

## Reading 1, *Deuteronomy 5:12-15*

<sup>12</sup> ' "Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as Yahweh your God has commanded you.

<sup>13</sup> Labour for six days, doing all your work,

<sup>14</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath for Yahweh your God. You must not do any work that day, neither you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your servants -- male or female -- nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your animals, nor the foreigner who has made his home with you;

<sup>15</sup> so that your servants, male and female, may rest, as you do. Remember that you were once a slave in Egypt, and that Yahweh your God brought you out of there with mighty hand and outstretched arm; this is why Yahweh your God has commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

How often people today cry out in exasperation or despair, "I just don't have enough time!" There is so much to do: earn a living, fulfill a vocation, nurture relationships, care for dependents, exercise, clean the house. Moreover, we hope to maintain sanity while doing all this, and to keep growing as faithful and loving people at the same time. We are finite, and the demands seem too great, the time too short.

Those of us who feel pressed for time have lots of company. In a surprise bestseller of 1991, *The Overworked American*, economist Juliet Schor reported that work hours and stress are up, and sleep and family time are down for all classes of employed Americans. Wives working outside the home return to find a "second shift" of housework awaiting them. Husbands add overtime or second jobs to their schedules. Single parents stretch in so many directions that they sometimes feel they can't manage. Simultaneously, all are bombarded by messages that urge them to spend more (and so, ultimately, work more), to keep their homes cleaner (standards keep rising), and to improve themselves as lovers, investors, parents, or athletes. Supposedly to make all this possible, grocery stores stay open all night long, and entertainment options are available around the clock. We live, says Schor, in "an economy and society that are demanding too much from people."

What's a person to do? U.S. culture has some answers ready. "Quality time with your kids" is the answer for parents. An exercise machine that reduces stress and burns off fat in only 20 minutes, three times a week, is the answer for the overwrought and the overweight. "What you need is a good night's sleep or a vacation" is the answer one friend offers to another. Each of these answers has value. Yet our circumstances require a stronger response, and we are too caught up in the swirl of our lives to devise one.

In this situation, the historic practice of setting aside one day a week for rest and worship promises peace to those who embrace it. Whether we know the term Sabbath or not, we the harried citizens of late modernity yearn for the reality. We need Sabbath, even though we doubt that we have time for it.

As the new century dawns, the practice of Sabbath keeping may be a gift waiting to be unwrapped, a confirmation that we are not without help in shaping the renewing ways of life for which we long. This practice stands at the heart of Judaism, but it is also available to Christians. For many of us, receiving this gift will require first discarding our image of Sabbath as a time of negative rules and restrictions, as a day of obligation (for Catholics) or a day without play (in memories of strict Protestant childhoods). Relocating our understanding of this day in the biblical stories of Creation, Exodus, and Resurrection will be essential if we are to discover the gifts it offers.

Article continues below

*To act as if the world  
cannot get along without  
our work for one day  
in seven is a startling  
display of pride that  
denies the sufficiency of  
our generous Maker.*

Unwrapping this gift also requires supporting *underworked* Americans as they wonder what Sabbath keeping might mean for them. One of the cruelest features of the American economy, which asks too much of many people, is that it casts numerous others aside, leaving them without sufficient work. A Sabbath-keeping community would be a community in which this injustice would not occur. When Sabbath comes, commerce halts, feasts are served, and all God's children play. The equal reliance of all people on the bounty and grace of God is gratefully acknowledged, and the goodness of weekday work is affirmed. Relationships that persist throughout the week are changed in the process. As the great Jewish scholar Abraham Joshua Heschel said, "The Sabbath cannot survive in exile, a lonely stranger among days of profanity."

## **THE SABBATH RHYTHM**

The way in which time is organized is a fundamental building block of any community. So basic is this that most of us take the pattern we are used to for granted, as if it were self-evident that time must be arranged in this way. For all the spiritual descendants of Abraham—Jews, Christians, Muslims—time flows in seven-day cycles. Other cultures move through time in different cycles, however.

In most ancient societies, rest days followed lunar phases or rotated on some number other than seven. During the French Revolution, anti-Christian leaders tried to weaken popular religious traditions by abolishing the seven-day week. The rhythms of the week subtly pattern the days and years of our lives, and they are filled with meaning.

The Sabbatarian pattern—six days of work, followed by one of rest—is woven deep into the fabric of the Bible. The very first story of Hebrew and Christian Scriptures climaxes on the seventh day, the very first time there was a seventh day. Having created everything, God rests, blesses this day, and makes it holy. In this way, Karl Barth has suggested, God declares as fully as possible just how very good creation is. Resting, God takes pleasure in what has been made; God has no regrets, no need to go on to create a still better world or a creature more wonderful than the man and woman. In the day of rest, God's free love toward humanity takes form as time shared with them.

Article continues below

Later, God teaches the people of Israel to share in the blessing of this day (Exod. 16). After bringing them out of Egyptian slavery into the wilderness, God sends them manna, commanding them to gather enough each morning for that day's food alone. Mistrusting, they gather more than they need, but it rots. On the sixth day, however, they are told to gather enough to last for two days. Miraculously, the extra does not rot, and those mistrustful ones who go out on the seventh morning to get more find none. God is teaching them, through their own hunger and nature's provisions, to keep the Sabbath, even before Moses receives the commandments on Sinai.

When those commandments come, the Sabbath commandment is the longest and in some ways the most puzzling. Unlike any of the others, it takes quite different forms in the two passages where the Ten Commandments appear. Both versions require the same behavior—work on six days, rest on one—but each gives a different reason. What is wonderful is that each reason arises from a fundamental truth about God's relationship to humanity.

The Exodus commandment to "remember" the Sabbath day is grounded in the story of Creation. The human pattern of six days of work and one of rest follows God's pattern as Creator; God's people are to rest on one day because God did. In both work and rest, human beings are in the image of God. At the same time, they

are not God but God's creatures, who must honor God by obeying this commandment.

In Deuteronomy, the commandment to "observe" the Sabbath day is tied to the experience of a people newly released from bondage. Slaves cannot take a day off; free people can. When they stop work every seventh day, the people will remember that the Lord brought them out of slavery, and they will see to it that no one within their own dominion, not even animals, will work without respite. Sabbath rest is a recurring testimony against the drudgery of slavery.

Together, these two renderings of the Sabbath commandment summarize the most fundamental stories and beliefs of the Hebrew Scriptures: Creation and Exodus, humanity in God's image, and a people liberated from captivity. One emphasizes holiness, the other social justice. Sabbath crystallizes Torah's portrait of who God is and what human beings are most fully meant to be.

Article continues below

## **LETTING NATURE BE**

As Sabbath crystallizes Torah, so Sabbath—*Shabbat*—is the heart of Judaism. When Jews who have become inattentive to their religion wish to deepen their observance, rabbis tell them with one voice: You must begin by keeping *Shabbat*. But what does it mean to keep a day holy, to refrain from work, to honor God's creativity and imitate God's rest, to experience the end of bondage? This question has been on the minds of observant Jews, and in their hearts and actions, for millennia. Following Exodus 31, in which God makes the Sabbath the sign of an irrevocable covenant with the people of Israel, Jewish leaders have emphasized its special place in Jewish life and heard in its rhythm the structure that has kept Jewish identity alive amid terrible adversity. A saying affirms that "more than the Jews have kept *Shabbat*, *Shabbat* has kept the Jews."

Many centuries of debate and cultural change have shaped the law and liturgy of contemporary *Shabbat* observance, which varies considerably from one branch of Judaism to another. Infusing the practice as a whole, however, is a theology of Creation and Exodus, of holiness and liberation.

In observant Jewish homes, *Shabbat* begins each Friday night at sundown as a woman lights the Sabbath candles. It is a festive time; people dress up, the best tableware and food are presented, guests are welcomed. In some families, everyone turns toward the door, singing to greet *Shabbat*, which Jewish hymns personify as

a loving bride who brings inner delight and as a beautiful queen who gives order and peace. Traditional prayers are prayers of thanks; indeed, mourning is suspended in *Shabbat* liturgies. Many families sing or read together after the meal. They will gather again the next evening for another meal at which they will bid farewell to the holy day. Finally, parents will bless their children and give them a bit of sweet spice so that the taste of Sabbath peace will linger on their tongues.

Jewish liturgy and law say both what should be done on *Shabbat* and what should not. What should not be done is "work." Defining exactly what that means is a long and continuing argument, but one classic answer is that work is whatever requires changing the natural, material world. All week long, human beings wrestle with the natural world, tilling and hammering and carrying and burning. On the Sabbath, however, Jews let it be. They celebrate it as it is and live in it in peace and gratitude. Humans are created too, after all, and in gratefully receiving the gift of the world, they learn to remember that it is not, finally, human effort that grows the grain and forges the steel. By extension, all activities associated with work or commerce are also prohibited. You are not even supposed to think about them.

Article continues below

What *should* be done? Specific religious duties do exist, including worship at synagogue and reading of the Torah. But the holiness of the Sabbath is also made manifest in the joy people expect to experience on that day. It is a good deed for married couples to have sexual intercourse on *Shabbat*. Taking a walk, resting, talking with loved ones, reading—these are good, too.

To the eyes of outsiders, Jewish observance of the Sabbath can seem like a dreary set of restrictions, a set of laws that don't bear any good news. According to those who live each week shaped by *Shabbat*, however, it is a practice that powerfully alters their relationships to nature, work, God, and others. *Shabbat* is not just law and liturgy; it is also a shared way of life, a set of activities that becomes second nature, a round of custom and prayer that the youngest child or the oldest person can enter, a piece of time that opens space for God. Over and over, Jewish authors say of *Shabbat* what those who enter deeply into other religious practices also say: to experience its goodness, you must enter its activities. To find Sabbath peace, you must keep the Sabbath holy. "The real and the spiritual are one, like body and soul in a living person," writes Heschel. "It is for the law to clear the path; it is for the soul to sense the spirit."

## **SABBATH KEEPING IN A CHRISTIAN KEY**

Christians are fortunate when Jewish friends invite us to come to a meal on a Friday evening, to keep Sabbath with them. On our own, however, Christians cannot keep Sabbath as Jews do. We know God most fully not through the perpetual covenant God made with the Israelites at Sinai but through Jesus Christ. Yet we also honor the Mosaic Commandments, and we stand in spiritual and historical kinship with the Jewish people, of whom Jesus was one. In an authentically Christian form of Sabbath keeping, we may affirm the grateful relationship to the Creator that Jews celebrate each Sabbath, and we may share the joyful liberation from drudgery first experienced by the slaves who left Egypt. But we add to these celebrations our weekly festival for the source of our greatest joy: Christ's victory over the powers of death. For Christians, this victory makes of each weekly day of rest and worship a celebration of Easter.

Article continues below

The first day of the week was special to Christians as an Easter day from the earliest days of their community. Sunday, the day on which the disciples had first encountered the risen Lord, became a day to gather, eat together, and rejoice. It was not in those years a day of rest, however; these gatherings happened after the workday was over, and for several decades, Jews who became Christians continued to observe *Shabbat* as well.

But these were years when Sabbath observance was changing for Jews as well as for Christians. After the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in the year 70, the rabbis who reformulated Jewish practice for the new situation placed great emphasis on the Sabbath as a lasting sign of God's unique covenant with Israel. So Jewish observance was becoming more strict during this period. At the same time, Christianity was developing a separate identity from Judaism, and many people who were not Jewish were joining the church. Gradually, Christians of Jewish background stopped attending synagogue and observing Jewish law. Over the years, Sunday became their one-day-in-seven for both rest and worship.

The Gospels say that Jesus observed the Jewish Sabbath, though he ignored some laws that other teachers thought should restrict healing or eating in specific situations of need. "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath," Jesus says (Matt. 12:12). Later, Christians continued to treasure the Sabbath commandment, along with the other nine commandments from Sinai. They also came to believe, however, that its meaning had changed within the new creation God began with Christ's death and resurrection. The holy day from now on, therefore, was not the

seventh but the "eighth," the day on which the future burst into the present. The appropriate response was to celebrate each Sunday with a feast of Communion, looking back to Jesus' passion and resurrection and forward to the great banquet that would occur at the end of time. The result has been centuries of Sunday worship, usually crowned by the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Building on this shared heritage, different groups of Christians have shaped Sabbath keeping in different ways. The strict Sabbath observance of the New England Puritans, which gave rise to "blue laws" in many American cities and towns, influenced the structure of time for many groups in this society. Reformed churches of Dutch origin have anchored an American subculture within which Sundays are still filled with family visits and theological debate.

