

Mark Chapter 8

There are 6 fairly obvious divisions in this chapter :-

1. 1-10 The feeding of the 4,000.
2. 11-13 A sign requested
3. 14-21 Leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod
4. 22-26 The blind man healed
5. 27-33 The confession of Peter
6. 34-38 Discipleship – gains and losses

1. The 4,000 fed

In this section, we have the record of how the Lord feeds 4,000 in a wilderness. It seems to follow hard on the heels of the feeding of the 5,000 which is recorded in Mark chapter 6. It has always been a puzzle to me, this second miracle. Why did the Lord seem to repeat a previous miracle, and why is it that the second occasion seems to be a bit less “spectacular” than the first, because of the fewer numbers involved. Brethren have spoken often about the 5,000 but little is said about the 4,000. Another contrast between the two events is that all four gospel writers record the feeding of the 5,000 whereas only Matthew and Mark record the 4,000. It is most unusual for John especially to record what is found in the other 3 gospels. It is said that 95% of what is in John is not found in the other 3 accounts. Indeed the feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle that appears in all 4 gospels.

This all seems to be emphasising the fact that the feeding of the 5,000 is more important than that of the 4,000, but let's see.

We can look at the miracle from 3 view points :

1. The Lord's compassion and the needs of the people.
2. A test of the disciples' faith
3. Doctrinal lessons from the miracle

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1. The need arose because a multitude of people had followed the Lord into a wilderness place bringing with them their sick and infirm to be healed. Matthew tells us that there were 4,000 men, besides women and children (Matt 15:38). The Lord calls his disciples to Him, and in verses 2 and 3, He states both His compassion and the need. The Lord had compassion on them because they had been with Him for 3 days and had nothing to eat. Compassion was the reason behind many of the Lord's miracles. It was compassion for the leper in Mk 1:41 that caused the Lord to reach out and touch the leper and heal him. It may have been a long time since this man had felt a friendly touch for he was unclean. But the Lord had compassion on his condition and touched him, then said, “I will. Be thou clean”. It was His word that healed the man. The touch was not required but the Lord did it just the same. It was compassion too for the

widow of Nain as she followed the funeral procession of her only son. She had been dealt a double blow. Her husband was dead and now her only son was being taken out to be buried. Who would care for her now.? But her position touched the heart of the Saviour and He stopped the procession and touched the bier. "Young man....arise". These miracles show that the Lord did not simply demonstrate His power but also His compassion. He had real feelings for those whom He healed. This compassion caused men to say of Him, "Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows". He entered into the sufferings of those whom He healed. It was not just a display of power, but of compassion.

So here in Mark Ch 8, if He had sent them away at this point, many had come a long way and would have fainted by the way. The Lord appreciated the effort they had made to come and meet Him. The need was very great then, but the Lord in these two verses simply states the situation as it was and offers no solution. He does not hint that He can solve the problem. But is He not really putting the problem to the disciples, " Here's the problem. What are you going to do about it?".

2. This leads us to our second point. The disciples are being put to the test here. The Lord did the same with the 5,000. In John 6, two disciples in particular are singled out. In verse 5 we read, "He saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?" The Lord already knew the answer of course. Verse 6 says, "He himself knew what He would do". So why the question?. Verse 6 says again, "This he said to prove him". It was a test of Philip's faith. But why Philip in particular?. It was Philip who said to Nathaniel in John 1:45, "We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write. Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Philip was making great claims for the Lord, but when he is put to the test in John 6, he replies, "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient that each one may eat a little." 200 pence was the annual salary of a working man. The Lord elsewhere told a parable about a master who went out at the start of the day to hire labourers for his field. This recruitment process was repeated at later times in the day, but at the end of the day, he gave to each the reward for a day's labour – a penny. Even if Philip could have provided the 200 pence, a year's wages, it would have been a meagre fare – that each one may eat a little. Philip is saying in other words, "The task is too great for us. We cannot do it." But Philip, who made the bold statement in John Chapter 1, fails to take account of the Lord's ability when we come to chapter 6. And who else is prominent in John 6.? Andrew butts in with the words, "There is a lad here with 5 barley loaves and 2 small fishes, but what are they amongst so many." Only John tells us that the loaves were made of barley or that the fish were small. Why so ?. Barley loaves were cheap loaves. In Rev 6:6, a measure of wheat was sold for a penny, but 3 measures of barley for a penny. Wheat cost 3 times more than barley. The fish too were only small. Andrew was right when he spoke about the smallness of their resources. But he too is being tested on what he said to Peter regarding the Lord in John Ch 1. He tells his brother Peter, "We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ". Could not the Messiah, the anointed one, feed his people. Well Andrew looked only at the

smallness of their resources and not to the Lord In Matthew 15:15, when the 5,000 needed to be fed, the decision of the disciples was, "Send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food". The task was too great, the resources were too small. Now it is. "Let's just ignore them and let them get on with it themselves."

