

Holy Tuesday Bridegroom Matins

Challenges to Jesus

April 19, 2011
Revision B

Gospel: Matthew 22:15-23:39

Is It Lawful to Pay Taxes?

After Jesus gave the Parable of the Marriage¹ Feast (Matthew 22:1-14), the Pharisees came with the Herodians to try to trap Him.

“Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, “Why do you test Me, *you* hypocrites? Show Me the tax money.” So they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, “Whose image and inscription *is* this?” They said to Him, “Caesar’s.” And He said to them, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” When they had heard *these words*, they marveled, and left Him and went their way (Matthew 22:17-22).

This encounter between the Jesus and the Pharisees illustrates some very interesting bedfellows. The Pharisees sent their disciples to Jesus along with the Herodians to try to entangle Jesus in His talk. The Herodians are significant in that they believed Herod was the Christ, and if anyone were to say anything that disparaged their “messiah”, one could expect swift political retribution. On the other hand, the Pharisees had an intense hatred for the Gentile authorities that oppressed them. To the Pharisees, the Herodians were Jews who had sold out to the “enemy”, and were nothing less than traitors. But what united the Pharisees and the Herodians was their hatred of Jesus.

As they came to Jesus, they acknowledged that He came in the true spirit of the Levitical judges. They said, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality” (Matthew 22:16 NRSV). This statement has a great deal to say regarding who they admitted Jesus was, and even cast themselves in a negative light, since this was what they were supposed to be doing as members of the Sanhedrin (Matthew 23:1-4).

The Law required the Levitical judges who later took Moses’ place to institute righteous judgment. Just as Moses stood as an intercessor between Christ and men (Deuteronomy 5:27, Exodus 20:19), so the judges who came later did. To reject them was to reject Christ, as was the case with Samuel when Israel demanded a king (1 Sam. 8:7). The early Church applied this to its bishops and priests. Cyprian stated² in this regard, “Nor let them think that the way of life or of salvation is still open to them, if they have refused to obey the bishops and priests”.

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¹ This parable is similar to the Parable of the Great Supper (Luke 14:15-24) which was given on a different occasion.

² Cyprian, Epistles 61:4, 39:7.

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An important aspect³ of their duty was rightly dividing the Word of God in the exposition of the Law and the Prophets, such that it corresponded to the teachings of Christ in the Gospels. Cyprian pointed out⁴ that Christ and the Apostles showed considerable respect for the Levitical judges of their day, even if these judges were false or had crucified Christ (John 18:20-23, Acts 23:2-5).

The judges were to hear the cases between their brethren. This was what initiated the Council of Jerusalem in c. 48 AD. A major dispute arose between Paul and certain men from Judea (Acts 15:2). Because the Law required diligent inquiry (Deuteronomy 19:18), they took the matter to Bishop James, who gave his judgment as the decision of the Council (Acts 15:19). On the other hand, the Pharisees were unwilling to do this regarding Jesus (John 7:50-52). When Nicodemus challenged them, they said to him, “Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee” (John 7:52). The bishops of the early Church were encouraged to keep one ear open for the accused or for the absent. They were not to believe the slander uttered against the absent⁵.

The judges were not to be respecters of persons, but were to judge the rich and the poor evenhandedly, neither showing partiality to the poor nor deferring to the great (Leviticus 19:15). They were forbidden from taking a bribe, since “a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous” (Deuteronomy 16:19). Christ was well known for His impartiality (Matthew 22:16), and James called partiality “sin” and a transgression of the Law (James 2:9). Early Christian tradition applied this to the Bishop: “For the bishop⁶ must not only himself give no offense, but must be no respecter of persons; in meekness instructing those that offend. But if he himself has not a good conscience, and is a respecter of persons for the sake of filthy lucre, he disregards the voice of God”.

If the matter were too difficult for the Levitical Judges (Exodus 18:26), they were to bring it into the Holy of Holies before the Lord and He would decide it for them. This was done by the High Priest who came into the Holy of Holies to inquire of the Lord with the Urim and Thummim (Hebrew: lights and truth) over his heart (Exodus 28:30, Numbers 27:21, 1 Samuel 28:6). Anyone who wouldn't accept the Lord's decision was to be executed as a traitor (Deuteronomy 17: 8-12).

Two or Three Witnesses represented confirmation of a matter as being true, even if the matter involved capital punishment (Deuteronomy 19:15, Hebrews 10:28), and the witnesses were to cast the first stone in the execution of the condemned person (Deuteronomy 13:9). Paul quoted this passage (Deuteronomy 17:7) with regard to an errant brother in the Church of Corinth (1 Corinthians 5:13). Christ stated that since God the Father bore witness to Him, therefore His testimony was true (John 8:17). He also instructed the Church to confirm everything with two or three witnesses, whether the matter involved an errant brother (Matthew 18:16) or a presbyter (1 Timothy 5:19). At Christ's trial before the Sanhedrin, the witnesses did not agree (Mark 14:59), but He was crucified anyway. On the other hand, Christ brought three witnesses to His Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1), and many were witnesses to His Resurrection

³ Apostolic Constitutions II, iv, 36; II, v, 41; II, iii, 13

⁴ Cyprian, Epistles 68:3; 64:1; 54:4.

⁵ See for example Basil, Letters, 244

⁶ Apostolic Constitutions II, iii, 9; II, ii, 5; II, vi, 45

(1 Corinthians 15:4-7). There were even two angels as witnesses of His Resurrection at the tomb (Luke 24:4).

Jesus referred to Himself as the door to the sheepfold. The Scribes and Pharisees, “climbed up some other way” (John 10:1) to get into the sheepfold. They interpreted the Law such that they could avoid honoring their father and mother (Matthew 15:3-6) and taught as doctrines the commandments of men (Matthew 15:9, Isaiah 29:13 LXX). They did not keep the Law and sought to murder Jesus because He did (John 7:19).

Gamaliel, who was a member of the Sanhedrin but later became a Christian, referred to Judas and Theudas as some nationalist-minded revolutionaries who were caught, executed and had their followers dispersed (Acts 5:36-37). These did not enter by the door either, and when they were dead, people quit believing in them. Jesus, on the other hand, did not advocate a revolt and when the people wanted to make Him king, He departed (John 6:15). When they tried to corner Him about paying tribute to Caesar, He said to pay it (Matthew 22:17-22). He taught consistently that His Kingdom was not of this world, and if it were, His servants would fight (John 18:36, Matthew 26:51-53).

John Chrysostom noted⁷ that the Pharisees dug a precipice on either side. If Jesus answered in favor of not paying taxes, they could link Him to revolutionaries like Judas and Theudas and have Him executed. If Jesus answered in favor of paying taxes, they could link Him to the hated Gentile occupation forces. Yet they came to Him in utter falsehood. Earlier they had said that He was a deceiver, that He deceives the people (John 7:12), that He has a demon (John 8:48) and that He is not of God (John 9:16). They were breathing anger and hatching a plot against Him, yet they pretended respect.

Jesus, being God, was deceived by none of these things and His rebuke was not the result of conjecture, but a sign of His knowing their secret thoughts. He steered artfully and gently between their hurdles, stopped their mouths and left them marveling. Paul later said the same thing, but more plainly, “Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes *are due*, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor” (Romans 13:7). Chrysostom noted that He was speaking only of those things which are no detriment to godliness; since if it was anything else, such a thing would be no longer Caesar’s tribute, but the devil’s.

The Sadducees Challenge Jesus Regarding the Resurrection

After the Pharisees and the Herodians left, the Sadducees came with a religious challenge. The Sadducees were the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who were in charge of the worship of God in the Temple. Yet they didn’t believe in the resurrection of the flesh. They posed a question regarding how the Levirate Marriage Law applied to the Kingdom of God. In their minds, there was no answer to their question, because there was no resurrection of the dead.

The Levirate Marriage Law reads:

“If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the widow of the dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family. Her husband's brother shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And it shall be that

⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXX, 1-2.

the firstborn son, which she bears, will succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. But if the man does not want to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate to the elders, and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to raise up a name to his brother in Israel. He will not perform the duty of my husband's brother'. Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him. But if he stands firm and says, 'I do not want to take her,' then his brother's wife shall come to him in the presence of the elders, remove his sandal from his foot, spit in his face, and answer and say. 'So shall it be done to the man who will not build up his brother's house'. And his name shall be called in Israel, 'The house of him who had his sandal removed'" (Deuteronomy 25:5-10).

Under Old Testament Law, a man's inheritance remained with his family forever. Even if his land was sold, title reverted back to the man's family during the Year of Jubilee. Levirate Marriages were intended to assure that a man's posterity continued even if he died before begetting any children. A brother who did not wish to build up his brother's house (Deuteronomy 25:9) lost his own inheritance. Boaz did such in his Levirate marriage to Ruth (Ruth 4:7-10). Someone who didn't care about his brother is very much like Cain who claimed he wasn't his brother's keeper (Genesis 4:9). On the contrary, those of Christ are called members of one another (Ephesians 4:25). There were several Levirate marriages in the genealogy of Jesus. For example, Joseph, Jesus' stepfather, is called the son of Heli (Luke 3:23) and also the son of Jacob (Matthew 1:16). Heli was Jacob's brother who died childless; Jacob married his brother's widow and raised up Joseph as a son for his brother. Thus Joseph was the biological son of Jacob, but the legal son of Heli.