Article continues below

On the other hand, some groups have been suspicious of Sabbatarianism so strict that it might seem legalistic ("If anywhere the day is made holy for the mere day's sake, then I order you to work on it, to ride on it, to feast on it, to do anything to remove this reproach from Christian liberty," Martin Luther declared) or have emphasized, like the Quakers, that all time is holy with God. Sunday mass has been and continues to be central to Roman Catholics. A few groups, including the Seventh-day Adventists, have made Saturday observance central to their identity.

### **CLEARING THE ROADBLOCKS**

Even while the Bible, history, and the example of Judaism stir up a yearning for Sabbath within us, we are aware that taking on a Sabbath rhythm would not be easy—and pressures to work and spend are only part of the problem. Some other obstacles also make it difficult to retrieve this practice.

One is figuring out how to make Sunday special when it is no longer protected by legislation and custom. The arrangement of time by society as a whole is political, of course: how time is structured makes someone's life easier and someone's harder. Sunday first received special governmental recognition in 321, when the emperor Constantine decreed it a day of rest throughout the Roman Empire. This spawned centuries of government-sponsored Sabbath keeping. In recent decades, however, the setting aside of Sunday as a special day has been losing force within American culture's politics of time. One reason is increasing sensitivity to religious diversity—a sensitivity pioneered by the Supreme Court in decisions that forced employers to respect the Sabbath practices of Jews and Adventists. Today, not only the laws but also the customs that once shielded Sunday from most commerce are

disappearing, and Christians' day of worship and rest is not automatically "free" for church and family. Claiming its freedom will take effort and perhaps even sacrifice.

A second roadblock is the bad reputation many devout Christians have given to the day of rest and worship. In the centuries after Constantine, church attendance came to be required and profane activity to be banned on Sundays, though in fact these rules were often ignored. When religious reform swept through Europe in the sixteenth century, improving the people's use of their day of rest was a concern of Protestant and Catholic leaders alike. In the ensuing centuries, some Protestants worldwide not only required many hours of worship services each Sunday, but also made it virtually impossible for absentees to have any fun. Sabbath keepers were killjoys, it seemed. Little wonder that gloom still hangs over the Sunday memories of some from more stringent times.

Article continues below

*Good Sabbaths make  
good Christians by  
regularly reminding  
us of God's creative,  
liberating, and redeeming  
presence, not only in  
words but also through  
a practice we do together  
in response to that presence.*

Today, economic forces are also nibbling away at the freedom of the day. In a vicious circle, people who spend more hours at weekday jobs need the other days for shopping, which prompts businesses to hire more Sunday workers, who join the growing percentage of the workforce who toil long, irregular hours, some trying desperately to make ends meet, others for the sake of more shopping. For millions of workers, long Sunday hours for rest and worship may be impossible within the current system. People who know the Sabbath pattern of creation, liberation, and resurrection nurture a dissatisfaction with this system, however, and can work for change. Keeping Sabbath, we grow in our longing for a system where all people have work at a living wage, and time for rest and worship too.



Will it be possible for twenty-first-century Christians who need Sabbath but also respect diversity, who need Sabbath but also yearn for joy, who need Sabbath but also struggle to make ends meet to enter the practice of Sabbath keeping? Perhaps. But this can only happen as we help one another develop new forms rooted in the enduring truths of Creation, liberation, and Resurrection.

### **UNWRAPPING THE GIFT OF SABBATH**

In our situation, Sabbath keeping will require a good deal of inventiveness. Tilden Edwards, an Episcopal priest who has explored this practice in real life and in a book, urges contemporary Christians to be flexible, embracing not a renewed Sabbatarianism as much as a pattern of "Sabbath time." He recommends a combination of Sunday worship and play with a regular rhythm of disciplined spiritual renewal during the week. Eugene Peterson, a Presbyterian minister, describes the "Sabbaths" he and his wife observed every Monday, after their busiest day was over: a drive to the country, a psalm, a silent hike for several hours, a quiet evening at home. Pastors are not the only ones who must work on Sundays; others, too, sometimes need to find ways of keeping Sabbath on other days. Yet none of us should think that we can sustain Sabbath keeping, whenever it happens, all by ourselves. We need mutuality in this practice, which resists our ordinary patterns in so many ways. We need to help one another discover this gift.

Most often, Sundays will make the best Sabbaths, and not only because our schedules are relatively open on that day. Joining the assembly of Christians for the celebration of Word and sacrament will remind us that Sabbath keeping is not about taking a day off but about being recalled to our knowledge of and gratitude for God's activity in creating the world, giving liberty to captives, and overcoming the powers of death. In addition, the friends with whom we worship can help us learn to rest and rejoice once the service is over.

What, besides churchgoing, is Christian Sabbath keeping? The answer must be tailored to specific circumstances and will vary considerably in different cultures and stages of life. It will be helpful in each circumstance to reflect on what is good and what is not. What is not good on Sabbath, or in Sabbath time? We would do well to heed three millennia of Jewish reflection on the Sabbath commandment. Not good are work and commerce and worry. To act as if the world cannot get along without our work for one day in seven is a startling display of pride that denies the sufficiency of our generous Maker. To refrain from working—not every day, but one in seven—opens the temporal space within which glad and grateful relationship with God and peaceful and appreciative relationship with nature and

other people can grow. Refraining from work on a regular basis should also teach us not to demand excessive work from others.

What about commerce? Buying and spending are closely related to working too much; they depend on work, create the conditions for more work, and often are work. We could refrain from shopping on Sundays, making a choice that might complicate the weekly schedule at first but should soon become a refreshing habit. And worry? It may be difficult to banish cares from our minds altogether, but we can refrain from activities that we know will summon worry—activities like paying bills, preparing tax returns, and making lists of things to do in the coming week.

And what is good on a Christian Sabbath? Most important is joyful worship that restores us to communion with the risen Christ and our fellow members of his body, the church. For Christians, every Sunday is Easter Sunday, a time to gather together with song and prayer, to hear the Word proclaimed, and to recognize Christ in the breaking of the bread. It is a festival, a spring of souls, a day of freedom not only from work but also from condemnation. At times, worshipping communities lose sight of this: hymns drag, elders judge, children fidget, fancy clothes constrain, and the minutes tick slowly by. In other congregations, joyful prayer and song burst through the seams of the worship service, and hours pass before anyone is ready to leave. The contrast suggests that we all need to remember that Sunday worship is not just about "going to church"; it is about taking part in the activity by which God is shaping a new creation. It is a foretaste of the feast to come.

Article continues below

After worship, what many of us need most is time with loved ones—not useful time for planning next week's schedules—but time "wasted" on the pleasure of being together, perhaps while sharing our enjoyment of art, nature, or athletics. For others, and for all of us at certain points in our lives, hours of solitude beckon, hours for sleep, reading, reflection, walking, and prayer. In addition, we might explore the long tradition of visiting the homebound or inviting lonely ones to our table on the Christian Sabbath when the joy these occasions bring can be experienced apart from the pressures of other appointments.

Churches must be careful, however, not to devour Sabbath freedom with "religious" or charitable obligations. Filling Sunday afternoons with church committee meetings, for example, is a terrible violation of this freedom. And it is a

violation that unfortunately seems to be increasing, precisely because of the pressures that Sabbath freedom specifically opposes. Of course, it is difficult to find time to meet during the week, but part of the point of Sabbath keeping is to cause shifts in weekday priorities. In many churches, it is the people on the committees who most need to be reminded to keep Sabbath! Resisting the temptation to meet on Sunday would help them to say to one another, "God intends rest and liberation for you during at least one seventh of your time." Eating, playing, and taking delight in nature and one another in the hours after worship would be wonderful ways for congregations or groups within them to keep Sabbath.

### **SABBATH FOR THE GOOD OF ALL**

Puritan Sabbath keepers agreed that "good Sabbaths make good Christians." They meant that regular, disciplined attention to the spiritual life was the foundation of faithfulness. Another dimension of the saying opens up if we imagine a worshipping community helping one another to step off the treadmill of work-and-spend and into the circle of glad gratitude for the gifts of God. Taken this way, good Sabbaths make good Christians by regularly reminding us of God's creative, liberating, and redeeming presence, not only in words but also through a practice we do together in response to that presence. But even beyond this, there are other benefits of Sabbath keeping, and these could spill over to bless the whole world. With a change, the saying acquires an applicability that reaches beyond the spiritual life alone, and beyond the Sabbath practices of Jews or Christians. Imagine this: "Good Sabbaths make good societies."

Article continues below

The practice of keeping Sabbath bears much wisdom for people seeking ways through the crises of these times and the stresses of contemporary life. "The solution of mankind's most vexing problems will not be found in renouncing technical civilization, but in attaining some degree of independence from it," writes Heschel. Sabbath keeping teaches that independence. Refraining from work on a regular basis is a way of setting limits on behavior that is perilous for both human welfare and the welfare of Earth itself. Overworked Americans need rest, and they need to be reminded that they do not cause the grain to grow and that their greatest fulfillment does not come through the acquisition of material things. Moreover, the planet needs a rest from human plucking and burning and buying and selling. Perhaps, as Sabbath keepers, we will come to live and know these truths more

fully, and thus to bring their wisdom to the common solution of humanity's problems.

A good Sabbath would also make a good society by balancing the claims of work and celebration, for workers and celebrants of all sorts. In prayers at the beginning and end of *Shabbat*, Jews thank God for the blessing of work. Not working on one day is tied to working on the other six; Sabbath affirms the value of work and interprets it as an important dimension of human identity. Sabbath keeping bears a longing that all human beings will have good work, as well as a longing that no one will be required to toil without respite.

Rest and worship. One day a week—not much, in a sense, but a good beginning. One day to resist the tyranny of too much or too little work and to celebrate with God and others, remembering thereby who we really are and what is really important. One day that, week after week, anchors a way of life that makes a difference every day.

### **Responsorial Psalm, *Psalms 81:3-4, 5-6, 6-8, 10-11***

<sup>3</sup> blow the trumpet for the new month, for the full moon, for our feast day!

<sup>4</sup> For Israel has this statute, a decision of the God of Jacob,

<sup>5</sup> a decree he imposed on Joseph, when he went to war against Egypt. I heard a voice unknown to me,

<sup>6</sup> 'I freed his shoulder from the burden, his hands were able to lay aside the labourer's basket.

<sup>7</sup> You cried out in your distress, so I rescued you. 'Hidden in the storm, I answered you, I tested you at the waters of Meribah.

<sup>8</sup> Listen, my people, while I give you warning; Israel, if only you would listen to me!

<sup>10</sup> I, Yahweh, am your God, who brought you here from Egypt, you have only to open your mouth for me to fill it.

<sup>11</sup> 'My people would not listen to me, Israel would have none of me.

### **Gospel, *Mark 2:23-3:6***

<sup>23</sup> It happened that one Sabbath day he was taking a walk through the cornfields, and his disciples began to make a path by plucking ears of corn.

<sup>24</sup> And the Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing something on the Sabbath day that is forbidden?'

<sup>25</sup> And he replied, 'Have you never read what David did in his time of need when he and his followers were hungry-

<sup>26</sup> how he went into the house of God when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the loaves of the offering which only the priests are allowed to eat, and how he also gave some to the men with him?'

<sup>27</sup> And he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath;

<sup>28</sup> so the Son of man is master even of the Sabbath.'

<sup>1</sup> Another time he went into the synagogue, and there was a man present whose hand was withered.

<sup>2</sup> And they were watching him to see if he would cure him on the Sabbath day, hoping for something to charge him with.

<sup>3</sup> He said to the man with the withered hand, 'Get up and stand in the middle!'

<sup>4</sup> Then he said to them, 'Is it permitted on the Sabbath day to do good, or to do evil; to save life, or to kill?' But they said nothing.

<sup>5</sup> Then he looked angrily round at them, grieved to find them so obstinate, and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out and his hand was restored.