So here in Mark Ch 8, on this second occasion in a wilderness, His disciples answered Him, "From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness". Should the reply not have been, "Well Lord, you did it once before, surely you can do it again. The disciples, however, are disappointing in their reply. The psalmist before them had also asked the question, "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?." The answer then was "yes". He gave them manna, angels' food, to eat. They ought to have known then that the Lord whom they followed could have done likewise. So the disciples have failed the test. But we must not be too critical of them. How often do we face challenges in life and we give up in despair. The task is too big for us, or our resources are too small. I often feel that our biggest failure is demonstrated in these well-known verses in Phil 4, "Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." How is it that in times of crisis we have no peace. We pray, we bring our problems to God, but perhaps we lack faith. Perhaps we fail to see the divine purpose in our circumstances, so that we cannot honestly pray "with thanksgiving". Hence, we, like the disciples, can make bold claims for the Lord Jesus, but fail to trust Him when we need to.

3. The lessons from the miracle

From verses 6 to 10, we have the account of the miracle itself. He commanded the people to sit down. He first brings order into a scene of chaos. He takes the loaves and the fishes, blesses them, breaks them, then gives them to the disciples to set before the people. In the Lord's goodness, He involves the disciples in the miracle. So too with the 5,000 before. He could have done it without them, but He chose rather to include them.

In verse 8, they took up of the broken meat that was left, seven baskets. In John 6, when the 5,000 were fed, the Lord commanded His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost" (verse 12). It teaches us that divinely given things are to be held as precious, and are not to be discarded.

But what lesson can we take from the miracle itself. Perhaps the two miracles in the wilderness are prophetic in character. With the 5,000, they are fed by 5 loaves and 2 small fishes. Five is the number of grace. There are 12 baskets filled at the end, and 12 is the number most commonly linked with the nation of Israel and it's 12 tribes. Twelve is also seen as the number of judgment, of divine administration. The heavenly city of Revelation is described as having 12 gates, and at each gate an angel judging the 12 tribes of Israel. Is not the feeding of the

5,000 a demonstration of how the Lord will feed His people Israel during the millenium.

It is also noteworthy to read of the immediate reaction of the people to the feeding of the 5,000. In John 6:14, the people said, "This is of a truth that prophet which should come into the world". "That prophet" was a very meaningful expression for the Jews. They were referring back to the promise of Moses in Deut 18:15 that God would raise up from amongst His people a prophet just like Moses, who would be able to lead and to feed His people, just as Moses did. This promise was held dearly by Israel throughout all the centuries that followed, right up to the Lord's day.

Expectations were raised by the appearance on the scene of John the Baptist. The people asked him the direct question, "Art thou the prophet ?". John replied with a very firm, "No".

In the verse that follows in John 6, verse 15, we read of how the people would have come by force to make the Lord Jesus their king. The Lord's reaction to this was to withdraw to a mountain alone. It will not be men but God who will crown Him Lord of all. God has said, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (Psalm 2). God will bring Him in and Israel will then acclaim Him, in a re-enactment of John 12. This was foretold by the Lord, "Ye shall not see Me henceforth until ye shall say, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord"".

But when we come to the feeding of the 4,000, no such expectations were raised. So why was this ?. I believe the feeding of the 4,000 could be a picture of how, after that Israel has been attended to, the Gentile nations will also be fed. The Gentiles have no expectations of either a prophet or a king. They will bow to Him as Lord. So what else can we say about the 4,000 ?. Four is often said to be the universal number ie the 4 points of the compass. They will come from the north, the south, the east and the west and sit down in the kingdom of heaven.