Gregory the Great showed⁸ how the Levirate marriage illustrates both Christ and the Church, where the Church lives not for herself, but for Him who died and rose again (2 Corinthians 5:15). Referring to Jesus' question to Peter, "Do you love Me?" (John 21:15-19), Gregory stated:

"If, then, the care of feeding is the proof of loving, whoever abounds in virtues, and yet refuses to feed the flock of God, is convicted of not loving the chief Shepherd". This relates to the Levirate marriage as follows. "Now the deceased brother is He who, after the glory of the resurrection, said, 'Go tell My brethren' (Matthew 28:10). For He died as it were without children, in that He had not yet filled up the number of His elect. Then, it is ordered that the surviving brother shall have the wife assigned to him, because it is surely fit that the care of the holy Church be imposed on him who is best able to rule it well. But, should he be unwilling, the woman spits in his face (Deuteronomy 25:9), because whoever cares not to benefit others out of the gifts which he has received, the holy Church expropriates even what he has of good, and, as it were, casts spittle on his face. And from one foot the shoe is taken away, inasmuch as it is written, 'Your feet shod in preparation of the Gospel of Peace' (Ephesians 6:15). If, then, we have the care of our neighbor as well as of ourselves upon us, we have each foot protected by a shoe. But he who, meditating his own advantage, neglects that of his neighbors, loses with disgrace the shoe of one foot".

⁸ Gregory the Great, Pastoral Rule I, 5.

With this as a background, the Sadducees posed a question to Jesus where seven brothers in succession had the same woman as a wife, each dying childless. Whose wife, they asked, would she be in the resurrection?

Jesus answered and said to them, “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” And when the multitudes heard this, they were astonished at His teaching (Matthew 22:29-33).

When Jesus said this, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had been “dead” c. 1800 years. If they’re not really “dead”, but living somewhere, it behooves us to get in touch with the abode where they are and see things from their point of view. In this life, we all have roles to play, such as husband and wife, based on what we’ve been given; but that will change in the resurrection.

We can see another example of this in connection with the slaughter of the 14,000 children at Bethlehem by Herod following Jesus’ birth. Matthew quoted a prophecy of Jeremiah. “A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning; Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted because they are no more” (Matthew 2:18, Jeremiah 31:15). Rachel was the wife of Jacob and mother of Joseph and Benjamin. Rachel had been barren for a long time prior to Joseph’s birth and had given her maid to her husband because of her barrenness; her children were very important to her (Genesis 30:1-8). As Jacob and his family were traveling back to Canaan from Mesopotamia, Rachel gave birth to Benjamin just before they arrived in Bethlehem. Rachel died in childbirth and was buried there (Genesis 35:16-20). Later, when the promised land was divided among the twelve tribes of Israel, Ramah along with Bethel, Jerusalem and Bethlehem were among the cities within the land allocated to the tribe of Benjamin (Joshua 18:21-28).

Thus, Jeremiah’s prophesy goes beyond the weeping of the mothers of the slaughtered children; even Rachel, herself, was weeping inconsolably. One might object that Rachel had been dead for c.1800 years; how could she weep? To understand this, one needs to understand the Lord’s viewpoint concerning who’s dead. As proof of the Resurrection, the Lord had said, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead but of the living” (Matthew 22:32). If Jacob is not dead, neither is Rachel.

John Chrysostom noted⁹ that Jesus did not answer the Sadducees in the same manner as He did the Pharisees. To the Pharisees, He answered, “You hypocrites!” because they came to him deceitfully. To the Sadducees, He answered, “You are mistaken!” because their question was rather one of ignorance. Since they were asking in ignorance, Jesus did not stop at their question, but answered their thought also

⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXX, 2.

The Greatest Commandment

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together to corner Jesus with a tough question. They asked Him which the greatest commandment is in the Law. In Matthew's account, a lawyer asked Jesus the question (Matthew 22:36). In Mark's account, a Scribe asked this question (Mark 12:28). Both could be true since lawyers and Scribes were both Mosaic Law experts. As one notes in reading through early Jewish writings such as the Talmud, it was common for Jewish legal scholars to debate the intricacies of fine points of the Law.

The Greatest Commandment as stated by Jesus (Matthew 22:37-39) is:

- You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.
- You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus called these two parts "the first" and "the second", where the second is like the first. These words did not just fall out of the sky; they had been an integral part of the Mosaic Law from the beginning (Deuteronomy 6:5, 10:12, 30:6, Leviticus 19:18). Israel was instructed to teach this to their children diligently (Deuteronomy 6:7). They were instructed to bind them into phylacteries on their foreheads (Deuteronomy 6:8) and write them on the doorposts of their houses (Deuteronomy 6:9).

What Does the Mosaic Law Include?

The Mosaic Law consisted of Commandments, Statutes, Judgments and Testimonies, where the core of the Law was what Jesus called the "Greatest Commandment". Tertullian described¹⁰ the Greatest Commandment as having been given in embryo to Adam in the Garden of Eden, and that if Adam and Eve had obeyed it, they would not have fallen. Thus the Gentiles had the Law prior to Moses. But the Mosaic Law bridged a gap until the coming of Christ when the Law would be written on men's hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34) and the Holy Spirit would take up residence in men's bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Until then the Lord commanded that the Law should be written in stone on Mt. Ebal (Deuteronomy 27:1-8) as medicine for an obstinate people who were forgetful and ungrateful, and who were prone to fall into idolatry.

The Law is still useful today, especially for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16), and early Apostolic teaching warned¹¹ people about speaking evil of the Law. When Christ came, He stated, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 5:17). Tertullian stated¹²,

"Plainly we assert that the Law has deceased in one sense that its burdens, which not even the fathers were able to sustain, have wholly ceased. Such parts, however, as relate to righteousness not only permanently remain reserved, but even amplified, in order that our righteousness may be able to redound above the righteousness of the scribes and of the Pharisees".

¹⁰ Tertullian, *Answer to the Jews*, I, iii, 2.

¹¹ *Apostolic Constitutions*, VI, IV, xix.

¹² Tertullian, *On Monogamy* IV, vi, 7.

The Mosaic Law consisted of:

Commandments.

- The Ten Commandments, which give details of the Greatest Commandment (Deuteronomy 5:6-21)
- Atonement for sin in anticipation of the work of Christ (Leviticus 4, 5, Numbers 15)
- Separation from the world; no intermarriage with Canaanites (Deuteronomy 7:1-11, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18)
- Tithes and Alms to guard against greed (Deuteronomy 26, 2 Corinthians 9:6-15)
- The year of remission to teach forgiveness (Deuteronomy 15:1-18, Mark 11:25, James 2:13)
- Manna to teach about real food (Deuteronomy 8:1-10, John 6:31-58)
- Blessings for those who obey; curses for those who don't (Deuteronomy 28, Matthew 25:14-46)

Statutes.

- The Major Festivals: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles
- Portions for the priests (Leviticus 6:14-30, 7, 10:12-20, Numbers 18:8-24, 1 Timothy 5:17-18)
- Duties of the priests before God in the House of God (Exodus 27-30, Leviticus 10:8-11)
- Maintain holiness and avoid uncleanness (Leviticus 20, Numbers 19, 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1, 1 John 2:6)
- Evenhandedness for Jew and Gentile (Numbers 15:14-16, Leviticus 19:33-34, Ephesians 2:11-22)

Judgments.

The Judgments represent “case law” that resolved some uncertainty on how to interpret the Mosaic Law. Some examples are the question of inheritance brought by the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1-11), and the question of working on the Sabbath during the 40 years in the wilderness (Numbers 15:32-36). Difficult cases were brought to the Levitical Judges in Jerusalem for a decision, and if the Levitical Judges had difficulty, they brought the case before the Lord Himself in the Holy of Holies for a decision (Deuteronomy 17:8-13, 19:15-21, 1:17 Numbers 28:21).

Testimonies.

The Testimonies or Witnesses (i.e. plural) are the recorded deeds and mercies of God among His people coming from His Presence on the Ark of the Testimony. Part of the Mosaic Law was teaching future generations what the Lord had done (Deuteronomy 6:20-25).

The Greatest Commandment as a Creed

The Mosaic Law defined keeping the Greatest Commandment as being “circumcised in heart” (Deuteronomy 30:6, 10:16). If they obeyed the Lord and kept this commandment (and its corollaries), the Lord promised to bless them above all the nations of the earth. He would open for them His good storehouse to bless them so that they could lend to and evangelize the nations (Deuteronomy 28:1, 2, 12). The Greatest Commandment was even used as a Creed in the Synagogue worship, and it was one of the first things children learned in school¹³. Thus, in questions with the Jewish leaders, there was no argument about what is the Greatest Commandment. This was so fundamental to the Mosaic Law that it was obvious.

¹³ Alfred Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, p. 245, 101-104.

The subject of the Greatest Commandment came up about six months earlier also. On the earlier occasion, a lawyer (that is, one skilled in interpreting the Mosaic Law) asked Jesus “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25) Jesus asked him what the Law said; the lawyer replied with the Greatest Commandment. Jesus answered, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live” (Luke 10:28). Wishing to justify himself, the lawyer replied, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus then proceeded with the story of the Good Samaritan to illustrate the second part of the Greatest Commandment.

In Mark’s account, Jesus prefaced His response with the introduction to the Creed used in the Synagogue worship, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4). After reciting the Greatest Commandment, Jesus concluded, “There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:29-31).