<sup>6</sup> The Pharisees went out and began at once to plot with the Herodians against him, discussing how to destroy him.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

### **A FAITH THAT WOULD NOT BE DENIED ( [Mark 2:1-6](#) )**

*2:1-6 When, some time afterwards, Jesus had come back to Capernaum, the news went round that he was in a house. Such crowds collected that there was no longer any room left, not even round the door. So he was speaking the word to them. A party arrived bringing to him a paralysed man carried by four men. When they could not get near him because of the crowd they unroofed part of the roof of the house in which he was, and when they had dug out. part of the roof, they let down the stretcher on which the paralysed man was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralysed man, "Child, your sins are forgiven."*

After Jesus had completed his tour of the synagogues he returned to Capernaum. The news of his coming immediately spread abroad. Life in Palestine was very public. In the morning the door of the house was opened and anyone who wished might come out and in. The door was never shut unless a man deliberately wished for privacy; an open door meant an open invitation for all to come in. In the humbler houses, such as this must have been, there was no entrance hall; the door opened directly on to the street. So, in no time, a crowd had filled the house to capacity and jammed the pavement round the door; and they were all eagerly listening to what Jesus had to say.

Into this crowd came four men carrying on a stretcher a friend of theirs who was paralysed. They could not get through the crowd at all, but they were men of resource. The roof of a Palestinian house was flat. It was regularly used as a

place of rest and of quiet, and so usually there was an outside stair which ascended to it. The construction of the roof lent itself to what this ingenious four proposed to do. The roof consisted of flat beams laid across from wall to wall, perhaps three feet apart. The space in between the beams was filled with brushwood packed tight with clay. The top was then marled over. Very largely the roof was of earth and often a flourishing crop of grass grew on the roof of a Palestinian house. It was the easiest thing in the world to dig out the rifling between two of the beams; it did not even damage the house very much, and it was easy to repair the breach again. So the four men dug out the filling between two of the beams and let their friend down direct at Jesus' feet. When Jesus saw this faith that laughed at barriers he must have smiled an understanding smile. He looked at the man, "Child," he said, "your sins are forgiven."

After Jesus had completed his tour of the synagogues he returned to Capernaum. The news of his coming immediately spread abroad. Life in Palestine was very public. In the morning the door of the house was opened and anyone who wished might come out and in. The door was never shut unless a man deliberately wished for privacy; an open door meant an open invitation for all to come in. In the humbler houses, such as this must have been, there was no entrance hall; the door opened directly on to the street. So, in no time, a crowd had filled the house to capacity and jammed the pavement round the door; and they were all eagerly listening to what Jesus had to say.

Into this crowd came four men carrying on a stretcher a friend of theirs who was paralysed. They could not get through the crowd at all, but they were men of resource. The roof of a Palestinian house was flat. It was regularly used as a place of rest and of quiet, and so usually there was an outside stair which ascended to it. The construction of the roof lent itself to what this ingenious four proposed to do. The roof consisted of flat beams laid across from wall to wall, perhaps three feet apart. The space in between the beams was filled with brushwood packed tight with clay. The top was then marled over. Very largely the roof was of earth and often a flourishing crop of grass grew on the roof of a Palestinian house. It was the easiest thing in the world to dig out the rifling between two of the beams; it did not even damage the house very much, and it was easy to repair the breach again. So the four men dug out the filling between two of the beams and let their friend down direct at Jesus' feet. When Jesus saw this faith that laughed at barriers he must have smiled an understanding smile. He looked at the man, "Child," he said, "your sins are forgiven."

It may seem an odd way to begin a cure. But in Palestine, in the time of Jesus, it was natural and inevitable. The Jews integrally connected sin and suffering. They argued that if a man was suffering he must have sinned. That is in fact the argument that Job's friends produced. "Who," demanded Eliphaz the Temanite, "that was innocent ever perished?" ( [Job 4:7](#).) The Rabbis had a saying, "There is no sick man healed of his sickness until all his sins have been forgiven him." To this day we get the same ideas among primitive peoples. Paul Tournier writes, "Do not missionaries report that disease is a defilement in the eyes of the savage? Even converts to Christianity do not dare to go to Communion when they are ill, because they consider themselves spurned by God." To the Jews a sick man was a man with whom God was angry. It is true that a great many illnesses are due to sin; it is still truer that time and time again they are due not to the sin of the ill man, but to the sin of others. We do not make the close connection that the Jews did, but any Jew would have agreed that forgiveness of sins was a prior condition of cure.

It may well be, however, that there is more than this in this story. The Jews made this connection between illness and sin, and it may well be that, in this case, the man's conscience agreed. And it may well be that that consciousness of sin had actually produced the paralysis. The power of mind, especially the sub-conscious mind, over the body is an amazing thing.

The psychologists quote a case of a girl who played the piano in a cinema in the days of the silent films. Normally she was quite well, but immediately the lights went out and cigarette smoke filled the auditorium she began to be paralysed. She fought against it for long, but at last the paralysis became permanent and something had to be done. Examination revealed no physical cause whatever. Under hypnosis it was discovered that when she was very young, only a few weeks old, she had been lying in one of those elaborate old-fashioned cots with an arch of lace over it. Her mother had bent over her smoking a cigarette. The draperies had caught fire. It was immediately extinguished and no physical hurt was done to her but her sub-conscious mind was remembering this terror. The dark plus the smell of the cigarette smoke in the cinema acted on the unconscious mind and paralysed her body--and she did not know why.

The man in this story may well have been paralysed because consciously or unconsciously his conscience agreed that he was a sinner, and the thought of being a sinner brought the illness which he believed was the inevitable



consequence of sin. The first thing that Jesus said to him was, "Child, God is not angry with you. It's all right." It was like speaking to a frightened child in the dark. The burden of the terror of God and estrangement from God rolled from his heart, and that very fact made the cure all but complete.

It is a lovely story because the first thing that Jesus does for everyone of us is to say, "Child, God is not angry with you. Come home, and don't be afraid."

### **THE UNANSWERABLE ARGUMENT ( [Mark 2:7-12](#) )**

*2:7-12 Some of the experts in the law were sitting there, and they were debating within themselves, "How can this fellow speak like this? He is insulting God. Who can forgive sins except one person--God?" Jesus immediately knew in his spirit that this debate was going on in their minds, so he said to them, "Why do you debate thus in your minds? Which is easier--to say to the paralysed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, and lift your bed, and walk around'? Just to let you see that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"-- he said to the paralysed man--"I say to you, 'Get up! Lift your bed! And go away home!'" And he raised himself, and immediately he lifted his bed, and went out in front of them all. The result was that they were all astonished, and they kept on praising God. "Never," they kept repeating, "have we seen anything like this."*

Jesus, as we have seen, had already attracted the crowds. Because of that he had attracted the notice of the official leaders of the Jews. The Sanhedrin was their supreme court. One of its great functions was. to be the guardian of orthodoxy. For instance, it was the Sanhedrin's duty to deal with any man who was a false prophet. It seems that it had sent out a kind of scouting party to check up on Jesus; and they were there in Capernaum. No doubt they had annexed an honourable place in the front of the crowd and were sitting there critically watching everything that was going on.

When they heard Jesus say to the man that his sins were forgiven it came as a shattering shock. It was an essential of the Jewish faith that only God could forgive sins. For any man to claim to do so was to insult God; that was blasphemy and the penalty for blasphemy was death by stoning ( [Leviticus 24:16](#) ). At the moment they were not ready to launch their attack in public, but it was not difficult for Jesus to see how their minds were working. So he determined to fling down a challenge and to meet them on their own ground.

It was their own firm belief that sin and sickness were indissolubly linked together. A sick man was a man who had sinned. So Jesus asked them: "Whether it is easier to say to this man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?" Any charlatan could say, "Your sins are forgiven." There was no possibility of ever demonstrating whether his words were effective or not; such a statement was completely uncheckable. But to say, "Get up and walk" was to say something whose effectiveness would either be proved or disproved there and then. So Jesus said in effect: "You say that I have no right to forgive sins? You hold as a matter of belief that if this man is ill he is a sinner and he cannot be cured till he is forgiven? Very well, then, watch this!" So Jesus spoke the word and the man was cured.

The experts in the law were hoist with their own petard. On their own stated beliefs the man could not be cured, unless he was forgiven. He was cured, therefore he was forgiven. Therefore, Jesus' claim to forgive sin must be true. Jesus must have left a completely baffled set of legal experts; and, worse, he must have left them in a baffled rage. Here was something that must be dealt with; if this went on, all orthodox religion would be shattered and destroyed. In this incident Jesus signed his own death warrant--and he knew it.

For all that it is an extremely difficult incident. What does it mean that Jesus can forgive sin? There are three possible ways of looking at this.

(i) We could take it that Jesus was conveying God's forgiveness to the man. After David had sinned and Nathan had rebuked him into terror and David had humbly confessed his sin, Nathan said: "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die." ([2 Samuel 12:1-13](#).) Nathan was not forgiving David's sin, but he was conveying God's forgiveness to David and assuring him of it. So we could say that what Jesus was doing was that he was assuring the man of God's forgiveness, conveying to him something which God had already given him. That is certainly true, but it does not read as if it was the whole truth.

(ii) We could take it that Jesus was acting as God's representative. John says: "The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son." ([John 5:22](#).) If judgment is committed to Jesus, then so must forgiveness be. Let us take a human analogy. Analogies are always imperfect but we can think only in human terms. A man may give another man a power of attorney; that means to say that he has given that man the absolute disposal of his goods and property. He

agrees that the other man should act for him, and that his actions should be regarded precisely as his own. We could take it that that is what God did with Jesus, that he delegated to him his powers and privileges, and that the word Jesus spoke was none other than the word of God.

(iii) We could take it in still another way. The whole essence of Jesus' life is that in him we see clearly displayed the attitude of God to men. Now that attitude was the very reverse of what men had thought God's attitude to be. It was not an attitude of stern, severe, austere justice, not an attitude of continual demand. It was an attitude of perfect love, of a heart yearning with love and eager to forgive. Again let us use a human analogy. Lewis Hind in one of his essays tells us of the day that he discovered his father. He had always respected and admired his father; but he had always been more than a little afraid of him. He was in church with his father one Sunday. It was a hot drowsy day. He grew sleepier and sleepier. He could not keep his eyes open as the waves of sleep engulfed him. His head nodded. He saw his father's arm go up; and he was sure that his father was going to shake or strike him. Then he saw his father smile gently and put his arm round his shoulder. He cuddled the lad to himself so that he might rest the more comfortably and held him close with the clasp of love. That day Lewis Hind discovered that his father was not as he had thought him to be and that his father loved him. That is what Jesus did for men and for God. He literally brought men God's forgiveness upon earth. Without him they would never have even remotely known about it. "I tell you," he said to the man, "and I tell you here and now, upon earth, you are a forgiven man." Jesus showed men perfectly the attitude of God to men. He could say, "I forgive," because in him God was saying, "I forgive."

### **THE CALL OF THE MAN WHOM ALL MEN HATED ( [Mark 2:13-14](#) )**

*2:13,14 So Jesus went out again to the lakeside, and the whole crowd came to him, and he went on teaching them. As he walked along, he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting in the office where he collected the customs duties. He said to him, "Follow me!" He rose and followed him.*

Steadily and inexorably the synagogue door was shutting on Jesus. Between him and the guardians of Jewish orthodoxy war had been declared. Now he was teaching, not in the synagogue, but by the lakeside. The open air was to be his church, the blue sky his canopy, and a hillside or a fishing boat his pulpit. Here

was the beginning of that dreadful situation when the Son of God was banned from the place which was regarded as the house of God.

He was walking by the lakeside and teaching. That was one of the commonest ways for a Rabbi to teach. As the Jewish Rabbis walked the roads from one place to another, or as they strolled in the open air, their disciples grouped themselves around and walked with them and listened as they talked. Jesus was doing what any Rabbi might have done.

Galilee was one of the great road centres of the ancient world. It has been said that, "Judaea is on the way to nowhere; Galilee is on the way to everywhere." Palestine was the land bridge between Europe and Africa; all land traffic must go through her. The great Road of the Sea led from Damascus, by way of Galilee, through Capernaum, down past Carmel, along the Plain of Sharon, through Gaza and on to Egypt. It was one of the great roads of the world. Another road led from Acre on the coast away across the Jordan out to Arabia and the frontiers of the empire, a road that was trodden by the regiments and the caravans.