Men have much to say today about climate change and protecting the environment. But the greatest climate change this world has ever seen will not come by controlling green house gases. It will come when the Lord returns to earth in power and glory. God's great purpose is to restore what was lost in Genesis 1-3. Paradise was lost – paradise will be restored. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". Eternity will begin when God makes a new heavens and a new earth. Gen 1:1 will be recovered.

In a future day, the nations will come to the tree of life (Rev 22), the very tree that was barred to Adam and Eve in Gen 3. God set the cherubim and the flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life. Now in Rev 22, in the millennial kingdom, the way to the tree is opened up. The tree bears 12 manner of fruits in their seasons and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. There will be perfect provision for all, perfection being seen typically in the seven baskets full of the fragments. There will be no famine in the Lord's kingdom. The ploughman shall overtake the reaper (Amos). There will be handfuls of

corn upon the tops of the mountains. Even the desert shall blossom like the rose (Isaiah 25:1). So this miracle in Mark 8 perhaps reveals the fullness and the completeness of the Lord's provision for men.

2. A sign requested

We see at the beginning of Mark Ch 7 how often the Lord was surrounded by those who sought to tempt Him, or to bring down His character and hence His work. In Mark 8: 11-13, there is yet another example of this. The Pharisees met Him and began to question with Him, seeking of Him a sign from heaven, tempting Him. It is ironic to read this at this particular part of Mark's gospel, for we have just read of no less than three great miracles done by the Lord in chapters 7 and 8.

1. The healing of the woman of Canaan's daughter – done by the spoken word.
2. The healing of the deaf and dumb man – done by a double touch of His fingers.
3. The feeding of the 4,000 – done as a result of blessing the loaves and fishes.

However, these miracles were not done in the presence of the scribes and Pharisees – at least none that we are aware of. So, were the Pharisees justified when they sought of Him a sign from heaven. Well, the Lord of course did many miracles, some of which were done in the immediate presence of the scribes and Pharisees. So how did these men respond on those occasions ?

2.1. The man with the withered hand

The Lord enters into a synagogue on the Sabbath day. There was a man there with a withered hand and they watched Him whether He would heal him on the Sabbath day. They have no thoughts, no feelings, for the poor man himself. He was just a test case, and all eyes are upon the Lord only that they might have a reason to accuse Him. The Sabbath was introduced by God to give the nation as a day of rest when burdens could be laid aside, but the Pharisees had turned the day of rest into a day of burden. Now the Lord asks them, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath day, or to do evil?". When they held their peace, the Lord looked round on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their heart. Compared to the tenderness of the Saviour, here were men with hearts of stone. The Jews looked upon this man as a test case, and the Lord met the challenge full on. This miracle was not to be done in a corner. He said to the man, "Stand forth". He had to come out into the midst where every eye could see him, and before them all, the Lord restored his hand whole as the other. Faced with such a public display of His healing power, how did the Jews react. ? The Pharisees amongst went out and took counsel with the Herodians, how they might destroy Him. What an unholy alliance this was. The orthodox Jew, religious and proud, teaming up with the politically motivated, ambitious, Herodians. The only thing they had in common that day was their hatred towards the Lord Jesus.

2.2. The woman bent double

The Lord is again in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. There He meets with a woman who had been bent double for 18 years. The Lord first spoke to her, then laid His hands upon her. Immediately she was made straight. The ruler of the synagogue looks on. Does he do as the woman does. She glorified God for what had been done. Rather, the ruler answered with indignation because that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath day. "There are 6 days in which men ought to work : in them therefore come and be healed and not on the Sabbath day". It was as almost as though he was saying, "Can you come back tomorrow instead and be healed!!" Were miracles so commonplace in this synagogue that they could be turned on and off at will.

2.3. The man born blind

It is again on a Sabbath day, but this time the Lord is not in some distant synagogue – He is in the temple at Jerusalem. They bring to Him a man born blind, and the Lord restores his sight. The Pharisees did not witness this miracle but they brought the man to them and tell them what had been done. The Pharisees also spoke to the man's parents who confirmed the fact that he had been blind and could now see. But are the Pharisees now convinced ?. Do they now believe on the Lord. No, they said, "Give God the praise. We know that this man is a sinner".