The Ten Commandments can be seen as a subdivision of the Greatest Commandment as follows:

Commandment	Exodus 20	Deuteronomy 5
Love the Lord with all your heart, soul and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5)		
1. Have no gods before Me	v. 3	v. 7
2. Do not make or serve idols	vv.4-6	vv.8-10
3. Do not take the Name in vain	v.7	v.11
Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18)		
4. Keep the Sabbath Day holy	vv.8-10	vv.12-15
5. Honor your parents	v.12	v.16
6. Do not murder	v.13	v.17
7. Do not commit adultery	v.14	v.18
8. Do not steal	v.15	v.19
9. Do not lie	v.16	v.20
10. Do not covet	v.17	v.21

Jesus summarized the Greatest Commandment by saying, “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:40).

Christ Fulfilled the Law

The Lord Himself stated that, “Do not think I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one yod (smallest Hebrew letter) or one point (small part of a Hebrew letter) will by no means pass from the Law until all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19). The Lord went on to describe how we need to take the precepts of the Law to heart and apply them to our thoughts and intentions as well as to our deeds (Matthew 5:21-48).

John Chrysostom mentioned¹⁴ three ways in which Christ fulfilled the Law.

1. He transgressed none of the precepts of the Law, and thus “fulfilled” the Law by keeping it perfectly. There are a number of occasions where the Scripture states¹⁵ this.
2. He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:3-4). “Since the law¹⁶ was laboring to make man righteous, but had not power, He came and brought in the way of righteousness by faith, and so established that which the Law desired; and what the Law could not do by letters, this He accomplished by faith. On this account He said, ‘I am not come to destroy the Law’” (Matthew 5:17).
3. He upgraded the Law to what was the original intent, and Chrysostom called this the “future code of laws”. “Do not murder” became “Do not even be angry” (Matthew 5:21-22); “Do not commit adultery” became “Do not even lust in your heart” (Matthew 5:27-28).

Sometimes overlooked in Paul’s famous argument of Law vs. Grace are Paul’s statements: “Therefore the Law is holy and the Commandment holy and just and good” (Romans 7:12). “For we know that the Law is spiritual” (Romans 7:14). “I agree with the Law that it is good” (Romans 7:16).

On the other hand, Paul argues, “I am fleshly, sold under sin” (Romans 7:14). “I delight in the Law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Romans 7:22, 23).

Abraham and the Law

Paul continued, “Therefore the Law has become our pedagogue¹⁷ until Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24). Justification always has been by faith; the Law, by itself, cannot determine a condition of the heart. “For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Romans 10:4). “Yet we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully; knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, etc.” (1 Timothy 1:8-9). Abraham is an excellent example of this!

Old Testament and New Testament writers alike used the life of Abraham as the model of a righteous life and a close walk with God. He was called “The friend of God” (2 Chronicles 20:7, James 2:21-24), and because of his faith, Israel inherited the Promised Land. The Church, with Christ as Head, has inherited the blessing of Abraham in the promise of the Holy Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:14). By faith Abraham obeyed and he had the vision to wait for the city which has foundations, whose craftsman and maker is God (Hebrews 11:8-10). Abraham believed God, and the belief (i.e. faith) was reckoned to him as righteousness. He is called the father of all who believe and the heir of the world (Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:11ff). Thus Abraham exemplifies the Grace of God. Abraham received faith according to grace (Romans 4:16), just as all who since him have received faith.

¹⁴ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, XVI, 3-4.

¹⁵ For example Matthew 3:15, John 8:46, John 14:30, Isaiah 53:9.

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, XVI, 3-4.

¹⁷ A pedagogue was a trustworthy slave who was charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys.

Abraham did not need the details of the Law because his heart was right. In light of this, Irenaeus wrote¹⁸, “The righteous fathers had the meaning of the Decalogue written in their hearts and souls; that is, they loved the God who made them, and did no injury to their neighbor. There was therefore no occasion that they should be cautioned by prohibitory mandates, because they had the righteousness of the law in themselves”. The Early Church taught¹⁹ that the purpose of all the details of the Mosaic Law was as medicine for an obstinate people who were forgetful and ungrateful, and who were prone to fall into idolatry, like the Golden Calf, at any moment. For these people and others like them the details of the Law were necessary and He bound them with bonds, a burden and a hard collar. When Christ came in the flesh, He did not take away the Law but the bonds and the collar.

The Law and Grace

John Chrysostom pointed²⁰ out that the Lord had said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Chrysostom continued, “But His commandments and the sum of them are, ‘You shall love the Lord your God, and your neighbor as yourself’. If therefore to love God is to love one’s neighbor, ‘For if you love Me’, He said, ‘O Peter, feed My sheep’ (John 21:16, 17). But to love one’s neighbor works a keeping of the commandments. With reason does He then say, “On these hang all the Law and the Prophets”.

Sometimes overlooked in Paul’s famous argument of Law vs. Grace are Paul’s statements: “Therefore the Law is holy, and the Commandment holy and just and good” (Romans 7:12). “For we know that the Law is spiritual” (Romans 7:14). “I agree with the Law that it is good” (Romans 7:16).

On the other hand, Paul argues, “I am fleshly, sold under sin” (Romans 7:14). “I delight in the Law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Romans 7:22, 23).

The guiding principle of the Mosaic Law was the “Greatest Commandment”. The use of the “Greatest Commandment” as a creed in the synagogues in the 1st Century, was in itself in obedience to one of the commandments (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). Taken as a whole, the Law contained all the elements of Grace as described with the advent of Christ as Messiah in the New Testament, and the Law pointed toward the work that Christ accomplished (Galatians 3:24). The intent of the Law was that God might cause His people to know that man shall not live by bread alone, but man shall live by every word coming out of the mouth of God (Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4). The expectation of the Law was Christ, and the Prophets understood this. Jeremiah wrote: “Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. I will put My Law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach again each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord’, for they shall all know Me from the least of them to the greatest of them” (Jeremiah 31:31-33, Hebrews 8:8-12).

¹⁸ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xvi, 3.

¹⁹ Apostolic Constitutions, VI, iv, 20-21

²⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXI.

The Law aimed at establishing faith and the condition of man's heart, and the command was to circumcise their hearts (Deuteronomy 10:16, Colossians 2:11) as well as their flesh. But the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out (Joel 2:28-29, Acts 2:16-18). In anticipation of the Lamb of God, He commanded that offerings for sin should be established using the blood of bulls and goats (Compare Hebrews 9:13) for sins done in ignorance (Leviticus 4), and using the blood of a lamb for sins done willfully (Leviticus 5). These offerings had to be performed repeatedly, because sin was repeated (Hebrews 7:26-28). It took a vision to see the end result of Christ's one sacrifice, where He became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Following the Law with all one's heart and soul was not supposed to be difficult. "For this commandment which I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. For the Word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart that you may do it" (Deuteronomy 30:11-15). Jesus said the same thing: "My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). With the coming of the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29-36), the Holy Spirit is now resident within us (1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19-20) and Law is written on our hearts. Our illumination regarding the things of God has greatly increased, and Mt. Ebal (Deuteronomy 27:1-8) along with the offerings for sin is unnecessary. This doesn't mean that the Mosaic Law is useless now that Grace has taken its place. As John Chrysostom stated²¹, "The Law is not the adversary but the fellow worker of Grace. But if when Grace is come, the Law continues to hold us down, it becomes an adversary. For if it confines those who ought to go forward to Grace, it is the destruction of our salvation. If a candle which gave light by night kept us, when it became day, from the sun, it would not only cease to benefit us, but would injure us. And so does the Law if it stands between the greater benefits of Grace and us. Just so a pedagogue makes a youth ridiculous, by retaining him with himself, when time calls for his departure".

Men under Grace have a greater responsibility than do men under the Law; because more has been given, more is expected (Luke 12:48, Matthew 25:29). John Cassian stated²²,

"How can those men be partakers of the grace of the gospel who disregard the fulfillment even of the lighter commands of the Law, to the easy character of which the words of the lawgiver bear testimony?"

Irenaeus stated²³ that while the Law had been given for bondage to Israel, its scope has been widened for those under Grace that we might have greater love for our Father.

"He has increased and widened those laws, granting to men, by means of adoption, to know God the Father. We love Him with the whole heart, while we abstain not only from evil deeds, but even from the desire after them. But He has also increased the feeling of reverence; for sons should have more veneration than slaves, and greater love for their Father. We shall give account to God not of deeds only, as slaves, but even of words and thoughts. We have truly received the power of liberty, in which condition a man is more severely tested, whether he will reverence, fear, and love the Lord".

²¹ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chapter 3

²² John Cassian, Conferences III, 21, 5

²³ Irenaeus, Against Heresies IV, xvi, 5

David's Son Is David's Lord

Mark's account of the lawyer's question about the "Greatest Commandment" includes some additional details. After Jesus had spoken, the Scribe responded by saying, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is One God, and there is no other than He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as one's self, is more than all of the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices". Jesus then exclaimed, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God!" (Mark 12:32-34). The Scribe had understood that the Lord desires mercy not sacrifice (Hosea 6:5, Isaiah 1:11-17).