Palestine at this time was divided up. Judaea was a Roman province under a Roman procurator; Galilee was ruled by Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great; to the east the territory which included Gaulonitis, Trachonitis and Batanaea was ruled by Philip, another of Herod's sons. On the way from Philip's territory to Herod's domains, Capernaum was the first town to which the traveller came. It was by its very nature a frontier town; because of that it was a customs' centre. In those days there were import and export taxes and Capernaum must have been the place where they were collected. That is where Matthew worked. True, he was not, like Zacchaeus, in the service of the Romans; he was working for Herod Antipas; but a hated tax-collector he was. (The King James Version calls the tax-collectors, publicans; that is because the Latin word was publicanus; the translation publican which is, of course, nowadays quite misleading, actually goes back to Wycliffe.)

This story tells us certain things both about Matthew and about Jesus.

(i) Matthew was a well-hated man. Tax-gatherers can never be a popular section of the community, but in the ancient world they were hated. People never knew just how much they had to pay; the tax-collectors extracted from them as much as they could possibly get and lined their own pockets with the surplus that

remained after the demands of the law had been met. Even a Greek writer like Lucian ranks tax-gatherers with "adulterers, panderers, flatterers and sycophants." Jesus wanted the man no one else wanted. He offered his friendship to the man whom all others would have scorned to call friend.

(ii) Matthew must have been a man at that moment with an ache in his heart. He must have heard about Jesus; he must have listened often on the outskirts of the crowds to his message; and something must have stirred in his heart. Now he could not possibly have gone to the orthodox good people of his day; to them he was unclean and they would have refused to have anything to do with him.

Hugh Redwood tells of a woman in the dock district in London who came to a women's meeting. She had been living with a Chinese and had a half-caste baby whom she brought with her. She liked the meeting and came back and back again. Then the vicar came to her. "I must ask you," he said, "not to come again." The woman looked her question. "The other women," said the vicar, "say that they will stop coming if you continue to come." She looked at him with a poignant wistfulness. "Sir," she said, "I know I'm a sinner, but isn't there anywhere a sinner can go?" Fortunately the Salvation Army found that woman and she was reclaimed for Christ.

That is precisely what Matthew was up against until he found the one who came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost.

(iii) This story tells us something about Jesus. It was as he walked along the lakeside that he called Matthew. As a great scholar said, "Even as he was walking along he was looking for opportunities." Jesus was never off duty. If he could find one man for God as he walked he found him. What a harvest we could gather in if we looked for men for Christ as we walked!

(iv) Of all the disciples Matthew gave up most. He literally left all to follow Jesus. Peter and Andrew, James and John could go back to the boats. There were always fish to catch and always the old trade to which to return; but Matthew burned his bridges completely. With one action, in one moment of time, by one swift decision he had put himself out of his job forever, for having left his tax-collector's job, he would never get it back. It takes a big man to make a big decision, and yet some time in every life there comes the moment to decide.

A certain famous man had the habit of going for long country walks on Dartmoor. When he came to a brook that was rather too wide to cross comfortably, the first thing he did was to throw his coat over to the other side. He made sure that there was to be no turning back. He took the decision to cross and made sure he was going to stick to it.

Matthew was the man who staked everything on Christ; and he was not wrong.

(v) From his decision Matthew got at least three things.

(a) He got clean hands. From now on he could look the world in the face. He might be very much poorer and life must be very much rougher, and the luxuries and the comforts were gone; but from now on his hands were clean and, because his hands were clean, his mind was at rest.

(b) He lost one job but he got a far bigger one. It has been said that Matthew left everything but one thing--he did not leave his pen. Scholars do not think that the first gospel, as it stands, is the work of Matthew; but they do think that it embodies one of the most important documents of all history, the first written account of the teaching of Jesus, and that that document was written by Matthew. With his orderly mind, his systematic way of working, his familiarity with the pen, Matthew was, the first man to give the world a book on the teaching of Jesus.

(c) The odd thing is that Matthew's reckless decision brought him the one thing he can least have been looking for--it brought him immortal and world-wide fame. All men know the name of Matthew as one forever connected with the transmission of the story of Jesus. Had Matthew refused the call he would have had a local ill-fame as the follower of a disreputable trade which all men hated; because he answered the call he gained a world-wide fame as the man who gave to men the record of the words of Jesus. God never goes back on the man who stakes his all on him.

### **WHERE THE NEED IS GREATEST ( [Mark 2:15-17](#) )**

*2:15-17 Jesus was sitting at a meal in Levi's house, and many tax-collectors and sinners were sitting with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many of them, and they sought his company. When the experts in the law, who belonged to the school of the Pharisees, saw that he was eating in the company of sinners and*

*tax-gatherers, they began to say to his disciples, "It is with tax-collectors and sinners that he is eating and drinking." Jesus heard them. "It is not those who are in good health who need a doctor," he said, "but those who are ill. I did not come to bring an invitation to people who think that they have no faults but to those who know that they are sinners."*

Once again Jesus is flinging down the gauntlet of defiance.

When Matthew had yielded himself to Jesus, he invited him to his house. Naturally, having discovered Jesus for himself, he wished his friends to share his great discovery--and his friends were like himself. It could not be any other way. Matthew had chosen a job which cut him off from the society of all respectable and orthodox people, and he had to find his friends among outcasts like himself. Jesus gladly accepted that invitation; and these outcasts of society sought his company.

Nothing could better show the difference between Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees and orthodox good people of the day. They were not the kind of people whose company a sinner would have sought. He would have been looked at with bleak condemnation and arrogant superiority. He would have been frozen out of such company even before he had entered it.

A clear distinction was drawn between those who kept the law and those whom they called the people of the land. The people of the land were the common mob who did not observe all the rules and the regulations of conventional Pharisaic piety. By the orthodox it was forbidden to have anything to do with these people. The strict law-keeper must have no fellowship with them at all. He must not talk with them nor go on a journey with them; as far as possible, he must not even do business with them; to marry a daughter to one of them was as bad as giving her over to a wild beast; above all, he must not accept hospitality from or give hospitality to such a person. By going to Matthew's house and sitting at his table and companying with his friends Jesus was defying the orthodox conventions of his day.

We need not for a moment suppose that all these people were sinners in the moral sense of the term. The word sinner (hamartolos, [G268](#)) had a double significance. It did mean a man who broke the moral law; but it also meant a man who did not observe the scribal law. The man who committed adultery and the man who ate pork were both sinners; the man who was guilty of theft and

murder and the man who did not wash his hands the required number of times and in the required way before he ate were both sinners. These guests of Matthew no doubt included many who had broken the moral law and played fast and loose with life; but no doubt they also included many whose only sin was that they did not observe the scribal rules and regulations.

When Jesus was taxed with this shocking conduct his answer was quite simple. "A doctor," he said "goes where he is needed. People in good health do not need him; sick people do; I am doing just the same; I am going to those who are sick in soul and who need me most."

[Mark 2:17](#) is a highly concentrated verse. It sounds at first hearing as if Jesus had no use for good people. But the point of it is that the one person for whom Jesus can do nothing is the person who thinks himself so good that he does not need anything done for him; and the one person for whom Jesus can do everything is the person who is a sinner and knows it and who longs in his heart for a cure. To have no sense of need is to have erected a barrier between us and Jesus; to have a sense of need is to possess the passport to his presence.

The attitude of the orthodox Jews to the sinner was really compounded of two things.

(i) It was compounded of contempt. "The ignorant man," said the Rabbis, "can never be pious." Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher, was an arrogant aristocrat. One called Scythinus undertook to put his discourses into verse so that ordinary unlettered folk might read and understand them. The reaction of Heraclitus was put into an epigram. "Heraclitus am I. Why do ye drag me up and down, ye illiterate? It was not for you I toiled, but for such as understand me. One man in my sight is a match for thirty thousand, but the countless hosts do not make a single one." For the mob he had nothing but contempt. The Scribes and Pharisees despised the common man; Jesus loved him. The Scribes and Pharisees stood on their little eminence of formal piety and looked down on the sinner; Jesus came and sat beside him, and by sitting beside him lifted him up.

(ii) It was compounded of fear. The orthodox were afraid of the contagion of the sinner; they were afraid that they might be infected with sin. They were like a doctor who would refuse to attend a case of infectious illness lest he himself contracted it. Jesus was the one who forgot himself in a great desire to save



others. C. T. Studd, great missionary of Christ, had four lines of doggerel that he loved to quote:

"Some want to live within the sound

Of Church or Chapel bell;

I want to run a rescue shop

Within a yard of hell."

The man with contempt and fear in his heart can never be a fisher of men.

### **THE JOYOUS COMPANY ( [Mark 2:18-20](#) )**

*2:18-20 The disciples of John were in the habit of fasting, as were the Pharisees. So they came to Jesus and said, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, while your disciples do not?" "Surely," Jesus said to them, "his closest friends cannot fast while the bridegroom is still with them? So long as they have the bridegroom they do not fast. But the days will come when some day the bridegroom will be taken away from them--and then, in that day, they will fast."*

With the stricter Jews fasting was a regular practice. In the Jewish religion there was only one day in all the year that was a compulsory fast, and that was the Day of Atonement. The day when the nation confessed and was forgiven its sin was The Fast, par excellence. But the stricter Jews fasted on two days every week, on Mondays and Thursdays. It is to be noted that fasting was not as serious as it sounds, for the fast lasted from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and after that normal food could be eaten.

Jesus is not against fasting as such. There are very good reasons why a man might fast. He might deny himself things he likes for the sake of discipline, to be certain that he is the master of them and not they of him, to make sure that he never grows to love them so well that he can not give them up. He might deny himself comforts and pleasant things so that, after self-denial, he might appreciate them all the more. One of the best ways to learn to value our homes is to have to stay away from home for a time; and one of the best ways to appreciate God's gifts is to do without them for a period.

These are good reasons for fasting. The trouble about the Pharisees was that in far too many cases their fasting was for self-display. It was to call the attention of men to their goodness. They actually whitened their faces and went about with dishevelled garments on their fast days so that no one could miss the fact that they were fasting and so that everyone would see and admire their devotion. It was to call the attention of God to their piety. They felt that this special act of extra piety would bring them to the notice of God. Their fasting was a ritual and a self-displaying ritual at that. To be of any value, fasting must not be the result of a ritual; it must be the expression of a feeling in the heart.

Jesus used a vivid picture to tell the Pharisees why his disciples did not fast. After a Jewish wedding the couple did not go away for a honeymoon; they stayed at home. For a week or so open house was kept and there was continual feasting and rejoicing. In a hard wrought life the wedding week was the happiest week in a man's life. To that week of happiness were invited the closest friends of the bride and the bridegroom; and they were called by the name children of the bridechamber. Jesus likened his little company to men who were children of the bridechamber, chosen guests at a wedding feast. There was actually a rabbinic ruling which said, "All in attendance on the bridegroom are relieved of all religious observances which would lessen their joy." The wedding guests were actually exempt from all fasting.

This incident tells us that the characteristic Christian attitude to life is joy. The discovery of Christ and the company of Christ is the key to happiness. There was a Japanese criminal called Tockichi Ishii. He was utterly and bestially pitiless; he had brutally and callously murdered men, women and children in his career of crime. He was captured and imprisoned. Two Canadian ladies visited the prison. He could not be induced even to speak; he only glowered at them with the face of a wild beast. When they left, they left with him a copy of the Bible in the faint hope that he might read it. He read it, and the story of the crucifixion made him a changed man. "Later when the jailer came to lead the doomed man to the scaffold, he found not the surly, hardened brute he expected, but a smiling, radiant man, for Ishii the murderer had been born again." The mark of his rebirth was a smiling radiance. The life that is lived in Christ cannot be lived other than in joy.

But the story ends with a foreboding cloud across the sky. No doubt when Jesus spoke of the day when the bridegroom would be taken away his friends did not

at the moment see the meaning of it. But here, right at the beginning, Jesus saw the cross ahead. Death did not take him unawares; even now he had counted the cost and chosen the way. Here is courage; here is the picture of a man who would not be deflected from the road at whose end there loomed a cross.

### **THE NECESSITY OF STAYING YOUNG IN MIND ( [Mark 2:21-22](#) )**

*2:21-22 No one sews a patch of new cloth on to an old garment. If he does the bit that was meant to fill in the hole tears it apart--the new from the old--and the tear is made worse. No one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does the wine will burst the wineskins, and the wine will be lost as well as the wineskins. New skins for new wine!*

Jesus knew quite well that he was coming with a message which was startlingly new; and he also knew that his way of life was shatteringly different from that of the orthodox rabbinic teacher. He also knew how difficult it is for the minds of men to accept and to entertain new truth; and here he uses two illustrations to show how necessary it is to have an adventurous mind.