The Pharisees then did not need more miracles – they needed more faith. It is said of the Lord towards the end of His life, "Though He did so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on Him". The rulers even had to confess, "This man doeth many miracles". The Pharisees of Mark 8 are on the same tack as that of the devil. When the devil challenged Him to make the stones into bread, he was asking Him to justify Himself. If thou be the Son of God, command these stones that they be made bread". Also, on the pinnacle of the temple, the devil quotes from the Psalms, "It is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee, lest Thou dash Thy foot against a stone". And he then issues the challenge, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence".

In Mark 8, this approach of the Pharisees gave rise to deep sigh – "He sighed deeply in His spirit." He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself, but it was obviously a cause of grief to Him. He sighed also in Mark 7:34 before He healed the deaf and dumb man. When He saw the tears of Mary and others at the grave of Lazarus, He groaned in the spirit. He was troubled in the spirit in John 13, when He was about to identify Judas as the betrayer. Though He Himself had chosen Judas, and knew that he would betray Him, it still grieved Him to think that one of the twelve would soon go out to betray Him for 30 pieces of silver. Sin, disease, and death, which were all the consequences of sin, had a deep impact upon the Saviour.

So how does the Lord respond to the question of the Pharisees. He asks, "Why doth this generation seek after a sign....there shall no sign be given unto this generation." The Lord did many miracles, but He never did anything to justify Himself or to glorify Himself. Herod was hoping to see some miracle done by Him, when He was brought before him as a prisoner. But the Lord did not

“perform” for his benefit. In the parallel passage to Mk 8, in Matthew 15, the Lord says that no sign would be given to them but the sign of the prophet Jonah. As He says elsewhere, “As Jonah was 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of the fish, even so the Son of man shall be 3 days and 3 nights in the bowels of the earth”. The only sign He would give would be of His own death and resurrection. He speaks in this veiled way to the Pharisees, but later in the chapter, in verse 31, He will be much more direct with His disciples with regards to His death.

Verse 13 at the end of this section is also significant. “And He left them and entering into the ship again departed to the other side. He had just arrived in the ship (see verse 10) but faced with the unbelief of these Pharisees, He did an about turn and went back into the ship. There is a verse in Luke where we read that He could do no mighty work there because of their unbelief. Unbelief reaps it’s own rewards.

It is little wonder then, that we read the words of Paul in I Cor 1:22, “The Jews require a sign, the Greeks seek after wisdom”.

It is sad to think that then the Antichrist comes, the false prophet, he will come with signs and lying wonders and will deceive the people. The Lord said of Himself, “I am come in my Father’s name and ye receive me not. Another shall come in his own name – him ye will receive.”

3. The leaven of the Pharisees and Herod

In verse 13, the Lord enters into a ship with His disciples. Verse 14 tells us of a problem that faced the disciples. They had forgotten to take bread. The Lord has obviously read their thoughts and charges them, “Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod.” There were three groups of men who most opposed the Lord in His lifetime. As in Mark 3, the Pharisees and the followers of Herod. But then as in Matthew 15, the Sadducees also. They represented very different viewpoints. The self-righteous Pharisees with all their religious pride and arrogance. The followers of Herod who sought political power and influence even if it meant siding with the Roman occupiers. And the rationalist Sadducees, who did not believe in resurrection or angels or spirits. In Acts 23, Paul even made use of the differences between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. When he saw the two groups present, he said, “Of the hope and resurrection of the dead, I am called in question this day.” Immediately, they are at each other’s throats. Yet there were times when these very different groups joined forces against the Lord. Sadducees and Pharisees, Pharisees and Herodians. In the world today, there are many religious groups but they are united in their denial of the true place of the Lord Jesus.

So here in Mark 8, the disciples were to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Herodians. Leaven is only required in small quantities in order to pervade the whole lump of flour. “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump. Paul used this imagery to warn against both moral and doctrinal error. In I Cor 5, the failure of the Corinthians to judge the immoral man was seen as leaven in the loaf. If not rooted out quickly, it would soon leaven the whole lump. Anyone in

business life today knows the dangers of setting a precedent. Once the precedent is established, it is hard to go back to the original position. So it is with wrong practice. Once permitted and accepted, it is hard to go back and recover the situation. The acceptance of wrong practice has been the rock upon which many an assembly has perished. False doctrine is also likened to leaven in Gal 5:9. It will soon spread if not eliminated and the introduction of Judaism in Galatia gave rise to the letter being sent to the Galatians.