But the Scribe lacked one thing: the knowledge of Who it was he was talking to. Therefore "Jesus answered and said while He taught in the Temple" (Mark 12:35). "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" They said to Him, 'The son of David'. He said to them, 'how then does David in the spirit call Him Lord, saying: The Lord said to My Lord, sit at My Right Hand till I make Your enemies Your footstool. If David then calls Him Lord, how is He his Son?' (Matthew 22:42-45). The answer was the Incarnation, which they were unwilling to accept. By comparing the accounts in Matthew and Mark, we can see the drama of this conversation unfold.

The Scribe had responded to Jesus, "There is One God and there is no other than He" (Mark 12:32). This statement was part of the Law (Deuteronomy 4:39) and the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:7, Exodus 20:3). But its context was always associated with the worship of idols.

Therefore, the Lord pointed out that David's Lord was God and Messiah, but yet He was also David's Son (meaning David's descendant). This, the Scribes and Pharisees were unwilling to admit, and this was one of the reasons they used to crucify Him (Mark 14:61-64). In this context, however, the Scribes (and Pharisees, Matthew 22:41) were unable to deny the Scriptures and did not dare to question Jesus any more (Matthew 22:46).

This turned out to be an advantage for the multitudes, for "the common people heard Him gladly" (Mark 12:37). Jesus then went on to warn the people about the Scribes and about how they love recognition and honor, but devour widows' houses and make long pretentious prayers (Mark 12:38-40) very obviously violating both points of the Greatest Commandment.

Understanding Psalm 110

The Pharisees knew exactly where Jesus was going when He asked His question of them. Jesus was quoting from Psalm 110, which is a Messianic Psalm that addresses the Father's relationship to the Son. David began, "The Lord said to My Lord, 'sit at My Right Hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool' (Psalm 110:1). The Pharisees liked the idea of their enemies being a footstool. But this Psalm fit hand-in-glove with Jesus' claim that He was God (John 10:33, 8:58), and this implied that they needed to obey Him, which they didn't like.

Psalm 110 is also quoted in Hebrews in a comparison of the Son of God with angels (Hebrews 1:13). While angels may be awesome and majestic (Daniel 10:4-8), they were created

by the Son of God (Hebrews 1:7, Psalm 104:4) and “they are all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14).

Psalm 110 also mentions the priestly role of Christ that began with the Incarnation: “The Lord (i.e. the Father) has sworn and will not change His mind; You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Psalm 110:4). Melchizedek was a messianic figure whose priesthood predated that of Levi and the Levitical priesthood. Paul quotes Psalm 110 in his discussion (Hebrews 5:6) of the Levitical priesthood as compared to the Melchizedek priesthood.

Who Is Melchizedek?

Many debates have been generated on the identity of Melchizedek. Melchizedek’s name means King of righteousness and he is described as King of Peace (Genesis 14:18, Hebrews 7:2); this illustrates our Great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14ff, 6:20). In the Scriptures, righteousness and peace come together in the person of Messiah (Psalm 85:10).

Paul points out (Hebrews 7:7) that the lesser (Abraham) is always blessed by the greater (Melchizedek). We might ask, “Could Melchizedek have been an angel?” The giving of a tithe by Abraham was an acknowledgment by Abraham that Melchizedek’s priesthood was of God, and Abraham seemed to recognize Melchizedek as someone greater than himself, since the tithe was customarily presented to Deity (Leviticus 27:30-32, Deuteronomy 26:12-15). While angels’ appearance often resembles that of the Son of God, angels are not spoken of as priests but as messengers (“Angel” means messenger) and as deacons (Hebrews 1:14, Greek).

Ambrose stated²⁴ that Melchizedek was not an angel but was a holy man and a priest of God who prefigured Christ as a “type” or a shadow of the Truth. Cyprian stated²⁵, “Melchizedek bore a type of Christ; He offered bread and wine and blessed Abraham. Who is more of a priest of the Most High God than our Lord Jesus Christ is, Who offered Himself as a sacrifice to God the Father. He offered the very same thing that Melchizedek offered; that is, bread and wine, namely, His body and blood”.

The person Melchizedek was tied intimately with the person of the Messiah in Old Testament prophecy and in First Century expectation. When Jesus asked the Pharisees, “If David then calls Him ‘Lord’, how is He his Son?” This was very embarrassing for them and no one dared question Jesus any more (Matthew 22:41-46). The answer, of course, is that Christ is the Son of God in His Person and the Son of David in His humanity.

Thus everyone agreed that Psalm 110 was addressing the Messiah. In this light, Psalm 110 also states, “The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind. You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Psalm 110:4). This passage was quoted by Paul in saying that Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of David in becoming High Priest according to the Order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:21). The prophet Zechariah also foretold that Messiah would be both a ruler (i.e. King) and a priest (Zechariah 6:12-13).

Paul was using the figure of Melchizedek to compare the Levitical priesthood to that of Christ. In doing so, he described Melchizedek as having no father and mother, no genealogy and

²⁴ Ambrose, *Of the Christian Faith*, III, xi, 87-89.

²⁵ Cyprian, *Epistles*, LXII, 4.

neither beginning of days nor end of life (Hebrews 7:3,6,16). John Chrysostom stated²⁶ that when Paul described Melchizedek in these terms, he was speaking in comparison to the Levitical priesthood, and he meant that information about Melchizedek's parents, his birth and his death wasn't available. Records that were kept in the Temple in Jerusalem for determining the Levitical priests would not include Melchizedek if he were not a descendant of Shem. Similarly, genealogical records for Job, a descendant of Esau, were not kept in the Temple either. The point was that if Melchizedek was greater than Abraham and was a type of Christ, then Christ is far greater than Abraham is, the priesthood of Christ is far greater than the Levitical priesthood, and genealogies are irrelevant.

The Abuse of Authority by the Scribes and Pharisees

The Scribes and Pharisees Sat in Moses' Seat

On Tuesday of Holy Week, Jesus gave a long address to the multitudes in the Temple (Matthew 24:1), where the Scribes and Pharisees were present as He spoke. He began by saying that the Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.

“Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, observe and do that, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do to be seen by men” (Matthew 23:3-5).

Moses' seat is the place of judgment, where Moses acted as an arbiter for settling disputes among the people. Later the Levites took Moses' place²⁷ in these matters. Similarly within the Church, we are instructed to “obey those who rule over us and be submissive, for they watch out for our souls as those who must give account” (Hebrews 13:17). We are instructed to “follow their faith, considering the outcome of their conduct” (Hebrews 13:7, see also 1 Peter 5:5). This is not a master-slave relationship, since the Lord had said that whoever desires to be the greatest in the Kingdom of God, let him be the slave of all (Matthew 20:25-28, 23:11-12). Therefore in “obeying those who rule over us”, we are instructed to imitate their humility, and to be persuaded by their example.

Hierarchs in the Church Now Sit in Moses' Seat

Referring to the priest watching out for our souls, John Chrysostom said²⁸, “While the steersman continues in good courage, the crew also will be in safety. But if he is tired out by their reviling him and showing ill will against him, he cannot watch equally well, or retain his skill; and without intending it, throws them into ten thousand mischiefs. So too the priest! If he enjoys honor from you, he will be able well to order your affairs. But if you throw them into despondency, you weaken their hands and render them, as well as yourselves, an easy prey to the waves, although they are very courageous. Consider what Christ said concerning the Jews. ‘The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat (Exodus 18:13); therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do’ (Matthew 23:2). Now we have not to say ‘the priests sit on Moses' seat’ but ‘on that of Christ’; for they have successively received His doctrine.

²⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XII, XIII.

²⁷ See the earlier discussion under “Is it Lawful To Pay Taxes?” for more details.

²⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, LXXXVI, 4.

In the New Testament, Paul and Barnabas, (and Paul and Silas) appointed presbyters (Greek *presbuteros*) at the Churches they established (Acts 14:23, 20:17, 1 Timothy 4:14, 5:17, Titus 1:5). The Greek word *presbuteros* implies elders and is used to refer to the elders (or presbyters) of the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:30, 15:2-6, 15:22-23, 16:4, 21:18) and the Jewish elders who opposed Paul and crucified Christ (Matthew 21:23, 26:3, 26:57, Acts 23:14, 24:1, 25:15). Thus, government in the Church was similar organizationally to that in Jewish society. Today the terms presbyter and priest are used interchangeably in the Orthodox Church and in some Western Churches.

When Paul said, “Obey those leading you and submit to them” (Hebrews 13:17) and “Looking at the outcome of their conduct, imitate their faith” (Hebrews 13:7), what should we do if they are wicked? Should we obey?”

In this respect, John Chrysostom distinguishes²⁹ between whether the hierarch is wicked in faith or in life. That is, does he teach heresy and is he therefore wicked in faith; or does he have a corrupt life to go with a correct faith? “If indeed he is wicked in regard to faith, flee and avoid him; not only if he is a man, but even if he were an angel come down from heaven”. For Paul said, “Satan transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his servants transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). Similar to the “angel of light” is a hierarch with a heretical faith: “The evil is not clear to all, and the wicked (hierarch) will not shrink from teaching it”.

If the hierarch is wicked in having a corrupt life, Chrysostom advised first to avoid being overly curious to ferret this out. Chrysostom took his cue from Christ in his response to the Scribes and Pharisees. He had said, “The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do; but do not do according to their works; for they say (what is right) but do not do it” (Matthew 23:2, 3). In this regard, it would be hard to imagine a more corrupt life than that of the Scribes and Pharisees. They openly plotted to murder the Lord and persecute the Apostles (Matthew 26:4, Acts 7:56-60, 9:1-2). They devoured widows’ houses in the name of upholding the Mosaic Law (Matthew 23:14). They tithed on all their income, but neglected justice and mercy and faith (Matthew 23:23).