No one ever had such a gift as Jesus for the discovery and the use of homely illustrations. Over and over again he finds in the simple things pathways and pointers to God. No one was ever such an expert in getting from the "here and now" to the "there and then." For Jesus "earth was crammed with heaven." He lived so close to God that everything spoke to him of God. Someone tells how, on Saturday afternoons, he used to go for country walks with one of the most famous of Scottish preachers. They used to have long talks together. Telling of it afterwards he said, "Wherever the conversation started, he had a way of cutting straight across country to God." Wherever Jesus' eye lighted it had a way of flashing straight on to God.

(i) He speaks of the danger of sewing a new patch on an old garment. The word used means that the new cloth was still undressed; it had never been shrunk; so when the garment got wet in the rain the new patch shrunk, and being much stronger than the old, it tore the old apart. There comes a time when the day of patching is over, and re-creating must begin. In the time of Luther it was not possible to patch up the abuses of the Roman Catholic church; the time for reformation had come. In the time of John Wesley, for Wesley at least, the time for patching the Church of England was done. He did not want to leave it, but in the end he had to, for only a new fellowship would suffice. It may well be that

there are times when we try to patch, when what is wanted is the complete abandonment of the old and the acceptance of something new.

(ii) Wine was kept in wineskins. There was no such thing as a bottle in our sense of the term. When these skins were new they had a certain elasticity; as they grew old they became hard and unyielding. New wine is still fermenting; it gives off gases; these gases cause pressure; if the skin is new it will yield to the pressure, but if it is old and hard and dry it will explode and wine and skin alike will be lost. Jesus is pleading for a certain elasticity in our minds. It is fatally easy to become set in our ways. J. A. Findlay quotes a saying of one of his friends--"When you reach a conclusion you're dead." What he meant was that when our minds become fixed and settled in their ways, when they are quite unable to accept new truth and to contemplate new ways, we may be physically alive but we are mentally dead.

As they grow older almost everyone develops a constitutional dislike of that which is new and unfamiliar. We grow very unwilling to make any adjustments in our habits and ways of life. Lesslie Newbigin, who was involved in the discussions about the formation of the United Church of South India, tells how one of the things that most often held things up was that people kept asking, "Now, if we do that, just where are we going?" In the end someone had to say bluntly, "The Christian has no right to ask where he is going." Abraham went out not knowing whither he went. ( [Hebrews 11:8](#).) There is a great verse in that same chapter of Hebrews: "By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons; of Joseph bowing in worship over the head of his staff." ( [Hebrews 11:21](#).) With the very breath of death upon him the old traveller still had his pilgrim staff in his hand. To the end of the day, with the evening now upon him, he was still ready for the road. If we are really to rise to the height of the Christian challenge, we must retain the adventurous mind. I received a letter once which ended "Yours aged 83 and still growing"--and with the inexhaustible riches of Christ before us, why not?

### **PIETY, REAL AND FALSE ( [Mark 2:23-28](#) )**

*2:23-28 One Sabbath day Jesus was going through the corn fields. His disciples began to pluck the ears of corn as they made their way along. The Pharisees began to say to him, "Look! Why are they doing what is not allowed on the Sabbath?" "Have you never read," he said, "what David did when he and his*

*friends were in need and hungry? Have you never read how he went into the house of God, when Abiathar was High Priest, and ate the shewbread--which none is allowed to eat except the priests--and gave it to his friends as well?" "The Sabbath," he said to them, "was made for the sake of man and not man for the sake of the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is lord also of the Sabbath."*

Once again Jesus cut right across the scribal rules and regulations. When he and his disciples were going through the corn fields one Sabbath day, his disciples began to pluck the ears of corn and to eat them. On any ordinary day the disciples were doing what was freely permitted ( [Deuteronomy 23:25](#)). So long as the traveller did not put a sickle into the field he was free to pluck the corn. But this was done on the Sabbath and the Sabbath was hedged around with literally thousands of petty rules and regulations. AH work was forbidden. Work had been classified under thirty-nine different heads and four of these heads were reaping, winnowing, threshing and preparing a meal. By their action the disciples had technically broken all these four rules and were to be classified as law-breakers. It seems fantastic to us; but to the Jewish rabbis it was a matter of deadly sin and of life and death.

The Pharisees immediately launched their accusation and pointed out that Jesus' disciples were breaking the law. They obviously expected him to stop them on the spot. Jesus answered them in their own language. He cited the story which is told in [1 Samuel 21:1-6](#). David was fleeing for his life; he came to the tabernacle in Nob; he demanded food and there was none except the shewbread. [Exodus 25:23-30](#) tells of the shewbread. It consisted of twelve loaves placed on a golden table three feet long, one and a half feet wide, and one and a half feet high. The table stood in the tabernacle in front of the Holy of Holies and the bread was a kind of offering to God. It was changed once a week; when it was changed it became the property of the priests and of the priests alone and no one else might eat it ( [Leviticus 24:9](#).) Yet in his time of need David took and ate that bread. Jesus showed that scripture itself supplies a precedent in which human need took precedence of human and even divine law.

"The Sabbath," he said, "was made for the sake of man and not man for the sake of the Sabbath." That was self-evident. Man was created before ever the elaborate Sabbath law came into existence. Man was not created to be the victim and the slave of Sabbath rules and regulations which were in the

beginning created to make life fuller and better for man. Man is not to be enslaved by the Sabbath; the Sabbath exists to make his life better.

This passage confronts us with certain essential truths which we forget at our peril.

(i) Religion does not consist in rules and regulations. To take the matter in question--Sunday observance is important but there is a great deal more to religion than Sunday observance. If a man might become a Christian simply by abstaining from work and pleasure on the Sunday, and by attending church on that day, and saying his prayers and reading his Bible, being a Christian would be a very easy thing. Whenever men forget the love and the forgiveness and the service and the mercy that are at the heart of religion and replace them by the performance of rules and regulations religion is in a decline. Christianity has at all times consisted far more in doing things than in refraining from doing things.

(ii) The first claim on any man is the claim of human need. Even the catechisms and the confessions admit that works of necessity and mercy are quite legal on the Sabbath. If ever the performance of a man's religion stops him helping someone who is in need, his religion is not religion at all. People matter far more than systems. Persons are far more important than rituals. The best way to worship God is to help men.

(iii) The best way to use sacred things is to use them to help men. That, in fact, is the only way to give them to God. One of the loveliest of all stories is that of The Fourth Wise Man. His name was Artaban. He set out to follow the star and he took with him a sapphire, a ruby and a pearl beyond price as gifts for the King. He was riding hard to meet his three friends, Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar, at the agreed place. The time was short; they would leave if he was late. Suddenly he saw a dim figure on the ground before him. It was a traveller stricken with fever. If he stayed to help he would miss his friends. He did stay; he helped and healed the man. But now he was alone. He needed camels and bearers to help him across the desert because he had missed his friends and their caravan. He had to sell his sapphire to get them; and he was sad because the King would never have his gem.

He journeyed on and in due time came to Bethlehem, but again he was too late. Joseph and Mary and the baby had gone. Then there came the soldiers to carry out Herod's command that the children should be slain. Artaban was in a house

where there was a little child. The tramp of the soldiers came to the door; the weeping of stricken mothers could be heard. Artaban stood in the doorway, tall and dark, with the ruby in his hand and bribed the captain not to enter. The child was saved; the mother was overjoyed; but the ruby was gone; and Artaban was sad because the King would never have his ruby.

For years he wandered looking in vain for the King. More than thirty years afterwards he came to Jerusalem. There was a crucifixion that day. When Artaban heard of the Jesus being crucified, he sounded wondrous like the King and Artaban hurried towards Calvary. Maybe his pearl, the loveliest in all the world, could buy the life of the King. Down the street came a girl fleeing from a band of soldiers. "My father is in debt," she cried, "and they are taking me to sell as a slave to pay the debt. Save me!" Artaban hesitated; then sadly he took out his pearl, gave it to the soldiers and bought the girl's freedom.

On a sudden the skies were dark; there was an earthquake and a flying tile hit Artaban on the head. He sank half-conscious to the ground. The girl pillowed his head on her lap. Suddenly his lips began to move. "Not so, my Lord. For when saw I thee hungered and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw I thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or naked and clothed thee? When saw I thee sick in prison, and came unto thee? Thirty and three years have I looked for thee; but I have never seen thy face, nor ministered to thee, my King." And then like a whisper from very far away, there came a voice. "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as thou hast done it unto one the least of these my brethren, thou hast done it unto me." And Artaban smiled in death because he knew that the King had received his gifts.

The best way to use sacred things is to use them for men. It has been known for children to be barred from a church because that church was considered too ancient and sacred for such as they. It can be that a church is more concerned with the elaboration of its services than with the help of its simple folk and the relief of its poor. But the sacred things are only truly sacred when they are used for men. The shewbread was never so sacred as when it was used to feed a starving man. The Sabbath was never so sacred as when it was used to help those who needed help. The final arbiter in the use of all things is love and not law.

-Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT)

## Chapter 2

### **A FAITH THAT WOULD NOT BE DENIED ( [Mark 2:1-6](#) )**

*2:1-6 When, some time afterwards, Jesus had come back to Capernaum, the news went round that he was in a house. Such crowds collected that there was no longer any room left, not even round the door. So he was speaking the word to them. A party arrived bringing to him a paralysed man carried by four men. When they could not get near him because of the crowd they unroofed part of the roof of the house in which he was, and when they had dug out part of the roof, they let down the stretcher on which the paralysed man was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralysed man, "Child, your sins are forgiven."*

After Jesus had completed his tour of the synagogues he returned to Capernaum. The news of his coming immediately spread abroad. Life in Palestine was very public. In the morning the door of the house was opened and anyone who wished might come out and in. The door was never shut unless a man deliberately wished for privacy; an open door meant an open invitation for all to come in. In the humbler houses, such as this must have been, there was no entrance hall; the door opened directly on to the street. So, in no time, a crowd had filled the house to capacity and jammed the pavement round the door; and they were all eagerly listening to what Jesus had to say.

Into this crowd came four men carrying on a stretcher a friend of theirs who was paralysed. They could not get through the crowd at all, but they were men of resource. The roof of a Palestinian house was flat. It was regularly used as a place of rest and of quiet, and so usually there was an outside stair which ascended to it. The construction of the roof lent itself to what this ingenious four proposed to do. The roof consisted of flat beams laid across from wall to wall, perhaps three feet apart. The space in between the beams was filled with brushwood packed tight with clay. The top was then marled over. Very largely the roof was of earth and often a flourishing crop of grass grew on the roof of a Palestinian house. It was the easiest thing in the world to dig out the rifling between two of the beams; it did not even damage the house very much, and it was easy to repair the breach again. So the four men dug out the filling between two of the beams and let their friend down direct at Jesus' feet. When Jesus saw



this faith that laughed at barriers he must have smiled an understanding smile. He looked at the man, "Child," he said, "your sins are forgiven."

After Jesus had completed his tour of the synagogues he returned to Capernaum. The news of his coming immediately spread abroad. Life in Palestine was very public. In the morning the door of the house was opened and anyone who wished might come out and in. The door was never shut unless a man deliberately wished for privacy; an open door meant an open invitation for all to come in. In the humbler houses, such as this must have been, there was no entrance hall; the door opened directly on to the street. So, in no time, a crowd had filled the house to capacity and jammed the pavement round the door; and they were all eagerly listening to what Jesus had to say.

Into this crowd came four men carrying on a stretcher a friend of theirs who was paralysed. They could not get through the crowd at all, but they were men of resource. The roof of a Palestinian house was flat. It was regularly used as a place of rest and of quiet, and so usually there was an outside stair which ascended to it. The construction of the roof lent itself to what this ingenious four proposed to do. The roof consisted of flat beams laid across from wall to wall, perhaps three feet apart. The space in between the beams was filled with brushwood packed tight with clay. The top was then marled over. Very largely the roof was of earth and often a flourishing crop of grass grew on the roof of a Palestinian house. It was the easiest thing in the world to dig out the rifling between two of the beams; it did not even damage the house very much, and it was easy to repair the breach again. So the four men dug out the filling between two of the beams and let their friend down direct at Jesus' feet. When Jesus saw this faith that laughed at barriers he must have smiled an understanding smile. He looked at the man, "Child," he said, "your sins are forgiven."