The Lord's warning about the Pharisees and the Herodians is however lost on the disciples. They had been so pre-occupied with bread, with material things, that they missed the spiritual lesson. Hence it is said in verse 16, "They reasoned among themselves, saying, it is because we have no bread". For this the Lord rebukes them. He asks them about the feeding of the five thousand and then the four thousand. How many loaves did they have and how many baskets did they take up at the end. What is the Lord aiming at here.? It is not to re-state the truth behind the miracles but to surely show that they had no reason to concern themselves about their daily bread when such a one as Himself was present with them. In what has become known as "The Lord's prayer", He taught them to ask, "Give us this day our daily bread". Or perhaps better, "Give us this day our bread from above". May we learn the lesson ourselves in our day.

4. Verses 22-26 The blind man healed

The Lord is now in Bethsaida, beside the Sea of Galilee. They bring to Him a blind man to be healed. In verse 23, we see that the Lord took him and led him out of the town. We saw in the previous chapter how that the Lord took the deaf and dumb man aside from the multitude. He sought not His own glory, but the glory of the Father who sent Him.

But notice how He took the blind man. He took Him by the hand. In II Cor 10:1, Paul writes about "the meekness and gentleness of Christ". The most beautiful way to describe this gentleness is to consider the hands of the Saviour. In Mark 1:31, He comes into Peter's house to find Peter's mother-in-law lying sick of a fever. Verse 31 records, "He came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up". There was no need of a rehabilitation period – she arose and ministered unto Him. In Mark 5:41, He enters the house of Jairus to find the daughter of the house lying dead. But He took the damsel by the hand and said, "Damsel...arise". Likewise the demon possessed child of Mk Ch 9, "He took him by the hand and lifted him up". The leper of Ch 1 felt the gentle touch of the Saviour. The little children felt the touch of His hand as He lifted them up on His arms and laid His hands upon them to bless them. With those same hands, He took the basin and the towel and washed then dried the disciples' feet. Just as we saw with His compassion, we see how the Saviour's hands reflect the love and care that He had for men, women, and children.

But returning to this miracle in Mark 8, it is one which I find rather puzzling. It is the only one I can think of when the Lord seemed to require two attempts to heal the man. After the Lord had laid His hands upon him the first time, He asked him if he could see anything. "I see men as trees walking", was the reply. His vision was apparently indistinct. There is no mention of a lack of clarity when other blind men were healed eg with blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10,

or the man born blind who was healed in John 9.

So why then did this man in Mark 8 need a second touch. It could not be due to any failure on the Lord's part, so there must be another reason. If the miracle is viewed again as prophetic, could it not then be a picture of what Paul said about Israel in Romans 11:25. "Blindness in part is happened unto Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so, all Israel will be saved". It is the only thing I can think of ie a picture of Israel which had an initial vision of the Christ in the early Acts but then that vision quickly dispersed. But they will have a complete re-awakening in a day to come. When the Lord will be in the midst of His people. The New Covenant will then be established. Amongst it's blessings we read that no man will say in that day, "Know the Lord. For all shall know Him from the least to the greatest". So, to complete this section, He saw every man clearly and the Lord sent him away. But he was to keep quiet about his experience. "Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town".

5. Peter's confession

From verses 27 to 30, we read Mark's very brief account of Peter's confession. The Lord is now in Caesarea Philippi, in the north, amongst the mixture of Jews and Gentiles. Caesarea Philippi was so named in honour of a Roman Caesar. It was here, on the very borders of Israel, that the Lord asks, "Whom do men say that I, the son of Man, am." Well men had varied opinions – "John the Baptist, or Elijah, or one of the prophets." The Lord then asks the disciples, "But whom say ye that I am.?" The question is put to all 12 but it is Peter who answers first, "Thou art the Christ". Peter was always first with something to say. Sometimes, he said the right thing; sometimes quite the opposite. But even when Peter was wrong, it was because he often led with his heart and not with his head. Sometimes we lead with neither. In Phil chapter 1, Paul prays for the saints, "That your love may abound yet more and more, in knowledge and in all discernment".

Here in Mark 8, the Lord's speaking about His death is too much for Peter. Verse 22 says, "Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him." With Peter, as we have said, the heart always overruled the head. Peter spoke in this way because he loved the Lord and couldn't bear the thought of the Lord suffering, far less being killed.

