from the carnal influences around him; then, he would be ready to hear properly the voice of the Lord and would have the free will to obey Him, to put His word into practice and bring his blessings into existence.

34

The healing of the centurion's servant
Matt. 8: 5-13



The healing of the centurion's servant

Reference text: Matt. 8: 5-13; Lk. 7: 1-10

“When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him and saying, ‘Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress.’ And he said to him, ‘I will come and cure him.’ The centurion answered, ‘Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and the slave does it.’ When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, ‘Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ And to the centurion Jesus said, ‘Go; let it be done for you according to your faith.’ And the servant was healed in that hour.” (Matt. 8: 5-13 / Lk. 7: 1-10)

A centurion was a Roman soldier who commanded one hundred soldiers of the army, the ‘centuries.’ They gathered in groups of three to ten (numbered I to X) to form the cohorts (300 to 1000 soldiers). The cohorts gathered and formed the legions. The Roman legion was the fundamental division of the Roman army. The legions ranged between 1,000 and 8,000 men (on average 3,000 to 6,000 soldiers). During his campaigns in Gaul, the Julius Caesar’s legions were composed of not more than 3,000 soldiers.

Therefore, a centurion was a man invested with authority, as well as subject to the authority of the Roman emperor (Caesar) or that of legionnaires legates (legatus legionis or praefectus legionis), commanders of elite legions, or that of a legatus pro praetore (legatus Augusti pro praetore; lit. ‘envoy of the emperor – acting for the praetor’), who ruled a Roman province and was commander of four or more legions, or else under the authority of military tribunes. The military tribunes were representatives of the soldiers and infantry before the generals, lieutenants and high command of the army. Their functions began with the Roman Republic (444 BC) and lasted until the end of the Principate, before the Dominate of Diocletian (this regime lasted from 285 AD until the end of the reign of Justinian in 565 AD).

In ancient Rome, there was also the tribune of the plebs [tribune of the people or plebeian tribune; in Latin: tribunus plebis], who worked with the Senate to defend the rights and interests of the plebs as a magistrate. He was a plebeian, not a patrician – an upper-class, noble Roman – and this position of tribune was created during the time of the Roman Republic (495 BC), and was incorporated by the dictator or emperor during the time of Julius Caesar (49-44 BC), who also exercised the function of tribune of the plebs. This function was diminished and lost until the end of the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius, around 180 AD.

This centurion who spoke to the Master was a friend of the Jews (Lk. 7: 5), so he had already heard about Jesus and began to believe in Him. When Jesus entered Capernaum the soldier came to Him begging for the healing of his servant.

First, let’s reason with this centurion’s decision in the face of his need. Even though he had soldiers under his command, he did not depend on anyone’s decision or support to find a solution to his immediate problem; he took a personalized, individualized attitude, different from those beside him. He did not expect others to move along with

him, though his subordinates even felt compassion for his sick servant. The bible says that he was a friend of the Jews, which made him different from the other Romans there; this meant that his heart had already been touched by God inclining him to the side of that conquered people, for Rome dominated Judea. As a Roman soldier of a high rank, he represented the presence of the conqueror among those people. Despite this position, he cast aside his Roman pride; he humbled himself and lowered himself to the level of the humiliated Jews, and came to seek healing for his servant in the person of Jesus. In other words, the centurion came to look for a teacher, a rabbi, in the enemy's land, because he knew that Jesus was the only one who could save his sick servant. He saw more than that: the soldier acknowledged Jesus as the true Lord; he called him 'Lord.' With this attitude, he symbolically lowered the entire Roman Empire before God, he recognized in the Messiah the personalized divinity, when the Jews themselves doubted it.

And when he came to Jesus and told Him his problem, seeing that the Master was willing to go to his house, he humbled himself even more and said: "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed." He thought himself unworthy because he knew he was a sinner; he was there at the behest of a worldly system to destroy the weakest. And he knew that Jews were not allowed to enter the houses of the Gentiles. But Jesus was not seeing his faults. On the contrary, He marveled at his faith, for the centurion did not need to see to believe; he just believed that a single word from Jesus would save his sick servant. We can also see a very human attitude in this man. At that moment, he wasn't concerned about Roman business; he was concerned about his own need. This means that sometimes we need to address our own problems rather than caring about others' problems. And we shouldn't give up until we reach our goal. He didn't give up on his blessing but searched in the right place, insisted and left the presence of the Lord with the victory he needed. He didn't care that someone might tell his superiors about the case.