The same applies to hierarchs with a corrupt life. Chrysostom said, “They have the dignity of office, but are of an unclean life. Do however attend to their words, but not to their life. For as regards his character, no one would be harmed thereby, because his character is clear to all. And also because, though he was ten thousand times as wicked, he will never teach what is wicked”.

In this respect, Chrysostom applied the Lord’s words, “Judge not that you be not judged” (Matthew 7:1) to a hierarch with a corrupt life since this applies to one’s life and not to one’s faith. The words that follow he said make this plain: “And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?” (Matthew 7:3).

²⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXXIV, 1.

The Monastic Life

John Chrysostom stated³⁰ that it was to concentrate on a life of humility that many people of his day had chosen the monastic life.

“Nothing is equal to the practice of modesty, wherefore He continually reminded them of this virtue, and He used children as an example (Mark 9:36-37). He began with the beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12). And in this place, He plucked arrogance up by the roots, saying, ‘He that abases himself shall be exalted’. Do you see how He draws off the hearer right over to the contrary thing? He not only forbids him to set his heart upon the first place, but requires him to follow after the last. And where shall we find this humility? Do you want us to go again to the city of virtue, the tents of the holy men, the mountains and the groves? There too shall we see this height of humility”.

“For men, some illustrious from their rank in the world, some from their wealth, in every way put themselves down, by their vesture, by their dwelling, by those to whom they minister; and, as in written characters, they throughout all things inscribe humility”.

“And the things that are incentives of arrogance, as to dress well, and to build houses splendidly, and to have many servants, things which often drive men even against their will to arrogance; these are all taken away. For they themselves light their fire, they themselves cleave the logs, themselves cook, themselves minister to those that come there”.

“No one can be heard insulting, or seen insulted, or commanded, or giving commands. But all are devoted to those that are waited on, and every one washes the strangers’ feet, and there is much contention about this. And he does it, not inquiring who it is, neither if he is a slave, nor if he were free; but in the case of every one fulfills this service. No man there is great or lowly. What then? Is there confusion? Far from it, but the highest order! If anyone is lowly, he that is great sees not this, but has accounted himself again to be inferior even to him, and so becomes great. There is one table for all, both for them that are served, and for them that serve; the same food, the same clothes, the same dwellings, and the same manner of life. He is great there, who eagerly seizes the lowly task. There is not yours, and mine but this expression is exterminated”.

Humility is a consistent theme throughout the Scriptures. For example, Israel in the desert was arrogant and stiff-necked. As a result, the Lord humbled them by letting them all die there even though they were miraculously provided for -- and all the surrounding nations knew it (Deuteronomy 8:1-6). On the other hand, Moses was the most humble man on earth and wouldn’t even defend himself when his brother and sister (Aaron and Miriam) spoke against him. But the Lord defended Moses and, in doing so, exalted him (Numbers 12:1-11).

Eight Woes or Judgments on the Scribes and Pharisees

Jesus finished His long address in the Temple with a series of eight “woes”, which were denunciations in the sense of grief, not in the sense of cursing or anathema. The eight are summarized in Table 1.

³⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXII, 3.

Table 1
Jesus' Denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees

Number	Problem
1	Shut Door to Kingdom of Heaven Against Men
2	Devour Widows' Houses; Long Phony Prayers
3	Travel Far for Converts; Make Them Worse Than Yourselves
4	Ignore the Sanctity of the Temple
5	Pay Tithes, But Ignore Justice, Mercy and Faith
6	Clean on the Outside, But Extortionists on Inside
7	Like Whitewashed Tombs; Hypocrites and Lawless Inside
8	Build Tombs for Prophets; Have Become Just Like Their Murderers

Shutting the Door to the Kingdom:

Early in Jesus' ministry, He was teaching in a house in Capernaum, where the Scribes and Pharisees were present (Mark 2:6, Luke 5:21). Four men arrived, carrying a paralytic, and couldn't get into the house because of the crowd. So they opened up the roof above where Jesus was teaching and lowered the paralytic in front of Jesus (Luke 5:19). Jesus did three things that only God can do.

First, He forgave the sins of the Paralytic (Matthew 9:2). Secondly He read the thoughts of the Scribes. "Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, 'Why do you think evil in your hearts?'" (Matthew 9:4). And third, to prove that this was God and that He had the authority to forgive sins, He said, "Which is easier to say, 'your sins are forgiven', or to say, 'arise and walk'?" Jesus continued, just to dispel any doubts, "But that you (the Scribes and Pharisees) may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" – then He said to the paralytic – "Arise, take up your bed and go to your house" (Matthew 9:6).

The reaction of the crowd was one of marvel; they "glorified God who had given such power to men" (Matthew 9:8), and they said, "We never saw anything like this!" (Mark 2:12).

Unfortunately, Jesus' warm reception in Capernaum was short-lived. A few months later, Jesus rebuked the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum because they didn't repent (Matthew 11:20-24). Perhaps this was because of the Scribes and Pharisees who were present. They didn't enter the Kingdom of Heaven themselves (Matthew 23:13) and by their undercutting and false teaching, they didn't allow some of those who were entering to go in. This can be compared to the parable of the Sower where some seed fell on the wayside and some fell on rocky ground (Matthew 13:18-21). The Scribes and Pharisees snatched the Word away before the people understood it (i.e. the wayside); or if the people did understand it, the Pharisees threatened to put them out of the Synagogue (John 9:34-35) if they continued (i.e., the rocky ground).

One might ask how the Gospel writers came to know that Jesus read the thoughts of the Scribes and Pharisees. Since they were so hostile to Him, it is unlikely that they would admit this. However, included among the Pharisees were Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea who

later believed and performed the burial rite for Jesus (John 19:38-42). They may have been present at Capernaum at this time, and were certainly included in private discussions among the Pharisees after this event.

Cyril of Alexandria asked³¹ why Jesus forgave the sins of the paralytic first. The answer is that sin is often the cause of physical diseases.

“Now someone, I imagine, may say to this: what he wanted was to be delivered from his disease; and why, then, does Christ announce to him the forgiveness of his sin? It was that you may learn that God silently and noiselessly observes the affairs of men, and watches the course of each one’s life; and so it is written, ‘the paths of a man are before the eyes of God; and He looks at all his tracks’ (Proverbs 5:21). As He is good, and wills that all men should be saved; He often purifies those who are entangled in sins by inflicting sickness upon their body. He says by the voice of Jeremiah, ‘You shall be taught, O Jerusalem, by labor and the scourge’ (Jeremiah 6:8). The writer of the book of Proverbs also has said, ‘my son, despise not the teaching of the Lord, nor faint when you are convicted by Him; for whom the Lord loves, He chastens and scourges every son whom He accepts’ (Proverbs 3:11). Therefore Christ announced that He would cut away the cause of the disease, and the very root, as it were, of the malady, even sin. If this is removed, necessarily must the disease which sprung from it be also at the same time taken away”.

Devouring Widows’ Houses:

According to Hebrew custom³², the oldest son in a family had the “birthright” and was given a double portion of the inheritance. For example, in a family of five sons, the oldest got a two-sixths share and the others got one-sixth shares. However, the oldest was required to provide for their mother for the rest of her life and for any sisters until they got married (this included the sister’s dowry!) out of his extra share. This was to be the case even if the oldest was the son of a wife who was not the father’s favorite (Deuteronomy 21:15-17). Thus, in the case of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-13), the Prodigal got one third and the older son got two thirds.

If the breadwinner of a family died early and unexpectedly, there were several options for his widow and children. The man’s oldest unmarried brother was required to take his wife and raise up children for his brother. If the man who died had children, this didn’t apply and the children needed to help their mother. Special provisions were made under Mosaic Law for widows and orphans (Deuteronomy 24:19-21; 16:10-11) and a special third tithe was set aside for them (Deuteronomy 14:29; 26:12). While they were not supposed to be neglected (Ezekiel 22:7, Malachi 3:5), the Scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day did just that under the pretense of legality (Matthew 23:14, Mark 12:40, Luke 20:47). As soon as the struggling widow ran out of money, they foreclosed on her house and seized her property. This was in violation of the Mosaic Law. People were to freely open their hand to the poor and generously lend him sufficient for his needs (Deuteronomy 15:7-8). To not do so was a sin and the poor man may cry to the Lord against his rich neighbors. In being generous to him, however, “the Lord will bless them in all their work and in everything they do” (Deuteronomy 15:9-11). The widow of Nain,

³¹ Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Luke*, Chapter 5.

³² Merrill Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, pp 376-378.

whose only son had just died, was probably in dire straits and could expect to lose everything in a short time.

Converting Proselytes:

Jesus said to the Pharisees, “You travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves”. The Pharisees didn’t have to travel to other countries much to do this, since there were so many Hebrew visitors to Jerusalem every year from outlying areas. The Apostles spoke to people from 15 different countries just on Pentecost (Acts 2:9-11).

John Chrysostom stated³³ that the long-term result of the conversion of proselytes by the Pharisees was a collection of disciples who were worse than they were.