It may seem an odd way to begin a cure. But in Palestine, in the time of Jesus, it was natural and inevitable. The Jews integrally connected sin and suffering. They argued that if a man was suffering he must have sinned. That is in fact the argument that Job's friends produced. "Who," demanded Eliphaz the Temanite, "that was innocent ever perished?" ([Job 4:7](#).) The Rabbis had a saying, "There is no sick man healed of his sickness until all his sins have been forgiven him." To this day we get the same ideas among primitive peoples. Paul Tournier writes, "Do not missionaries report that disease is a defilement in the eyes of the savage? Even converts to Christianity do not dare to go to Communion when

they are ill, because they consider themselves spurned by God." To the Jews a sick man was a man with whom God was angry. It is true that a great many illnesses are due to sin; it is still truer that time and time again they are due not to the sin of the ill man, but to the sin of others. We do not make the close connection that the Jews did, but any Jew would have agreed that forgiveness of sins was a prior condition of cure.

It may well be, however, that there is more than this in this story. The Jews made this connection between illness and sin, and it may well be that, in this case, the man's conscience agreed. And it may well be that that consciousness of sin had actually produced the paralysis. The power of mind, especially the sub-conscious mind, over the body is an amazing thing.

The psychologists quote a case of a girl who played the piano in a cinema in the days of the silent films. Normally she was quite well, but immediately the lights went out and cigarette smoke filled the auditorium she began to be paralysed. She fought against it for long, but at last the paralysis became permanent and something had to be done. Examination revealed no physical cause whatever. Under hypnosis it was discovered that when she was very young, only a few weeks old, she had been lying in one of those elaborate old-fashioned cots with an arch of lace over it. Her mother had bent over her smoking a cigarette. The draperies had caught fire. It was immediately extinguished and no physical hurt was done to her but her sub-conscious mind was remembering this terror. The dark plus the smell of the cigarette smoke in the cinema acted on the unconscious mind and paralysed her body--and she did not know why.

The man in this story may well have been paralysed because consciously or unconsciously his conscience agreed that he was a sinner, and the thought of being a sinner brought the illness which he believed was the inevitable consequence of sin. The first thing that Jesus said to him was, "Child, God is not angry with you. It's all right." It was like speaking to a frightened child in the dark. The burden of the terror of God and estrangement from God rolled from his heart, and that very fact made the cure all but complete.

It is a lovely story because the first thing that Jesus does for everyone of us is to say, "Child, God is not angry with you. Come home, and don't be afraid."

**THE UNANSWERABLE ARGUMENT ( [Mark 2:7-12](#) )**

*2:7-12 Some of the experts in the law were sitting there, and they were debating within themselves, "How can this fellow speak like this? He is insulting God. Who can forgive sins except one person--God?" Jesus immediately knew in his spirit that this debate was going on in their minds, so he said to them, "Why do you debate thus in your minds? Which is easier--to say to the paralysed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, and lift your bed, and walk around'? Just to let you see that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"-- he said to the paralysed man--"I say to you, 'Get up! Lift your bed! And go away home!'" And he raised himself, and immediately he lifted his bed, and went out in front of them all. The result was that they were all astonished, and they kept on praising God. "Never," they kept repeating, "have we seen anything like this."*

Jesus, as we have seen, had already attracted the crowds. Because of that he had attracted the notice of the official leaders of the Jews. The Sanhedrin was their supreme court. One of its great functions was. to be the guardian of orthodoxy. For instance, it was the Sanhedrin's duty to deal with any man who was a false prophet. It seems that it had sent out a kind of scouting party to check up on Jesus; and they were there in Capernaum. No doubt they had annexed an honourable place in the front of the crowd and were sitting there critically watching everything that was going on.

When they heard Jesus say to the man that his sins were forgiven it came as a shattering shock. It was an essential of the Jewish faith that only God could forgive sins. For any man to claim to do so was to insult God; that was blasphemy and the penalty for blasphemy was death by stoning ( [Leviticus 24:16](#)). At the moment they were not ready to launch their attack in public, but it was not difficult for Jesus to see how their minds were working. So he determined to fling down a challenge and to meet them on their own ground.

It was their own firm belief that sin and sickness were indissolubly linked together. A sick man was a man who had sinned. So Jesus asked them: "Whether it is easier to say to this man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?" Any charlatan could say, "Your sins are forgiven." There was no possibility of ever demonstrating whether his words were effective or not; such a statement was completely uncheckable. But to say, "Get up and walk" was to say something whose effectiveness would either be proved or disproved there and then. So Jesus said in effect: "You say that I have no right to forgive sins?"

You hold as a matter of belief that if this man is ill he is a sinner and he cannot be cured till he is forgiven? Very well, then, watch this!" So Jesus spoke the word and the man was cured.

The experts in the law were hoist with their own petard. On their own stated beliefs the man could not be cured, unless he was forgiven. He was cured, therefore he was forgiven. Therefore, Jesus' claim to forgive sin must be true. Jesus must have left a completely baffled set of legal experts; and, worse, he must have left them in a baffled rage. Here was something that must be dealt with; if this went on, all orthodox religion would be shattered and destroyed. In this incident Jesus signed his own death warrant--and he knew it.

For all that it is an extremely difficult incident. What does it mean that Jesus can forgive sin? There are three possible ways of looking at this.

(i) We could take it that Jesus was conveying God's forgiveness to the man. After David had sinned and Nathan had rebuked him into terror and David had humbly confessed his sin, Nathan said: "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die." ([2 Samuel 12:1-13](#).) Nathan was not forgiving David's sin, but he was conveying God's forgiveness to David and assuring him of it. So we could say that what Jesus was doing was that he was assuring the man of God's forgiveness, conveying to him something which God had already given him. That is certainly true, but it does not read as if it was the whole truth.

(ii) We could take it that Jesus was acting as God's representative. John says: "The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son." ([John 5:22](#).) If judgment is committed to Jesus, then so must forgiveness be. Let us take a human analogy. Analogies are always imperfect but we can think only in human terms. A man may give another man a power of attorney; that means to say that he has given that man the absolute disposal of his goods and property. He agrees that the other man should act for him, and that his actions should be regarded precisely as his own. We could take it that that is what God did with Jesus, that he delegated to him his powers and privileges, and that the word Jesus spoke was none other than the word of God.

(iii) We could take it in still another way. The whole essence of Jesus' life is that in him we see clearly displayed the attitude of God to men. Now that attitude was the very reverse of what men had thought God's attitude to be. It was not an attitude of stern, severe, austere justice, not an attitude of continual demand. It

was an attitude of perfect love, of a heart yearning with love and eager to forgive. Again let us use a human analogy. Lewis Hind in one of his essays tells us of the day that he discovered his father. He had always respected and admired his father; but he had always been more than a little afraid of him. He was in church with his father one Sunday. It was a hot drowsy day. He grew sleepier and sleepier. He could not keep his eyes open as the waves of sleep engulfed him. His head nodded. He saw his father's arm go up; and he was sure that his father was going to shake or strike him. Then he saw his father smile gently and put his arm round his shoulder. He cuddled the lad to himself so that he might rest the more comfortably and held him close with the clasp of love. That day Lewis Hind discovered that his father was not as he had thought him to be and that his father loved him. That is what Jesus did for men and for God. He literally brought men God's forgiveness upon earth. Without him they would never have even remotely known about it. "I tell you," he said to the man, "and I tell you here and now, upon earth, you are a forgiven man." Jesus showed men perfectly the attitude of God to men. He could say, "I forgive," because in him God was saying, "I forgive."

### **THE CALL OF THE MAN WHOM ALL MEN HATED ( [Mark 2:13-14](#) )**

*2:13,14 So Jesus went out again to the lakeside, and the whole crowd came to him, and he went on teaching them. As he walked along, he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting in the office where he collected the customs duties. He said to him, "Follow me!" He rose and followed him.*

Steadily and inexorably the synagogue door was shutting on Jesus. Between him and the guardians of Jewish orthodoxy war had been declared. Now he was teaching, not in the synagogue, but by the lakeside. The open air was to be his church, the blue sky his canopy, and a hillside or a fishing boat his pulpit. Here was the beginning of that dreadful situation when the Son of God was banned from the place which was regarded as the house of God.

He was walking by the lakeside and teaching. That was one of the commonest ways for a Rabbi to teach. As the Jewish Rabbis walked the roads from one place to another, or as they strolled in the open air, their disciples grouped themselves around and walked with them and listened as they talked. Jesus was doing what any Rabbi might have done.

Galilee was one of the great road centres of the ancient world. It has been said that, "Judaea is on the way to nowhere; Galilee is on the way to everywhere." Palestine was the land bridge between Europe and Africa; all land traffic must go through her. The great Road of the Sea led from Damascus, by way of Galilee, through Capernaum, down past Carmel, along the Plain of Sharon, through Gaza and on to Egypt. It was one of the great roads of the world. Another road led from Acre on the coast away across the Jordan out to Arabia and the frontiers of the empire, a road that was trodden by the regiments and the caravans.

Palestine at this time was divided up. Judaea was a Roman province under a Roman procurator; Galilee was ruled by Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great; to the east the territory which included Gaulonitis, Trachonitis and Batanaea was ruled by Philip, another of Herod's sons. On the way from Philip's territory to Herod's domains, Capernaum was the first town to which the traveller came. It was by its very nature a frontier town; because of that it was a customs' centre. In those days there were import and export taxes and Capernaum must have been the place where they were collected. That is where Matthew worked. True, he was not, like Zacchaeus, in the service of the Romans; he was working for Herod Antipas; but a hated tax-collector he was. (The King James Version calls the tax-collectors, publicans; that is because the Latin word was publicanus; the translation publican which is, of course, nowadays quite misleading, actually goes back to Wycliffe.)

This story tells us certain things both about Matthew and about Jesus.

(i) Matthew was a well-hated man. Tax-gatherers can never be a popular section of the community, but in the ancient world they were hated. People never knew just how much they had to pay; the tax-collectors extracted from them as much as they could possibly get and lined their own pockets with the surplus that remained after the demands of the law had been met. Even a Greek writer like Lucian ranks tax-gatherers with "adulterers, panderers, flatterers and sycophants." Jesus wanted the man no one else wanted. He offered his friendship to the man whom all others would have scorned to call friend.

(ii) Matthew must have been a man at that moment with an ache in his heart. He must have heard about Jesus; he must have listened often on the outskirts of the crowds to his message; and something must have stirred in his heart. Now he

could not possibly have gone to the orthodox good people of his day; to them he was unclean and they would have refused to have anything to do with him.

Hugh Redwood tells of a woman in the dock district in London who came to a women's meeting. She had been living with a Chinese and had a half-caste baby whom she brought with her. She liked the meeting and came back and back again. Then the vicar came to her. "I must ask you," he said, "not to come again." The woman looked her question. "The other women," said the vicar, "say that they will stop coming if you continue to come." She looked at him with a poignant wistfulness. "Sir," she said, "I know I'm a sinner, but isn't there anywhere a sinner can go?" Fortunately the Salvation Army found that woman and she was reclaimed for Christ.

That is precisely what Matthew was up against until he found the one who came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost.

(iii) This story tells us something about Jesus. It was as he walked along the lakeside that he called Matthew. As a great scholar said, "Even as he was walking along he was looking for opportunities." Jesus was never off duty. If he could find one man for God as he walked he found him. What a harvest we could gather in if we looked for men for Christ as we walked!

(iv) Of all the disciples Matthew gave up most. He literally left all to follow Jesus. Peter and Andrew, James and John could go back to the boats. There were always fish to catch and always the old trade to which to return; but Matthew burned his bridges completely. With one action, in one moment of time, by one swift decision he had put himself out of his job forever, for having left his tax-collector's job, he would never get it back. It takes a big man to make a big decision, and yet some time in every life there comes the moment to decide.

A certain famous man had the habit of going for long country walks on Dartmoor. When he came to a brook that was rather too wide to cross comfortably, the first thing he did was to throw his coat over to the other side. He made sure that there was to be no turning back. He took the decision to cross and made sure he was going to stick to it.

Matthew was the man who staked everything on Christ; and he was not wrong.

(v) From his decision Matthew got at least three things.

(a) He got clean hands. From now on he could look the world in the face. He might be very much poorer and life must be very much rougher, and the luxuries and the comforts were gone; but from now on his hands were clean and, because his hands were clean, his mind was at rest.