By humbling himself before Jesus, the man opened the way to the blessing. Jesus entered his house through a word. It makes us think that we have to step out of our comfort place and cry out for Jesus' healing where we need it. We need to get up and do something; we need to look for Him by our own strength, by our initiative. God didn't see the centurion's faults, as He doesn't care about the faults of those in need of healing, but people need to seek salvation for themselves. He said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He didn't say, "Be still and inactive where you are and I will come to you." He even comes to us, but the cry comes from our heart. He brings people to us, but before he brings them, the cry for help came from our soul and He heard it; He saw our attempts to seek Him.

The centurion humbled himself and sought the Master. Humility is to know that we depend on God in all situations, regardless of our position within the Church or society. Using all the divine power He had, Jesus was humble because He knew that, as a man, what He did and taught came from the Father and depended on Him for everything. Humility must not be confused with servitude, slavery, ignorance, misery or any other evil situation that can affect financial life; insecurity, indecision or lack of authority. Humility is different from humiliation, and humiliation is what others do to us, forcing us to believe the lie that what we have to give is of no use to anyone. Humility is the opposite of pride, the self-sufficiency that makes one do everything without the participation of God. And pride blinds and makes people deaf, blind to the truth and deaf to God's word of deliverance, for the threatening and tempting voices of the world speak louder.

The centurion used to listen and give orders. Therefore, he did not need to see to believe, only to hear one word: “Go; let it be done for you according to your faith. Your servant was healed.” The Jews, on the contrary, used to ask for signs to God, as they did to Jesus; and Jesus told them that the only sign He would give them would be the sign of Jonah. Here, we can see important lessons:

1) To be aware of what authority is.

As a man who knew what authority was, the centurion knew what it was to command and to be commanded, consequently, he knew the implications of obedience and rebellion. Thus, when he heard about Jesus, he recognized in Him an authority from God, for no one did the miracles He did without coming from Him. It is necessary to know how to respect the authorities, for the bible says that they were left on earth by God to correct the rebels and defend the just. Even though they are often used by the devil to commit atrocities and injustices, the Lord gives us the direction to respect them, but He also makes it clear that they also have an authority in heaven (Col. 4: 1), who is He Himself, to whom they will have to account for their actions. In the spiritual world it is no different. The Word says that Jesus is the head over all Rule and Authority and Power and Dominion, and has put all things under His feet, therefore, when we respect and honor an authority sent by Him to release a word in our favor, we are blessed, because we will be in obedience; above all, because the word that was released came from the mouth of God Himself and evil must fall before us. The centurion’s servant had an illness and, logically, it did not come from God but from the evil one, therefore, a word given by Jesus alone would solve the problem, and that’s what happened; the centurion said to Him, “only speak the word, and my servant will be healed.” In Jn. 4: 46-54 the healing of the son of a king’s official is described, which is probably the same case described in Matthew and Luke, where the word servant can also have the meaning of son or child (Jn. 4: 49), that is, someone led by an authority. We are God’s children, but the bible also says that we are His servants, which makes us think that as Father and Lord we must honor Him and obey Him in everything, because He knows what is best for us. The great controversy revolves around an unjust order given by an authority (which is said to be from God), but that goes against His laws, as is the case of Peter and John who told the Jewish leaders that they were forbidding them to preach the Word: “We must obey God rather than any human authority” (Acts 5: 29 – NRSV) and “Whether it is right in God’s sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4: 19-20 – NRSV). They had received from the mouth of Jesus Himself the command to preach the gospel to every creature (Mk. 16:15) and His authority was greater than that of men.

2) Have faith in a word of authority from God.

A person may have an idea of what authority means, but not have faith that the word of authority that comes from the mouth of God has the power to destroy the strongholds of the devil. Jesus Himself, being recognized as a prophet among His people, did not perform miracles in some cities, because there He did not see faith. This is the lesson He wanted to teach the Jews of Capernaum by letting the centurion speak. As Jews, they recognized in Him an authority from God (some truly believed that He was the Son of God), saw the miracles He performed, but still did not have enough faith to believe that the word that came from His lips had power to destroy any kind of evil. That’s why He commended the centurion’s faith, because he not only understood what authority was, but also believed in the power of the word that came from His mouth. When an authority sent by the Lord prays on our behalf releasing a blessing, we need to believe that it is not

the word of men that has power, but the word that comes from the mouth of God. That's why Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." The anointed of God releases the word, but it is not he who has power, but the "sword of the Spirit" that came from his lips.