“They are unprofitable for the salvation of the many, and need much work in order to win over even one. They were even remiss in the preservation of him whom they had gained, by the wickedness in their life corrupting him, and making him worse. When the disciple sees his teachers to be such as these, he becomes worse than they do. He does not stop at his teacher’s wickedness; but as when his teacher is virtuous, he imitates him, so when he is bad, he even goes beyond him, by reason of our proneness to what is evil. Because they labor to instill into their disciples a greater wickedness, they harden them to a much greater depravity than they have, and this is above all a mark of a depraved soul.

Ignore the Sanctity of the Temple:

Jesus spoke to the Scribes and Pharisees, “You say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it. Fools and blind! Which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold?’ And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it’. Fools and blind! Which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?” (Matthew 23:16-19)

The focus of the Scribes and Pharisees was on the things of this life and they had no concept of the value of spiritual things. Even the Temple itself, to them, was just the sum of the valuables it contained. Jesus pointed out that the real valuable item in the Temple was the Presence of God that sanctified it. In this and other contexts, Jesus taught that one thing sanctifies another, and that physical objects can be used for spiritual purposes.

For example, a woman touched the hem of His garment, and was immediately healed of her hemorrhage (Luke 8:43-45). The Master sanctified the garment and the garment sanctified the hem. Similarly during the two years that Paul was in Ephesus on his Third Missionary Journey, handkerchiefs and aprons that touched Paul’s body were used to heal diseases and cast out evil spirits (Acts 19:12). Perhaps the most dramatic example of sanctified physical objects was the man who was raised from the dead by touching the bones of Elisha. In this account, it was completely unintentional; no faith at all existed on the part of the burial crew (2 Kings 13:20-21). The relics of Elisha had been sanctified by the power behind the life of Elisha. Thus, one thing sanctifies another. This is also the case with icons, holy water, holy oil and many instances of relics of the saints.

³³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXIII, 1.

Pay Tithes, But Ignore Justice, Mercy and Faith:

The practice of tithing was well established at the time of Abraham when Abraham (Abram) gave a tithe to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:1-6). Sacrifice had already been established before Cain killed Abel, and it was jealousy over the Lord's acceptance of Abel's offering that led Cain to kill Abel (Genesis 4:2-5). This suggests that Cain and Abel may also have been instructed about tithes.

Tithing was given more definition in the Mosaic Law, however. Three tithes are mentioned: The first tithe was part of the "Covenant of Salt" between the Lord and the Levites, who had no land for an inheritance (Numbers 18:20-24). The other tribes had defined land and boundaries for their inheritance which reverted back to their families even if it was sold (Leviticus 25:13-28). In their agricultural economy every 10th sheep at the time of tithing coming into the sheepfold was offered to the Lord (Leviticus 27:30-33) and was received by the Levites. The 1st tithe was part of an income for them that derived from the services they performed.

A second tithe was used at the festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles, where everyone rejoiced before the Lord; it was used by everyone, not just the Levites (Deuteronomy 12:12-19). The tithes and other vows, alms and freewill offerings were also brought to Jerusalem at this time.

Every third year, an additional tithe was set aside for the alien, the orphans, the widows and the Levites (Deuteronomy 14:28-29, 26:12-13). Following the giving of this third tithe, the people were to say "before the Lord" that they have not withheld any and to ask the Lord for a blessing that they might continue to have a land flowing with milk and honey (Deuteronomy 26:12-15). The righteous Tobit in his almsgiving describes these three tithes (Tobit 1:5-8 LXX).

The Prophet Malachi spoke to the people of his day about robbing God by refusing to contribute their tithes: "But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings! You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house. And test Me now in this, says the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows" (Malachi 3:8-10: compare Deuteronomy 26:12-15).

In the Early Church, people gave not just a Tithe, but they sold everything they had and laid the proceeds at the Apostles' feet to do as the Apostles pleased (Acts 2:45, 4:36-37). This demonstrates a singular detachment from worldly possessions among members of the Early Church.

Yet tithing shouldn't be a thing that we are forced to do, but a thing that we want to do. John Chrysostom said³⁴, that almsgiving is the characteristic of Christianity and the medicine for our sins

"If one is doing work of virtue, and yet all that is done is of necessity, it is shorn of its reward."

³⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XIX, 9:7

“Almsgiving is the mother of love, where love is the characteristic of Christianity. It is the medicine of our sins, the cleansing of the filth of our souls, the ladder fixed to heaven; it binds together the Body of Christ”.

Clean on the Outside, But Extortionists on the Inside:

Jesus stated to the Scribes and Pharisees, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also” (Matthew 23:25-26). By the inside of the cup or dish, He is referring to the soul, and the outside of the cup is the body.

Jesus gave a similar instruction to a Pharisee almost a year earlier when the Pharisee invited Jesus to his house for dinner (Luke 11:37-51). Jesus went in and sat down, but didn't wash His hands (perhaps purposely!), and the Pharisee noticed this. Cyril of Alexandria stated³⁵ that the Pharisees had a form of faith that was superficial only, and they were not lovers of God.

“Jesus had the reputation among them of a righteous man and a prophet, yet He did not conform Himself to their customs. They washed before meals as though this freed them from all pollution. But washing with water is useful for cleaning the body, but how can it free men from the defilement of the mind and heart? Tell us, O Pharisee, where Moses gave you this precept? What commandment ordained by God requires men to wash before meals? The priests were bathed in water to declare, by means of the baptism enacted in shadow, that even they did not have sufficiency for sanctification. They needed Holy Baptism for the true cleansing”.

On the other hand, “The Pharisees went about with sad looks, as though pale from fasting, and stood praying in the streets, wishing rather to have praise of men than God. They exhibited themselves to the onlookers as the very pattern of the life of virtue that is by the Law; and in doing so, they withdrew in every way possible from being lovers of God”.

John Chrysostom stated³⁶ that their uncleanness is exhibited by their behavior toward others:

“But these things He said, intimating their mad desire of glory, and their frenzy concerning this. This became a cause of all their evils, namely, that they did all things for display and appearance. This both led them away from the Faith, and caused them to neglect what really is virtue, and induced them to busy themselves about bodily purifying only, neglecting the purification of the soul. So therefore to lead them into what really is virtue, and to the purifying of the soul, He makes mention of mercy, judgment and faith. These are the things that comprise our life, these are what purify the soul, justice, love for man, and truth. These incline us to pardon others and restrain us from being excessively severe and unforgiving to them that sin. If we do this, we gain doubly, both becoming kind to man, and hence obtaining also ourselves much kindness from the God of all.

³⁵ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, Homily 83, Studion Publishers, 1983.

³⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVIII, 2.

We see this throughout the Scriptures, as holiness and sacred things are contrasted with uncleanness, defilement and contamination. The Scriptures refer to things, animals, and people as being holy, but always by association with a Holy God. Made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, Ephesians 4:24), His people were to be holy as He is holy (Leviticus 19:2), and they are to be partakers of His Holiness (Hebrews 12:10). Consequently, the Tabernacle and all its furnishings and utensils were anointed with holy oil (Exodus 40:9) in preparation for the Presence of God dwelling there (Exodus 29:43-46, Numbers 7:89). Holy clothing was worn by the priests (Exodus 28:2) in serving God, and holy water was used by the priests in performing the judgments of God both for discernment in concealed sin (Numbers 5:17ff) and for removing uncleanness (Numbers 19:9). The offerings to the Lord were also holy, whether animal or vegetable (Exodus 29:33, Leviticus 2:3, 6:25). Even the ground was holy if the Lord's Presence was there (Exodus 3:4, Joshua 5:15), and the camp of Israel was not allowed to become defiled (Deuteronomy 23:14, Numbers 5:2-3) because of the Tabernacle and the Presence of God in its midst. The Commandments, Statutes and Judgments of the Lord were similarly holy (Romans 7:12, Psalm 19:7-10) because they represented the Word of God for His people (Deuteronomy 4:8, Leviticus 18:26-28, Psalm 105:42). All this carries over into the New Testament, where the people of God "are not called to uncleanness but in holiness" (1 Thessalonians 4:7). Ambrose stated³⁷ that the Church is the holy ground, fruitful with sanctity and fertile with virtues. Christ in us is like the burning bush, consuming our thorns, showing us Grace.

In contrast to the holiness in Israel, things associated with idols and demons were unclean, defiled and polluted (Genesis 35:2, Leviticus 18:30, Ezekiel 36:22-25). In the New Testament, demons are called "unclean spirits" more often than they are called "evil spirits", even though both are true. As the people of God associated themselves with idols and demons, they became similarly unclean, defiled and polluted (Deuteronomy 32:15-18, Jeremiah 7:30, 16:18). Anyone who was unclean for any reason had to remain outside the Camp until his uncleanness was rectified (Leviticus 13:46, Numbers 31:19, Deuteronomy 23:10). Because the Lord was present in the Camp (Deuteronomy 23:14, Numbers 5:3), any uncleanness in the Camp affected everyone. A dramatic example of this was given by the actions of Achan, who, out of greed, brought polluted objects into the Camp of Israel (Joshua 7).