Likewise on the mount of transfiguration, Peter spoke out of turn because he loved to see the Lord in all His glory. I believe that is why he said, "Let us make here three tabernacles". It is Luke who tells us that Peter spoke when he saw that Moses and Elijah were about to leave the scene. Peter wanted this display of glory to continue.

In John 13, Peter thought it was too humble a task for the Lord to be washing his feet. First he questions the Lord – "Dost Thou wash my feet". Then he refuses – "Thou shalt never wash my feet". The motives were pure, but the understanding was false.

In the same chapter, Peter's proud boast is, "Though all shall be offended, I will never be offended. I will lay down my life for Thy sake." Peter is saying in effect, "These men might let you down but you can rely on me." That night he denied his Lord before a servant maid.

Peter's heart was in the right place but he often spoke out of turn. In Mark chapter 8, one might have expected the Lord to have thanked Peter for showing such concern. Instead the Lord delivers a stinging rebuke, "Get thee behind Me Satan." Peter was the unwitting spokesman for Satan as he rebuked the Lord Jesus.

Peter's reply in Mark's gospel is briefer than in Matthew's, where he added, "the Son of the living God". There is no mention either in Mark of the Lord's reply to Peter, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee but my Father which is in heaven". The knowledge that Peter had was a revelation from heaven. In Matthew, the Lord goes further- "Upon this rock I will build my Church". The Lord will build His church upon the confession of Himself, such as that made by Peter. It is strange that it is in Matthew's gospel, the gospel to the Jews, that first mention is made of the Church. The Church is mentioned again in Matt 18. "Tell it unto the Church". I suppose the Lord is saying to the Jews that if they will not receive Him, then others will. He will bring in this new thing called the Church once Israel has been set aside through unbelief.

No sooner has Peter made his confession of who the Lord is than the Lord goes on in Mark 8:31 to speak about having to suffer, to be rejected, to be killed, and to be raised again the third day. For the Church's foundation is laid upon the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. In I Cor 15, Paul describes the gospel which was delivered to him. "How that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures, and He was buried, and He rose again the third day, according to the scriptures".

In the gospels, the Lord indeed speaks often about His death. As early as John 2:19, the Lord tells the men of Jerusalem, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again." These words were not lost on His enemies who said to Pilate after His death, "We remember that that deceiver said, after three days I will rise again". How sad that the disciples failed to grasp the same meaning.

He also compared Himself to Jonah, who spent three days and nights in the belly of the fish. So He too would be three days and nights in the bowels of the earth. Moses and Elijah spoke of His decease when they were with Him on the Holy Mount (Luke 9).

In John 10, where He presents Himself as the Good Shepherd, He speaks no less than three times about laying down His life for His sheep. In John 12 also, the Lord says, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit". From the very beginning and right through to the end, the Lord spoke of His death.

6. Discipleship – gains and losses

Now, from verse 34 to the end, the Lord speaks of His coming again, and of the reward or otherwise that He shall dispense in that day. It is not here the Rapture of the Church here, but rather the return of the Lord to earth ie His appearing in glory. The Bible in fact has relatively little to say about the Rapture. Once we have gone beyond John 14 and I Thess 4, we have just about exhausted the subject. But, on the other hand, the Bible has a great

deal to say about His return to earth., But first of all, there is advice on how we ought to live for the Lord today. "Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me". The disciple must be marked by an unselfish self-denial. He has to say "No" to himself, to his own desires and ambitions. Paul did this in Phil 3. He spread out before himself all his advantages and attainments as a Jew, as a Pharisee. There were things that he once prized and for which he would be much envied by his fellow Jews. But when he became a Christian, he had to sit down and take stock. Hence he writes, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ". This was in the past, but in the present he continues, "Yea, and I count all things but loss that I might win Christ".

In Chapter 2 of Phil, there are two "wherefores." The first describes the present exaltation of the Lord Jesus and His future vindication. The second "wherefore" is about how we are to live out our lives today – "work out your salvation in fear and trembling ". Not "work for" but "work out" your salvation. In Galatians 2:20, Paul spoke of how self had been crucified and he was now living by the faith of the Son of God.