3) Dispute for authority

What is happening today in the Church, even due to the interference of the Internet, using social media, is a dispute for authority, which has been harmful to the growth of members. To explain it better: just as the Army of the Lord has a hierarchy, the hell also has a hierarchy, and that is why authority is disputed to this day, whether in the social and governmental area, or in the religious area. And today what the enemy does is precisely to remove the leadership; to take away the authority of leaders. Why? Just as Lucifer tried to take away the authority of Jesus, because he was an angel, a guardian cherub, in charge of the worship of Jesus, today he wants to take away the leadership, the true leadership of Christ. Therefore, within the church of Christ, it is advisable to be obedient to a leader, for your own good, to have a spiritual direction to follow. Many people stray from the church for some reason (it doesn't matter the reason) and start to live off posts on the Internet, under the direction of various leaders or even simple brothers (church members or even those who have strayed from it too) who do not always bring the correct teaching.

The result is: the mind of the straying person is left without a line of teaching and ends up more confused than before, becoming easy prey in the hands of Satan to lead him to perdition, that is, the loss of salvation. Therefore, be careful with so many indiscriminate posts on the Internet, for this can bring confusion of doctrines to your mind, as well as undermine the entire work of a leader. A true leader does not oppress or overburden those he leads, but exhorts, disciplines and rebukes the little ones for their own benefit. Because of this hard work (2 Tim. 4: 1-5) the bible says that they deserve the respect that is due to them:

- "Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher." (Gal. 6: 6). In short: give feedback to the person who is being used by God to discipline a person.

- "But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves" (1 Thes. 5: 12-13). In short: respect a superior and have esteem for him.

- "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing—for that would be harmful to you" (Heb. 13: 17). In short: to obey and accept the direction that comes from God for correction and direction of spiritual growth. This does not mean idolizing the leader or giving an explanation of everything. Nothing is done under coercion, but out of love, as is done with biological parents, grandparents, teachers, doctors etc.

A clarification on the expression "spiritual authority"

I would like to make it clear that the expression often used in the church to describe the position of leadership, that is, "spiritual authority," is not actually used in the Bible, neither in the OT nor in the NT. It was created by Christians later. It is the blood of Jesus that covers you, not the pastor. None of Christ's apostles used this term in their letters. What happens is: all people who are born again and, therefore, have the Holy Spirit within them (especially after baptism in water and even more so after baptism in

the Holy Spirit) and receive power over the spiritual world from God Himself, that is, they have the power of God's word to rebuke demons or anything that the Lord commands them to do, in order to make His kingdom prevail on earth. But they do not receive authority from God over anyone's spirit or life decisions, because the spirit of every human being belongs to God and each person's decision depends on their free will. However, spiritual leaders, such as Paul, Peter and John, for example, were ecclesiastical but human authorities over new converts to teach them the Christian faith and discipline them in the way of the Lord. And, because they themselves had been wrought by God a little more, they therefore had more anointing to exercise their authority over the spiritual realm and thus protect those who were younger in the faith or straighten their paths, exercising the word of God correctly. But they did not receive from God the freedom to determine their own will over the spirit or soul of those who are younger in the faith. In no way should the term "spiritual authority" be confused with the tyranny of the leader.

35

The parable of the mustard seed
Mk. 4: 30-32



The parable of the mustard seed

Reference text: Mk. 4: 30-32; Matt. 13: 31-32; Lk. 13: 18-19

“He also said, ‘With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs [KJV: herbs; NIV: garden plants], and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.’” (Mk. 4: 30-32; Matt. 13: 31-32; Lk. 13: 18-19 – NRSV).

This is one of Jesus’ shortest parables when making some comparison with His kingdom, but it has already brought a lot of discussion throughout the church ages due to the element that was used (the mustard plant) and the different terms used by three evangelists: Mark, Matthew and Luke. In fact, its interpretation seems simpler and more obvious than mustard itself and I will explain why.

In this parable of the mustard seed, the sower represents Jesus, and the plant is the Kingdom of God. The birds of the sky are those who believe in Him, come and remain in His branches, that is, they find shelter in the Kingdom of His Father. This comparison, which is also present in OT texts such as Dan. 4: 12, suggests the universal scope of the kingdom of God.