(b) He lost one job but he got a far bigger one. It has been said that Matthew left everything but one thing--he did not leave his pen. Scholars do not think that the first gospel, as it stands, is the work of Matthew; but they do think that it embodies one of the most important documents of all history, the first written account of the teaching of Jesus, and that that document was written by Matthew. With his orderly mind, his systematic way of working, his familiarity with the pen, Matthew was, the first man to give the world a book on the teaching of Jesus.

(c) The odd thing is that Matthew's reckless decision brought him the one thing he can least have been looking for--it brought him immortal and world-wide fame. All men know the name of Matthew as one for ever connected with the transmission of the story of Jesus. Had Matthew refused the call he would have had a local ill-fame as the follower of a disreputable trade which all men hated; because he answered the call he gained a world-wide fame as the man who gave to men the record of the words of Jesus. God never goes back on the man who stakes his all on him.

### **WHERE THE NEED IS GREATEST ( [Mark 2:15-17](#) )**

*2:15-17 Jesus was sitting at a meal in Levi's house, and many tax-collectors and sinners were sitting with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many of them, and they sought his company. When the experts in the law, who belonged to the school of the Pharisees, saw that he was eating in the company of sinners and tax-gatherers, they began to say to his disciples, "It is with tax-collectors and sinners that he is eating and drinking." Jesus heard them. "It is not those who are in good health who need a doctor," he said, "but those who are ill. I did not come to bring an invitation to people who think that they have no faults but to those who know that they are sinners."*

Once again Jesus is flinging down the gauntlet of defiance.



When Matthew had yielded himself to Jesus, he invited him to his house. Naturally, having discovered Jesus for himself, he wished his friends to share his great discovery--and his friends were like himself. It could not be any other way. Matthew had chosen a job which cut him off from the society of all respectable and orthodox people, and he had to find his friends among outcasts like himself. Jesus gladly accepted that invitation; and these outcasts of society sought his company.

Nothing could better show the difference between Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees and orthodox good people of the day. They were not the kind of people whose company a sinner would have sought. He would have been looked at with bleak condemnation and arrogant superiority. He would have been frozen out of such company even before he had entered it.

A clear distinction was drawn between those who kept the law and those whom they called the people of the land. The people of the land were the common mob who did not observe all the rules and the regulations of conventional Pharisaic piety. By the orthodox it was forbidden to have anything to do with these people. The strict law-keeper must have no fellowship with them at all. He must not talk with them nor go on a journey with them; as far as possible, he must not even do business with them; to marry a daughter to one of them was as bad as giving her over to a wild beast; above all, he must not accept hospitality from or give hospitality to such a person. By going to Matthew's house and sitting at his table and companying with his friends Jesus was defying the orthodox conventions of his day.

We need not for a moment suppose that all these people were sinners in the moral sense of the term. The word sinner (*hamartolos*, [G268](#)) had a double significance. It did mean a man who broke the moral law; but it also meant a man who did not observe the scribal law. The man who committed adultery and the man who ate pork were both sinners; the man who was guilty of theft and murder and the man who did not wash his hands the required number of times and in the required way before he ate were both sinners. These guests of Matthew no doubt included many who had broken the moral law and played fast and loose with life; but no doubt they also included many whose only sin was that they did not observe the scribal rules and regulations.

When Jesus was taxed with this shocking conduct his answer was quite simple. "A doctor," he said "goes where he is needed. People in good health do not need him; sick people do; I am doing just the same; I am going to those who are sick in soul and who need me most."

[Mark 2:17](#) is a highly concentrated verse. It sounds at first hearing as if Jesus had no use for good people. But the point of it is that the one person for whom Jesus can do nothing is the person who thinks himself so good that he does not need anything done for him; and the one person for whom Jesus can do everything is the person who is a sinner and knows it and who longs in his heart for a cure. To have no sense of need is to have erected a barrier between us and Jesus; to have a sense of need is to possess the passport to his presence.

The attitude of the orthodox Jews to the sinner was really compounded of two things.

(i) It was compounded of contempt. "The ignorant man," said the Rabbis, "can never be pious." Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher, was an arrogant aristocrat. One called Scythinus undertook to put his discourses into verse so that ordinary unlettered folk might read and understand them. The reaction of Heraclitus was put into an epigram. "Heraclitus am I. Why do ye drag me up and down, ye illiterate? It was not for you I toiled, but for such as understand me. One man in my sight is a match for thirty thousand, but the countless hosts do not make a single one." For the mob he had nothing but contempt. The Scribes and Pharisees despised the common man; Jesus loved him. The Scribes and Pharisees stood on their little eminence of formal piety and looked down on the sinner; Jesus came and sat beside him, and by sitting beside him lifted him up.

(ii) It was compounded of fear. The orthodox were afraid of the contagion of the sinner; they were afraid that they might be infected with sin. They were like a doctor who would refuse to attend a case of infectious illness lest he himself contracted it. Jesus was the one who forgot himself in a great desire to save others. C. T. Studd, great missionary of Christ, had four lines of doggerel that he loved to quote:

"Some want to live within the sound

Of Church or Chapel bell;

I want to run a rescue shop

Within a yard of hell."

The man with contempt and fear in his heart can never be a fisher of men.

### **THE JOYOUS COMPANY ( [Mark 2:18-20](#) )**

*2:18-20 The disciples of John were in the habit of fasting, as were the Pharisees. So they came to Jesus and said, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, while your disciples do not?" "Surely," Jesus said to them, "his closest friends cannot fast while the bridegroom is still with them? So long as they have the bridegroom they do not fast. But the days will come when some day the bridegroom will be taken away from them--and then, in that day, they will fast."*

With the stricter Jews fasting was a regular practice. In the Jewish religion there was only one day in all the year that was a compulsory fast, and that was the Day of Atonement. The day when the nation confessed and was forgiven its sin was The Fast, par excellence. But the stricter Jews fasted on two days every week, on Mondays and Thursdays. It is to be noted that fasting was not as serious as it sounds, for the fast lasted from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and after that normal food could be eaten.

Jesus is not against fasting as such. There are very good reasons why a man might fast. He might deny himself things he likes for the sake of discipline, to be certain that he is the master of them and not they of him, to make sure that he never grows to love them so well that he can not give them up. He might deny himself comforts and pleasant things so that, after self-denial, he might appreciate them all the more. One of the best ways to learn to value our homes is to have to stay away from home for a time; and one of the best ways to appreciate God's gifts is to do without them for a period.

These are good reasons for fasting. The trouble about the Pharisees was that in far too many cases their fasting was for self-display. It was to call the attention of men to their goodness. They actually whitened their faces and went about with dishevelled garments on their fast days so that no one could miss the fact that they were fasting and so that everyone would see and admire their devotion. It was to call the attention of God to their piety. They felt that this special act of

extra piety would bring them to the notice of God. Their fasting was a ritual and a self-displaying ritual at that. To be of any value, fasting must not be the result of a ritual; it must be the expression of a feeling in the heart.

Jesus used a vivid picture to tell the Pharisees why his disciples did not fast. After a Jewish wedding the couple did not go away for a honeymoon; they stayed at home. For a week or so open house was kept and there was continual feasting and rejoicing. In a hard wrought life the wedding week was the happiest week in a man's life. To that week of happiness were invited the closest friends of the bride and the bridegroom; and they were called by the name children of the bridechamber. Jesus likened his little company to men who were children of the bridechamber, chosen guests at a wedding feast. There was actually a rabbinic ruling which said, "All in attendance on the bridegroom are relieved of all religious observances which would lessen their joy." The wedding guests were actually exempt from all fasting.

This incident tells us that the characteristic Christian attitude to life is joy. The discovery of Christ and the company of Christ is the key to happiness. There was a Japanese criminal called Tockichi Ishii. He was utterly and bestially pitiless; he had brutally and callously murdered men, women and children in his career of crime. He was captured and imprisoned. Two Canadian ladies visited the prison. He could not be induced even to speak; he only glowered at them with the face of a wild beast. When they left, they left with him a copy of the Bible in the faint hope that he might read it. He read it, and the story of the crucifixion made him a changed man. "Later when the jailer came to lead the doomed man to the scaffold, he found not the surly, hardened brute he expected, but a smiling, radiant man, for Ishii the murderer had been born again." The mark of his rebirth was a smiling radiance. The life that is lived in Christ cannot be lived other than in joy.

But the story ends with a foreboding cloud across the sky. No doubt when Jesus spoke of the day when the bridegroom would be taken away his friends did not at the moment see the meaning of it. But here, right at the beginning, Jesus saw the cross ahead. Death did not take him unawares; even now he had counted the cost and chosen the way. Here is courage; here is the picture of a man who would not be deflected from the road at whose end there loomed a cross.

**THE NECESSITY OF STAYING YOUNG IN MIND ( [Mark 2:21-22](#) )**

*2:21-22 No one sews a patch of new cloth on to an old garment. If he does the bit that was meant to fill in the hole tears it apart--the new from the old--and the tear is made worse. No one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does the wine will burst the wineskins, and the wine will be lost as well as the wineskins. New skins for new wine!*

Jesus knew quite well that he was coming with a message which was startlingly new; and he also knew that his way of life was shatteringly different from that of the orthodox rabbinic teacher. He also knew how difficult it is for the minds of men to accept and to entertain new truth; and here he uses two illustrations to show how necessary it is to have an adventurous mind.

No one ever had such a gift as Jesus for the discovery and the use of homely illustrations. Over and over again he finds in the simple things pathways and pointers to God. No one was ever such an expert in getting from the "here and now" to the "there and then." For Jesus "earth was crammed with heaven." He lived so close to God that everything spoke to him of God. Someone tells how, on Saturday afternoons, he used to go for country walks with one of the most famous of Scottish preachers. They used to have long talks together. Telling of it afterwards he said, "Wherever the conversation started, he had a way of cutting straight across country to God." Wherever Jesus' eye lighted it had a way of flashing straight on to God.

(i) He speaks of the danger of sewing a new patch on an old garment. The word used means that the new cloth was still undressed; it had never been shrunk; so when the garment got wet in the rain the new patch shrunk, and being much stronger than the old, it tore the old apart. There comes a time when the day of patching is over, and re-creating must begin. In the time of Luther it was not possible to patch up the abuses of the Roman Catholic church; the time for reformation had come. In the time of John Wesley, for Wesley at least, the time for patching the Church of England was done. He did not want to leave it, but in the end he had to, for only a new fellowship would suffice. It may well be that there are times when we try to patch, when what is wanted is the complete abandonment of the old and the acceptance of something new.

(ii) Wine was kept in wineskins. There was no such thing as a bottle in our sense of the term. When these skins were new they had a certain elasticity; as they grew old they became hard and unyielding. New wine is still fermenting; it

gives off gases; these gases cause pressure; if the skin is new it will yield to the pressure, but if it is old and hard and dry it will explode and wine and skin alike will be lost. Jesus is pleading for a certain elasticity in our minds. It is fatally easy to become set in our ways. J. A. Findlay quotes a saying of one of his friends--"When you reach a conclusion you're dead." What he meant was that when our minds become fixed and settled in their ways, when they are quite unable to accept new truth and to contemplate new ways, we may be physically alive but we are mentally dead.

As they grow older almost everyone develops a constitutional dislike of that which is new and unfamiliar. We grow very unwilling to make any adjustments in our habits and ways of life. Lesslie Newbigin, who was involved in the discussions about the formation of the United Church of South India, tells how one of the things that most often held things up was that people kept asking, "Now, if we do that, just where are we going?" In the end someone had to say bluntly, "The Christian has no right to ask where he is going." Abraham went out not knowing whither he went. ( [Hebrews 11:8](#).) There is a great verse in that same chapter of Hebrews: "By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons; of Joseph bowing in worship over the head of his staff." ( [Hebrews 11:21](#).) With the very breath of death upon him the old traveller still had his pilgrim staff in his hand. To the end of the day, with the evening now upon him, he was still ready for the road. If we are really to rise to the height of the Christian challenge, we must retain the adventurous mind. I received a letter once which ended "Yours aged 83 and still growing"--and with the inexhaustible riches of Christ before us, why not?