This dialogue in Mark is the first mention of a cross in this gospel. It is not the Lord's cross, but the disciples' cross. It is "his cross" ie what is unique to the individual, and his cross may differ from that of another. In Ch 9:23, Luke in his account of this incident adds the word "daily". Let him take up his cross daily and follow me. It is not a once in a lifetime experience, but rather an experience which is to be repeated every single day. Paul certainly was denying himself, taking up his cross, and following the Lord. For Paul, "his cross" meant physical suffering, what he describes in II Cor 12 as "a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me".

The consequences of taking, or not taking, this course of action is spelled out in Mk 8:35. "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, but whosoever will save his life shall lose it, but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, and the gospel's, the same shall save it". We can settle down to enjoy ourselves in the world. We can "save" our lives, but in the assessment of heaven, we shall "lose" our lives.

These words are often quoted in the gospel message – "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul". But really we are speaking here about the Lord's disciples. Our faithfulness, or otherwise, may not be obvious today, in this life, but when the Lord comes again all will be revealed.

We must always distinguish between the two comings or else we will give rise to much confusion and false doctrine. When the Lord speaks of coming as the Son of man, it is always His appearing in glory in the world, for Israel. Before this happens, the Church will have gone home to be with the Lord, as described in I Thess Ch 4. The judgment seat of Christ will have taken place in heaven, and the Christians will return to earth with Christ when He comes to reign. The reward of the saints will be manifest in that day. II Thess 2 says that He will come to be glorified in His saints and to be admired in all them that believe. A wondering world will see not only the glory of the Lord but also the glory of His saints. But what if we have "saved" our lives for our own selfish ends. What if we have given next to nothing to the Lord in our lifetime.

Well, what is said in verse 38 may become true of us. "Of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when He cometh". We will be an embarrassment to Him if we in our lifetime do not give our lives wholly to Him.

Paul takes up this theme in II Tim 2:12. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him. If we deny him, he also will deny us. If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful : he cannot deny himself ." This is no description of being saved, then lost. If we are unfaithful, He abideth faithful. He cannot deny himself. We are part of Him, and He is part of us. But when He comes, our faithfulness, or otherwise, will be seen by all.

There are those who look upon such verses as that at the end of our chapter and teach either partial rapture or the possibility of being saved, then lost. Scripture, however, does not support either of these doctrines. As far as the rapture is concerned, Paul writes in I Thess 5, "Whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him". Waking or sleeping in the immediate context is not physical but moral and spiritual. The words carry with them the ideas of being watchful or slothful. But regardless of our actual state on the day, we will all go up for, just as in salvation, we are not depending upon ourselves but on Christ, "who died for us". It is the work of Christ that saves, and it is the work of Christ that will take us all up to heaven on that day.

We also read in Ch 5:9 of I Thess, "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us... ". Just as our salvation depended not upon ourselves but the death of Christ, so too will our participation in the day of Rapture.

Going back to I Thess 1:10, we read about the Thessalonians how that they had turned to serve the living God, "And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come". In our AV, we have three occurrences of the little preposition "from". In the Greek original, however, two different words are used. The first two instances of "from" are to wait for His Son from heaven", and "whom He raised from the dead" use the Greek word EK, which means "out of". It is to be taken out of a place or situation that we already find ourselves in. This would be true of the Lord. He is coming out of heaven for that is where He is today, and He was raised out of the dead, for He lay for three days in the tomb. But in the third usage of "from" in this verse, Paul uses APO which means literally "away from". Our Lord will not deliver us "out of" wrath but away from it. We will never be part of Tribulation wrath, for He is our deliverer away from coming wrath.

And what about our eternal security?. There are three things that give me confidence :-

1. Divine hands

In John 10, the Lord tells us that none shall pluck them from His hand. One of my hands is being held by the Lord Himself. But what about the other hand.? In the same chapter, the Lord says, "None shall pluck them from my Father's hand". Divine hands are holding me secure.

2. The family of God

John 1 tells us that, "as many as received Him, to them gave He the right

to become the children of God". In the natural sense, once a child is born into a family, he or she always remains as part of that family. That is true not matter how far that child may stray from the other members of that family. We are in the family of God.

3. The Lord's promise

In John Ch 10, the Lord gives the promise regarding His sheep, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish". "Never" is in fact a triple negative which means literally, "No, by no means, not unto the ages". The Lord is saying in effect, "They shall never, never, never perish". Our salvation is secure.