Thus the parable suggests great growth from small beginnings, but universal in scope (cf. Dan 4: 12) and firmly rooted, where some would find shelter and others would find obnoxious and try to root out, according to Ben Witherington, for mustard, due to its rapid growth, was considered a weed; its roots were difficult to uproot. Ben Witherington (also known as Ben Witherington III, born in 1951) is an American Wesleyan-Arminian scholar (Methodist) dedicated to research into the New Testament.

Pliny the Elder, in his ‘Natural History’ (published around 78 AD) said that mustard is extremely beneficial for health. And in fact it is, for it has more vitamins, proteins and minerals than many vegetables. Pliny the Elder, or Gaius Pliny the Second (Latin: Gaius Plinius Secundus; 23–79 AD) was a Roman author, naturalist, natural philosopher, and naval and army commander of the early Roman Empire, contemporary of Emperor Vespasian. The only one of his works that survived was a treatise called Natural History (‘Naturalis Historia’), of 37 volumes, showing an excellent overview of geography, zoology and botany in Antiquity, in addition to some of the writer’s opinions on the destiny of man in nature.

The word used in Greek biblical texts for mustard (for example: Mk 4: 31) is *sinapi* (σίναπι – Strong #4615), which means ‘mustard’ (probably the shrub, not the herb – according to Strong’s Concordance note). However, if we consider a real mustard plant [The three species: *Sinapis alba* (white mustard) or the *Sinapis nigra* (black mustard) or the *Sinapis juncea* (brown mustard)], especially the ones we consume most today, which are the brown and the white, it is unlikely that the plant houses birds in its branches, for its maximum height is from 70 cm or 28 inches (the white mustard) to 1.5 meters or 4,92 feet (brown mustard); In this case, Jesus seems to use a bit of extravagance in His analogy on purpose. Or, it could be *S. nigra*, a little larger and less commercially cultivated today, and whose height can reach a maximum of 3 meters (9,84 feet), however it’s not a tree as we know it today, but a shrub of considerable height.

Studying a little about the mustard so well known to us today, the seeds are generally around 1 to 2 millimeters (0,0394-0,0787 in) in diameter and can be a color that varies from yellowish white to black. Mustard seeds generally take eight to ten days to germinate under suitable conditions, i.e. cool atmosphere and relatively moist soil.

Mustards are plants from the Brassicaceae Family and genus *Brassica* and *Sinapis* whose seeds, after ground and mixed with water, vinegar and other liquids, become the condiment known as mustard. The *Brassica* genus also includes collards, cabbage, turnips, broccoli, cauliflower, arugula, watercress and radishes.

Within the *Brassica* genus (The other scientific name is *Sinapis*), the three most cultivated species are:

- *Brassica juncea* (L.) Czernjaew: known as mustard, Indian mustard, leaf mustard or brown mustard. Another scientific name: *Brassica hirta* Moench.
 - *Brassica nigra* (L.) Koch: black mustard. Other scientific names: *Sinapis nigra* L. or *Rhamphospermum nigrum*.
 - *Brassica alba* Rabenth: white mustard. Other scientific name: *Sinapis alba* L.
- B. alba* and *B. juncea* are today the two most important mustard species.
- There is a fourth species, *Brassica carinata* A. Braun: known as Abyssinian or Ethiopian mustard, cultivated in the highlands of Ethiopia and northern Kenya.



In the image above: *Sinapis alba* (white mustard) seeds (right) next to rice seeds (left). White mustard seeds are hard spheroid seeds, usually around 1.0 to 1.5 mm (0.039 to 0.059 in) in diameter, with a color ranging from beige or yellow to light brown. Photo: Edal Anton Lefterov – [wikipedia.org](https://www.wikipedia.org).

In the image below: Black mustard seeds (*Rhamphospermum nigrum*; *Brassica nigra* or *Sinapis nigra*). Photo: Gaurav Dhvaj Khadka – [wikipedia.org](https://www.wikipedia.org).



In the image above we see the tiny size of the mustard seed compared to the human hand, like the head of a pin.