### **PIETY, REAL AND FALSE ( [Mark 2:23-28](#) )**

*2:23-28 One Sabbath day Jesus was going through the corn fields. His disciples began to pluck the ears of corn as they made their way along. The Pharisees began to say to him, "Look! Why are they doing what is not allowed on the Sabbath?" "Have you never read," he said, "what David did when he and his friends were in need and hungry? Have you never read how he went into the house of God, when Abiathar was High Priest, and ate the shewbread--which none is allowed to eat except the priests--and gave it to his friends as well?" "The Sabbath," he said to them, "was made for the sake of man and not man for the sake of the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is lord also of the Sabbath."*

Once again Jesus cut right across the scribal rules and regulations. When he and his disciples were going through the corn fields one Sabbath day, his disciples began to pluck the ears of corn and to eat them. On any ordinary day the disciples were doing what was freely permitted ( [Deuteronomy 23:25](#)). So long as the traveller did not put a sickle into the field he was free to pluck the corn. But this was done on the Sabbath and the Sabbath was hedged around with literally thousands of petty rules and regulations. AH work was forbidden. Work had been classified under thirty-nine different heads and four of these heads were reaping, winnowing, threshing and preparing a meal. By their action the disciples had technically broken all these four rules and were to be classified as law-breakers. It seems fantastic to us; but to the Jewish rabbis it was a matter of deadly sin and of life and death.

The Pharisees immediately launched their accusation and pointed out that Jesus' disciples were breaking the law. They obviously expected him to stop them on the spot. Jesus answered them in their own language. He cited the story which is told in [1 Samuel 21:1-6](#). David was fleeing for his life; he came to the tabernacle in Nob; he demanded food and there was none except the shewbread. [Exodus 25:23-30](#) tells of the shewbread. It consisted of twelve loaves placed on a golden table three feet long, one and a half feet wide, and one and a half feet high. The table stood in the tabernacle in front of the Holy of Holies and the bread was a kind of offering to God. It was changed once a week; when it was changed it became the property of the priests and of the priests alone and no one else might eat it ( [Leviticus 24:9](#).) Yet in his time of need David took and ate that bread. Jesus showed that scripture itself supplies a precedent in which human need took precedence of human and even divine law.

"The Sabbath," he said, "was made for the sake of man and not man for the sake of the Sabbath." That was self-evident. Man was created before ever the elaborate Sabbath law came into existence. Man was not created to be the victim and the slave of Sabbath rules and regulations which were in the beginning created to make life fuller and better for man. Man is not to be enslaved by the Sabbath; the Sabbath exists to make his life better.

This passage confronts us with certain essential truths which we forget at our peril.

(i) Religion does not consist in rules and regulations. To take the matter in question--Sunday observance is important but there is a great deal more to religion than Sunday observance. If a man might become a Christian simply by abstaining from work and pleasure on the Sunday, and by attending church on that day, and saying his prayers and reading his Bible, being a Christian would be a very easy thing. Whenever men forget the love and the forgiveness and the service and the mercy that are at the heart of religion and replace them by the performance of rules and regulations religion is in a decline. Christianity has at all times consisted far more in doing things than in refraining from doing things.

(ii) The first claim on any man is the claim of human need. Even the catechisms and the confessions admit that works of necessity and mercy are quite legal on the Sabbath. If ever the performance of a man's religion stops him helping someone who is in need, his religion is not religion at all. People matter far more than systems. Persons are far more important than rituals. The best way to worship God is to help men.

(iii) The best way to use sacred things is to use them to help men. That, in fact, is the only way to give them to God. One of the loveliest of all stories is that of The Fourth Wise Man. His name was Artaban. He set out to follow the star and he took with him a sapphire, a ruby and a pearl beyond price as gifts for the King. He was riding hard to meet his three friends, Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar, at the agreed place. The time was short; they would leave if he was late. Suddenly he saw a dim figure on the ground before him. It was a traveller stricken with fever. If he stayed to help he would miss his friends. He did stay; he helped and healed the man. But now he was alone. He needed camels and bearers to help him across the desert because he had missed his friends and their caravan. He had to sell his sapphire to get them; and he was sad because the King would never have his gem.

He journeyed on and in due time came to Bethlehem, but again he was too late. Joseph and Mary and the baby had gone. Then there came the soldiers to carry out Herod's command that the children should be slain. Artaban was in a house where there was a little child. The tramp of the soldiers came to the door; the weeping of stricken mothers could be heard. Artaban stood in the doorway, tall and dark, with the ruby in his hand and bribed the captain not to enter. The child was saved; the mother was overjoyed; but the ruby was gone; and Artaban was sad because the King would never have his ruby.



For years he wandered looking in vain for the King. More than thirty years afterwards he came to Jerusalem. There was a crucifixion that day. When Artaban heard of the Jesus being crucified, he sounded wondrous like the King and Artaban hurried towards Calvary. Maybe his pearl, the loveliest in all the world, could buy the life of the King. Down the street came a girl fleeing from a band of soldiers. "My father is in debt," she cried, "and they are taking me to sell as a slave to pay the debt. Save me!" Artaban hesitated; then sadly he took out his pearl, gave it to the soldiers and bought the girl's freedom.

On a sudden the skies were dark; there was an earthquake and a flying tile hit Artaban on the head. He sank half-conscious to the ground. The girl pillowed his head on her lap. Suddenly his lips began to move. "Not so, my Lord. For when saw I thee hungered and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw I thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or naked and clothed thee? When saw I thee sick in prison, and came unto thee? Thirty and three years have I looked for thee; but I have never seen thy face, nor ministered to thee, my King." And then like a whisper from very far away, there came a voice. "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as thou hast done it unto one the least of these my brethren, thou hast done it unto me." And Artaban smiled in death because he knew that the King had received his gifts.

The best way to use sacred things is to use them for men. It has been known for children to be barred from a church because that church was considered too ancient and sacred for such as they. It can be that a church is more concerned with the elaboration of its services than with the help of its simple folk and the relief of its poor. But the sacred things are only truly sacred when they are used for men. The shewbread was never so sacred as when it was used to feed a starving man. The Sabbath was never so sacred as when it was used to help those who needed help. The final arbiter in the use of all things is love and not law.

**THE CLASH OF IDEAS ( [Mark 3:1-6](#) )**

*3:1-6 Jesus went into the synagogue again; and there was a man there who had a hand which had withered; and they were watching him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath day, so that, if he did, they might be able to formulate a charge against him. He said to the man who had the withered hand, "Stand up and come out in to the middle of the congregation." He said to them, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath day? Or to do evil? To save a life? Or to kill it?" But they remained silent. He looked round on them with anger, for he was grieved at the obtuseness of their hearts. He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand!" He stretched it out; and his hand was restored. The Pharisees immediately went out and began to concoct a plot with Herod's entourage against Jesus, with a view to killing him.*

This is a crucial incident in the life of Jesus. It was already clear that he and the orthodox leaders of the Jews were quite at variance. For him to go back into the synagogue at all was a brave thing to do. It was the act of a man who refused to seek safety and who was determined to look a dangerous situation in the face. In the synagogue there was a deputation from the Sanhedrin. No one could miss them, for, in the synagogue, the front seats were the seats of honour and they were sitting there. It was the duty of the Sanhedrin to deal with anyone who was likely to mislead the people and seduce them from the right way; and that is precisely what this deputation conceived of themselves as doing. The last thing they were there to do was to worship and to learn; they were there to scrutinize Jesus' every action.

In the synagogue there was a man with a paralysed hand. The Greek word means that he had not been born that way but that some illness had taken the strength from him. The gospel according to the Hebrews, a gospel which is lost except for a few fragments, tells us that the man was a stone mason and that he besought Jesus to help him, for his livelihood was in his hands and he was ashamed to beg. If Jesus had been a cautious, prudent person he would have conveniently arranged not to see the man, for he knew that to heal him was asking for trouble.

It was the Sabbath day; all work was forbidden and to heal was to work. The Jewish law was definite and detailed about this. Medical attention could be given only if a life was in danger. To take some examples--a woman in childbirth might be helped on the Sabbath; an infection of the throat might be treated; if a wall fell on anyone, enough might be cleared away to see whether

he was dead or alive; if he was alive he might be helped, if he was dead the body must be left until the next day. A fracture could not be attended to. Cold water might not be poured on a sprained hand or foot. A cut finger might be bandaged with a plain bandage but not with ointment. That is to say, at the most an injury could be kept from getting worse; it must not be made better.

It is extraordinarily difficult for us to grasp this. The best way in which we can see the strict orthodox view of the Sabbath is to remember that a strict Jew would not even defend his life on the Sabbath. In the wars of the Maccabees, when resistance broke out, some of the Jewish rebels took refuge in caves. The Syrian soldiers pursued them. Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that they gave them the chance to surrender and they would not, so "they fought against them on the Sabbath day, and they burned them as they were in caves, without resistance and without so much as stopping up the entrances of the caves. They refused to defend themselves on that day because they were not willing to break in upon the honour they owed to the Sabbath, even in such distress; for our law requires that we rest on that day." When Pompey, the Roman general, was besieging Jerusalem, the defenders took refuge in the Temple precincts. Pompey proceeded to build a mound which would overtop them and from which he might bombard them. He, knew the beliefs of the Jews and he built on the Sabbath day, and the Jews lifted not one hand to defend themselves or to hinder the building, although they knew that by their Sabbath inactivity they were signing their own death warrant. The Romans, who had compulsory military service, had in the end to exempt the Jews from army service because no strict Jew would fight on the Sabbath. The orthodox Jewish attitude to the Sabbath was completely rigid and unbending.

Jesus knew that. This man's life was not in the least danger. Physically he would be no worse off if he were left until to-morrow. For Jesus this was a test case, and he met it fairly and squarely. He told the man to rise and to come out of his place and stand where everyone could see him. There were probably two reasons for that. Very likely Jesus wished to make one last effort to waken sympathy for the stricken man by showing everyone his wretchedness. Quite certainly Jesus wished to take the step he was going to take in such a way that no one could possibly fail to see it.

He asked the experts in the law two questions. Is it lawful to do good or to do evil on the Sabbath day? He put them in a dilemma. They were bound to admit

that it was lawful to do good; and it was a good thing he proposed to do. They were bound to deny that it was lawful to do evil; and, yet, surely it was an evil thing to leave a man in wretchedness when it was possible to help him. Then he asked, Is it lawful to save a life or to kill it? Here he was driving the thing home. He was taking steps to save this wretched man's life; they were thinking out methods of killing himself. On any reckoning it was surely a better thing to be thinking about helping a man than it was to be thinking of killing a man. No wonder they had nothing to say!

Then Jesus with a word of power healed the man; and the Pharisees went out and tried to hatch a plot with the Herodians to kill him. This shows the lengths to which the Pharisees would go. No Pharisee would normally have anything to do with a Gentile or a man who did not keep the law; such people were unclean. The Herodians were the court entourage of Herod; they were continually coming into contact with Romans. For all normal purposes the Pharisees would have considered them unclean; but now they were prepared to enter into what was for them an unholy alliance. In their hearts there was a hate which would stop at nothing.

This passage is fundamental because it shows the clash of two ideas of religion.

(i) To the Pharisee religion was ritual; it meant obeying certain rules and regulations. Jesus broke these regulations and they were genuinely convinced that he was a bad man. It is like the man who believes that religion consists in going to church, reading the Bible, saying grace at meals, having family worship, and carrying out all the external acts which are looked on as religious, and who yet never put himself out to do anything for anyone, who has no sense of sympathy, no desire to sacrifice, who is serene in his rigid orthodoxy, and deaf to the call of need and blind to the tears of the world.

(ii) To Jesus religion was service. It was love of God and love of men. Ritual was irrelevant compared with love in action.

"Our Friend, our Brother, and our Lord,

What may Thy service be?

Nor name, nor form, nor ritual word,

But simply following Thee."

To Jesus the most important thing in the world was not the correct performance of a ritual, but the spontaneous answer to the cry of human need.

**Reading 2, *Second Corinthians 4:6-11***

<sup>6</sup> It is God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' that has shone into our hearts to enlighten them with the knowledge of God's glory, the glory on the face of Christ.

<sup>7</sup> But we hold this treasure in pots of earthenware, so that the immensity of the power is God's and not our own.

<sup>8</sup> We are subjected to every kind of hardship, but never distressed; we see no way out but we never despair;

<sup>9</sup> we are pursued but never cut off; knocked down, but still have some life in us;

<sup>10</sup> always we carry with us in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus, too, may be visible in our body.

<sup>11</sup> Indeed, while we are still alive, we are continually being handed over to death, for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may be visible in our mortal flesh.

<sup>7</sup> *But we hold this treasure in pots of earthenware, so that the immensity of the power is God's and not our own.*