Anyone from Israel who offered sacrifices to idols and demons both violated God's holiness (Leviticus 20:2-7), defiled the Sanctuary (Leviticus 20:3, Ezekiel 5:11) and joined the one doing so to the demons (1 Corinthians 10:19-22). Similarly, participating in the practices of the Canaanites, such as fornication and witchcraft, rendered a person unclean (Deuteronomy 18:9-12). The Apostle Paul had similar words to say to the Corinthians regarding joining the temple of God, their body, to harlots (1 Corinthians 6:15-20). As the people of God were unfaithful, and continued in their uncleanness, defilement and pollution (1 Kings 11:5-7), the Lord gave them over to more of the same in order to wake them up (Ezekiel 16:36-37, 23:7-30). Paul wrote that the Lord continues to do this in the New Testament (Romans 1:24). As in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-24), it often takes time for a person to realize the filth he's enmeshed in before he desires to return to his Father's house (Luke 15:16-17). Quoting Isaiah 52, Paul stated, "'Therefore come out from their midst and be separate', says the Lord, 'and do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you'". "Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves

³⁷ Ambrose, Epistle 63, 41-42.

from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 6:17-7:1).

All of the above breaks down, however, if the leaders of Israel, the Scribes and Pharisees, have no spiritual discernment in these matters, and have no vision beyond things physical.

Like Whitewashed Tombs; Hypocrites and Lawlessness Inside:

John Chrysostom stated³⁸ that Jesus derided the Scribes and Pharisees for their vainglory; in calling them ‘whitewashed sepulchers’ and ‘hypocrites’, He was pointing out the cause of all their evils. The prophets constantly laid this to their charge, that they spoil, that their rulers judge not according to the rule of justice; everywhere you may find their sacrifices refused, but these external things required. So that there is nothing strange, nothing new, neither in the law giving, nor in the accusation, or even in the comparison to a sepulcher. David did not merely call them a sepulcher, ‘but their throat is an open sepulcher’ (Psalm 5:9, Romans 3:13).

Chrysostom also compared people in his days to the Scribes and Pharisees, and this is a good thing to contemplate during the season of Lent.

“Many men now are like them also, decking themselves indeed outwardly, but full of iniquity within. Today there is many a care for outward purification, but of those in the soul, none. But if anyone should tear open each man’s conscience, many worms and much corruption would he find, and an ill savor beyond utterance; unreasonable and wicked lusts I mean, which are more unclean than worms. He in whom Christ dwells, and the Holy Spirit has worked, and such great mysteries, that this man should be a sepulcher, what wretchedness is this? What mourning and lamentation does this call for, when the members of Christ have become a tomb of uncleanness?”

“And how does someone even dare to set foot in the churches of God, and in holy temples, when they have the savor of so much abomination? For if one carrying a dead body into the king’s courts and burying it there would have suffered the utmost punishment, setting your foot in the sacred courts and filling the house with so much bad odor, consider what a punishment you will undergo. The Psalmist says, ‘Let my prayer be set forth in Your sight as incense’ (Psalm 141:2). When not incense, but a stinking smoke arises from you, and from your deeds, what punishment do you not deserve to undergo?”

“What then is the stinking smoke? Many come in gazing about at the beauty of women; others, as pedophiles, curious about the blooming youth of boys. After this, do you not marvel, how thunderbolts are not launched, and the whole Church is not plucked up from its foundations? Worthy both of thunderbolts and hell are the things that are done; but God, who is long -suffering, and of great mercy, delays His wrath, calling you to repentance and amendment. What are you doing, man? Are you curiously looking after women’s beauty, and do you not shudder at doing this despite being in the temple of God? Does the Church seem to you a brothel? In God’s temple, when God Himself is discoursing to you, and threatening about these things, you are committing adultery at the same time in which you are being told not to do this. Do you not shudder or stand amazed? These things do the spectacles of wantonness teach

³⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXIII, 2-4.

you, the grievous snares of the thoughtless, and the pleasurable destruction of the unchaste.”

“Did you not hear that the men and women were gathered together in the upper room (Acts 1:14-15), and that congregation was worthy of the heavens? And very reasonably! The women then practiced much self-denial, and the men gravity and chastity. Hear, for instance, the seller of purple saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come in, and stay with me” (Acts 16:15). Hear the women, who went about with the Apostles, having taken in themselves manly courage, Priscilla, Persis, and the rest³⁹; from whom our present women are as far removed as our men from their men.”

“Even traveling into far countries women didn’t bring not on themselves evil report; but now even though brought up in a chamber, they hardly escape this suspicion. These things arise from their decking of themselves, and their luxury. Then the business of those women was to spread the word; but now to appear beautiful and fair in countenance. This is glory to them; this is salvation; but of lofty and great works they do not even dream.”

“I therefore beg you not to seek after wealth and affluence, but a good disposition, and gentleness. Seek for a pious and self-denying damsel, and these will be to you better than countless treasures. If you seek the things of God, these others will come also; but if you pass by the things of God, don’t expect anything.”

Building Tombs for Prophets, Just Like Their Murderous Fathers:

In all ages, it has been customary to exhibit the gravesites of national heroes. In their pretense of spirituality, the Scribes and Pharisees honored the gravesites of the prophets. All this while, they sought to kill Jesus, who had sent the prophets to them. Jesus cornered them on this point:

“Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city. On you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar (Matthew 23:31-35).

Cyril of Alexander stated⁴⁰ that the ancestors of the Scribes and Pharisees had been the ones who put to death the holy prophets who were bringing them the word of God and who were leading them to the right way. As the descendants of the murderers, they acknowledged that the prophets were holy and venerable men by building over them ornate sepulchers. Thus they became the judges of their fathers and accused their fathers of having done wrongfully. Ironically, the Scribes and Pharisees, who condemned their fathers for such cruel murders, were about to incur the guilt of even more abominable offenses: the murder of the Prince of Life. As

³⁹ From the context, these women seem to be some of the women of Philippi (Acts 16:13).

⁴⁰ Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, Homily 85, Studion Publishers, 1983.

if this weren't enough, they followed in short order with the murder of the Archdeacon Stephen, for no other reason than his speaking to them the words of the Scriptures.

Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, was the father of John the Baptist, and also Jesus' uncle, which means that the murderous frenzy of the Scribes and Pharisees had gotten very personal with Jesus. The occasion of this murder was Jesus' own conception by the Virgin Mary. Zechariah, after diligent inquiry, which included divine inspiration (Luke 1:39-45), concluded that Mary was still a virgin and he asserted this⁴¹ in the Temple. When it was his turn to preside at the Temple he had Mary take her place in that part of the Temple reserved for virgins. The Scribes and Pharisees were so angry with Zechariah over this that they began plotting with Herod to kill him. They got their opportunity when the Magi arrived to worship the infant Christ. Herod thought that the infant John the Baptist was the new King that the Magi were seeking, and ordered his execution. When Herod's soldiers couldn't find John (Zechariah had sent him into the desert with Elizabeth), they struck Zechariah down between the Temple and the altar.

In one of these accounts⁴², Zechariah prophesied before the birth of Christ that Mary would be the mother of God and that her child would be 'God the Savior, Jesus Christ, the King and Ruler of their race'.

Even though John the Baptist was only an infant when his father, Zechariah, was murdered, John seems to be aware who was responsible for his death. He was also very aware of the spiritual character of the Scribes and Pharisees.

“Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, ‘Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance’” (Matthew 3:5-8).

Jesus referred to the Scribes and Pharisees using the same words as His cousin John.

John Chrysostom commented⁴³ that the significance of the mention of the “blood of righteous Abel” was that they should have learned from the example of righteous Abel that the shedding of innocent blood will not go unnoticed. Lamech had said that he should be avenged seventy-sevenfold for murdering a man (Genesis 4:23-24), compared to Cain's vengeance of just sevenfold (Genesis 4:15). In other words, Lamech was more deserving of punishment than Cain was. This is noteworthy in that Lamech was not brought to a better mind by Cain's example, but became worse. They who, after many people sin and have been punished, have not grown better from hearing of their example, but have committed the same offenses, are justly worthy to suffer their punishments also.

⁴¹ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, December 29, discussion.

Holy Apostles Convent, tr., The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, Buena Vista, CO, 2002, September 5, p. 215.

Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, Homily 85, Studion Publishers, 1983, footnote, p. 345. This account is attributed to the historian Sulpitius Severus.

⁴² Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, Homily 85, Studion Publishers, 1983, footnote, p. 345. This account is attributed to the historian Sulpitius Severus.

⁴³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXIV, 2.

Speaking about the Scribes and Pharisees, Chrysostom said⁴⁴ that they didn't learn from the past, but murdered holy men in a holy place.

“Abel was murdered likewise out of envy. What do you have to say? Don't you know what Cain suffered? Did God not exact the severest penalty? Did you not hear what things your fathers suffered when they slew the prophets; were they not delivered over to punishments, and infliction of vengeance without number? How then did you not become better? And why do I speak of the punishments of your fathers, and what they suffered? You who yourself condemn your fathers, how is it you do worse? For even you yourselves have declared that ‘He will miserably destroy those wicked men’” (Matthew 21:41).

“The outrage regarding the Scribes and Pharisees was twofold. Not only did they slay holy men, but also in a holy place. And saying these things, He did not only alarm them, but also comforted His disciples, showing that the righteous men who were before them suffered these things. But these He alarmed, foretelling that as their fathers paid their penalty, even so they should suffer the utmost extremities. The prophets also laid this to their charge, saying, ‘They mingle blood with blood’ (Hosea 4:2 LXX). Which He said to Noah likewise, ‘I will require all blood that is shed’” (Genesis 9:4-6). For not merely ordinary persons did they slay, but prophets and wise men. And by these He means the Apostles and those after them, for, indeed, many prophesied.