White or yellow mustard (*Sinapis alba*)

- White or yellow mustard (*Sinapis alba*) grows wild in North Africa, the Middle East and Mediterranean Europe, later expanding to other regions such as Central Asia and even as far north as Greenland, and naturalized throughout Great Britain and Ireland. It is shorter than the others, approximately 60-70 cm (23,62-28 in) high and shorter pods. It blooms and matures annually. White mustard seeds are hard spheroid seeds, usually around 1.0 to 1.5 mm (0.039 to 0.059 in) in diameter, with a color ranging from beige or yellow to light brown. When ground and mixed with other

ingredients, they produce a paste or condiment. *Sinapis alba* is used to make the yellow table mustard, often with its color accentuated by turmeric [*Curcuma longa*].

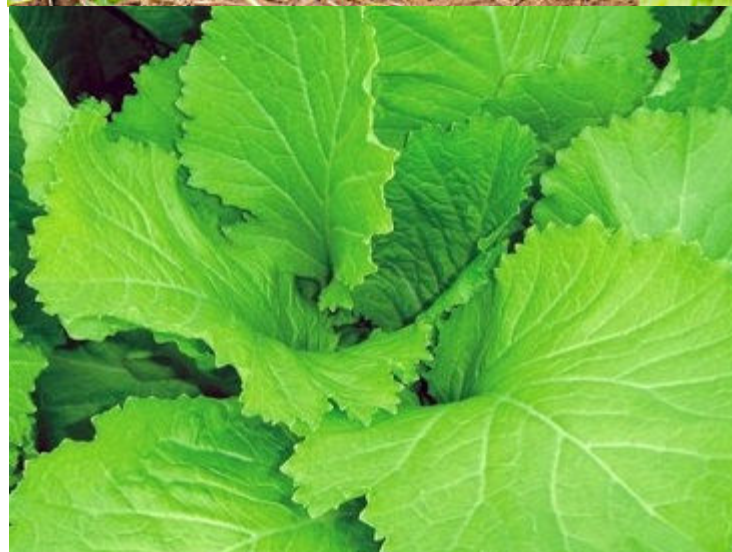




Brown mustard (*Brassica juncea* L.)

- Indian mustard, leaf mustard or brown mustard (*Brassica juncea* L.) originates from the foothills of the Himalayas and is cultivated in Nepal, the United Kingdom, Canada, Denmark and the United States of America. *Brassica juncea* is quite rustic, needs little water, measures around 1 to 2 meters (1.5 meters on average – 4,92 ft), has abundant vertical and heavy roots, which can keep the seeds ripening, and with longer pods. The flowers are small and yellow in color. It's the one we usually buy at the market-place. Typically, the leaves are sold in bundles; they are long and can be curly or smooth and have a spicy flavor.

Image below: Mustard fields in Bangladesh – photo: Nafiur Rahman.



In the two images above: The edible leaf of the brown mustard found in the market.

Black mustard (*Brassica nigra* or *Sinapis nigra*)

- Black mustard (*Rhaphospermum nigrum*; syn. *Brassica nigra* and *Sinapis nigra*) has dark brown to black seeds, commonly used as a seasoning. It grows in moist and fertile soil. It can be found in the coldest regions of North Africa, parts of Asia, as well as in Argentina, Chile, United States of America and in some European countries. In North America it is considered an invasive species. It blooms in summer, from May onwards (in the UK). Its use as a spice has been known since the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Greece, Babylon, India and China. Cultivation as an agricultural culture emerged after the Middle Ages. In the world of spices, black mustard is considered true mustard. Black mustard plants are annual, erect herbs, about 50 cm to 2 meters tall (1.6404–6.56 ft), sometimes 3 meters (9.84 ft). The flowers have four yellow petals. Each stem has about four flowers at the top, forming a ring around the stem. After flowering, the plant forms long pods, which contain four rounded seeds. Both the young leaves, the buds and the flowers are edible. Black mustard is believed to be the seed mentioned by Jesus in the parable of the mustard seed.



Wild black mustard (*Brassica nigra*) in bloom, 2.5 m tall; Shoreline Park, Rancho Palos Verdes, California. Photo: Carlfbagge.

Below: Another yellow flowering (Blooming Black Mustard) – source: The Spruce.

Source: The Spruce



Photo: Pancrat – Jardim das flores, Paris | [wikipedia.org](https://www.wikipedia.org)

Image above: Black mustard with its long pods (*Brassica nigra*, moutarde noire, siliques, Jardin des Plantes de Paris). Photo: Pancrat.

Mustard plants still retain their ancient characteristics and very little evolutionary advancement seems to have occurred since its cultivation from wild to domestic plants [note from me: questionable reference]. Black mustard has gradually become unsuitable for large-scale farming, for much of the seed is lost. Black mustard cultivation is no longer practiced commercially in the western world as it once was; during the years of 1950, most of growers abandoned it and started cultivating brown mustard, *Brassica juncea*, whose seeds are more indestructible (Sources: Ravindran – 2017).

Much discussion has already arisen around this parable, especially due to the word used to describe this herb, that is, ‘tree.’ But mustard is not a tree; at most a shrub, if we can think of black mustard (*Sinapis nigra* or *Brassica nigra*). According to rabbinical sources, Jews did not cultivate the plant in gardens, which corroborates Matthew’s description of it growing in a field (for it is originally a wild plant). Luke says that the plant was planted in a garden, which may suggest a reformulation of the parable for a gentile people, outside the Levant region.

As I wrote before, the word used in biblical texts in Greek for mustard is sinapi (σίναπι – Strong #4615), which means ‘mustard’ (probably the shrub, not the herb – according to Strong’s Concordance note). But there are others for ‘shrub’ or ‘herb’ or ‘tree’:

- Shrubs or plants [in KJV: herbs; NIV: garden plants; in Greek: λάχανον lachanon, Strong #3001 = an herb, garden plant, vegetable];
- Tree [in KJV = a tree; in Greek: δένδρον, dendron, Strong #1186 = tree; Probably from ‘drus’ (an oak); a tree];
- Garden [in KJV = garden, vegetable garden; in Greek: κήπος képos, Strong #2779 = a garden, any place planted with trees and herbs].

Let’s check the texts (NRSV):

- In the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 13: 31-32): “He put before them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs [NIV: garden plants] and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.’”

- In the Gospel of Mark (Mk. 4: 30-32): “He also said, ‘With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs [NIV: garden plants], and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.’”

- In the Gospel of Luke (Lk. 13: 18-19): “He said therefore, ‘What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.’”

According to Douglas (J. D. Douglas – The New Bible Dictionary, 2nd edition 1995), mustard plants normally do not exceed 1.20 m (3.94 ft). He also makes some interesting comments about the taxonomy of plants and animals in biblical times (taxonomy is the area of biology responsible for identifying, naming and classifying living beings). For example:

- Plants designated by the same names today are not exactly the same in different parts of the world.

- The plants of Palestine today were not exactly native to the same area in biblical times.
- Different versions of Scripture reflect erroneous identifications; there is confusion in botanical nomenclature by translators. This is because, for the original sacred writers, current standards of accuracy in botanical matters were not important considerations, and furthermore, the terminology they used was by no means as complete as that of modern botanists.
 - The versions bring more confusion than certainty in plant identification.
 - For example, some plants are translated as:
 - ‘Apple’ was the apricot.
 - ‘Elm’ (ARA) was Terebinth.
 - ‘Nettle’ was Acanthus (Isa. 34: 13), and so on.

Conclusion

After much research and asking for God’s revelation to clear up the confusion on the subject after so many millennia of conjecture and rational speculation about the Gospel of Christ, my humble opinion is that the plant mentioned may even be *Sinapis nigra*, as some scholars suggest, but the purpose of Jesus’ allegory was the purposeful hyperbole about the great growth of His Kingdom, expanding its dominion among the nations and attracting to itself many souls in need of shelter, protection, light and direction from God. Even because Jesus always made mention of the OT prophecies, especially Daniel and Isaiah. And I confess that, when reading and meditating on the Word, the first thought that came to my mind was Nebuchadnezzar’s dream with the tree (Dan. 4: 1-37, especially v. 12 and 20-22), whose branches expanded among the nations, symbolizing his dominion and power over the known world at that time. This makes us focus on the majesty and sovereignty of God in all ages, making His word prevail and placing His chosen ones in a position of honor before the wicked and experts in science and worldly matters. This parable is also an encouragement to us today, who are still trying to preserve our calling as messengers and sowers of the Lord on Earth, keeping the faith of many. Even if our work seems insignificant and unimportant, or has started as small as a mustard seed, it remains a prosperous sowing, for through us the word of God will be preached until the end. He himself guarantees us success in this endeavor.

“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7: 37b-38).