When Jesus said, “How can you escape the condemnation of hell?” (Matthew 23:33), the term “hell” is the word *Gehenna*, the smoldering garbage dump outside the city of Jerusalem. Basil the Great suggests⁴⁵ another aspect of “hell”. He suggests that the “cutting in half” of the ungodly on Judgment Day (Matthew 24:51, Luke 12:46) refers to the eternal alienation of the soul from the Spirit. “Thus in hell there is no one who confesses, no one in death who remembers God, because the help of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3, Matthew 16:17) is no longer available”.

Jesus concluded, “Behold your house is left desolate” (Matthew 23:38). Chrysostom commented⁴⁶, “They will be stripped of the aid which comes from Me. Surely it was the same One Who also was protecting them before, and holding them together, and preserving them; surely it was He who was ever chastening them. And He appointed a punishment, which they had ever dreaded exceedingly; for it declared the entire overthrow of their government.

Jesus' final words were, “For I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’” (Matthew 23:39) “And this is the language of one that loves earnestly, not merely warning them by the past; for of the future day⁴⁷ of His Second Coming does He here speak”.

“He made it plain even to the utterly unbelieving, that they should worship Him. He spoke of many things that were to be first, that He should send prophets and that they should kill them; that it should be in the synagogues. He included that they should suffer the utmost

⁴⁴ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXXIV, 2.

⁴⁵ Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, 40.

⁴⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXXV, 3.

⁴⁷ Chrysostom stated that when Jesus said, “You shall see Me no more”, He meant the time up to His crucifixion.

extremities; that their house should be left desolate; that they should undergo things more grievous than any, and such as never were undergone before. For all these things are enough to furnish even to the most senseless and contentious a clear proof of that which should come to pass at His coming”.

Parable from the Old Testament: Ezekiel 1:21-2:1 “A Man on the Throne of God”

As we consider the Gospel for Tuesday of Holy Week, we listen to the religious leaders challenge Jesus in every way that they can imagine. Yet they have no clue Who it is that they’re dealing with. Ezekiel’s vision gives us a glimpse of this. Ezekiel saw not just the likeness of the Throne of God, but also the likeness of a man on the Throne. The text from Ezekiel reads:

“When those went, *the wheels* went; and when those stood, *the wheels* stood; and when those lifted themselves off the earth, they were lifted off with them: for the spirit of life was in the wheels”.

“And the likeness over the heads of the living creatures was as a firmament, as the appearance of crystal, spread out over their wings above. And their wings were spread out under the firmament, reaching one to the other; two *wings* to each, covering their bodies. And I heard the sound of their wings when they went, as the sound of much water: and when they stood, their wings were let down. And lo! A voice from above the firmament that was over their head, *there was* as the appearance of a sapphire stone *and* the likeness of a throne upon it: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as an appearance of a man above. And I saw as it were the resemblance of amber from the appearance of the loins and upwards, and from the appearance of the loins and under I saw an appearance of fire and the brightness thereof round about. As the appearance of the rainbow when it is in the cloud in days of rain so was the form of brightness round about”.

“This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And I saw and fell upon my face, and heard the voice of one speaking: and he said to me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak to thee” (Ezekiel 1:21-2:1).

Cyril of Jerusalem stated⁴⁸ that our human eyes and understanding could not see or comprehend God. Even the greatest of the prophets could only behold the likeness of God, not God Himself. The prophets could not even stand in the presence of the angels unless the angels transformed themselves into something more human. Because of this, God spread out the heavens to veil His Godhead, and it was necessary for Christ to come in the flesh, where His flesh veiled His Deity so that people could relate to Him. Cyril stated:

“To look upon God with eyes of flesh is impossible; for the incorporeal cannot be subject to bodily sight; and the Only Begotten Son of God Himself has testified, saying, ‘No man has seen God at any time’ (John 1:18). For Ezekiel saw Him, yet what does the Scripture say? ‘He saw the likeness of the glory of the Lord’ (Ezekiel 1:28); not the Lord Himself; not the glory itself, as it really is. And when he saw merely the likeness of the glory, he fell to the earth from fear (Ezekiel 1:28). Now if the sight of the likeness of the glory brought fear and distress upon the prophets, anyone who should attempt to behold God Himself would to a certainty lose his life, according to the saying, ‘No man shall see My face and live’ (Exodus 33:20). For this cause God, of His great loving-kindness,

⁴⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, IX, 1-4.

spread out the heaven as a veil of His Godhead that we should not perish. The word is not mine, but the Prophet's. 'If You would open the heaven, trembling will take hold upon the mountains from You, and they shall melt, as wax melts before the fire' (Isaiah 64:1-2 LXX). And why do you wonder that Ezekiel fell down on seeing the likeness of the glory? (Ezekiel 1:28) Daniel, at the sight of Gabriel, who was but a servant of God, immediately shuddered and fell on his face; and, prophet as he was, dared not answer him, until the Angel transformed himself into the likeness of a son of man (Daniel 10:9, 16, 18). Now if the appearing of Gabriel caused trembling in the Prophets, had God Himself been seen as He is, would not all have perished?"

"The Divine Nature then is impossible to see with eyes of flesh. But from the works, which are Divine, it is possible to attain to some conception of His power, according to Solomon, who says, 'By the greatness and beauty of the creatures proportionately the Maker of them is seen' (Wisdom 13:5 LXX). He did not say that from the creatures the Maker is seen, but added proportionately. God appears the greater to every man in proportion as he has grasped a larger survey of the creatures. When his heart is uplifted by that larger survey, he gains thereby a greater conception of God".

"Do you want to learn that the nature of God is impossible to comprehend? The Three Children in the furnace of fire, as they hymn the praises of God, say 'Blessed are you that behold the depths, and sit upon the Cherubim' (Song of the Three Children 1:31 LXX). What is the nature of the Cherubim? Understand that and then look upon Him who sits on them. Ezekiel the Prophet even made a description of them, as far as was possible, saying that every one has four faces, one of a man, another of a lion, another of an eagle, and another of a calf. Each one had six wings⁴⁹, and they had eyes on all sides; and that under each one was a wheel of four⁵⁰ sides (Ezekiel 1:6-11, 10:21; Isaiah 6:2). Nevertheless though the Prophet makes the explanation, we cannot understand it even as we read. But if we cannot understand the throne, which he has described, how shall we be able to comprehend Him who sits on it, the Invisible and Ineffable God? To scrutinize the nature of God is impossible. But it is in our power to send up praises of His glory for His works that are seen".

Gregory Thaumaturgus took this one step further and likened⁵¹ the womb of the Virgin Mary to the visions that Ezekiel saw, since she contained the same God that appeared to Ezekiel.

"The archangel addressed Mary in these terms: Through me all the heavenly powers hail you, the holy virgin. He Himself, who is Lord of all the heavenly powers and of all creation, has selected you as the holy one and the wholly fair. Through your holy, chaste, pure, and undefiled womb, the enlightening Pearl comes forth for the salvation of the entire world. Of all the race of man you are by birth the holy one, the more honorable, the purer, and the more pious than any other. You have a mind whiter than the snow, and a body made purer than any gold, however fine, and a womb such as the object which Ezekiel saw, and which he has described in these terms.

⁴⁹ Cyril has blended the account of Ezekiel and Isaiah.

⁵⁰ A wheel of four sides represents two wheels spinning at right angles to each other.

⁵¹ Gregory Thaumaturgus, Four Homilies on the Annunciation, II, 2

‘And the likeness of the living creatures upon the head was as the firmament, and as the appearance of the awesome crystal and the likeness of the throne above them was as the appearance of a sapphire. Above the throne it was as the likeness of a man, and as the appearance of amber; and within it there was, as it were, the likeness of fire all around’ (Ezekiel 1:22, 26, 27). Clearly, then, the prophet beheld in type Him who was born of the holy virgin, whom you, O holy virgin, would have had no strength to bear, had you not beamed forth for that time with all that is glorious and virtuous. With what words of praise, then, shall we describe her virgin-dignity? With what indications and proclamations of praise shall we celebrate her stainless figure? With what spiritual song or word shall we honor her who is most glorious among the angels? She is planted in the house of God like a fruitful olive that the Holy Spirit overshadowed; and by her means are we called sons and heirs of the kingdom of Christ”.

Jerome stated⁵² that the vision that Ezekiel saw was an image of the Creation, where the crystal represents the compressed and denser waters above the earth⁵³. The Creation itself speaks of the laver of Baptism; that is, as the infant world came out of the waters, so the new believer comes out of the laver.

“The Spirit of God above moved, as a charioteer, over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:2), and produced from them the infant world, a type of the Christian child that is drawn from the laver of baptism. A firmament is constructed between heaven and earth, and to this is allotted the name heaven, — in the Hebrew Shamayim or ‘what comes out of the waters,’ — and the waters which are above the heavens are parted from the others to the praise of God (Genesis 1:7). Wherefore also in the vision of the prophet Ezekiel there is seen above the cherubim a crystal stretched forth (Ezekiel 1:22); that is, the compressed and denser waters. The first living beings come out of the waters; and believers soar out of the laver with wings to heaven. Man is formed out of clay (Genesis 2:7) and God holds the mystic waters in the hollow of his hand (Isaiah 40:12). In Eden a garden is planted, and a fountain in the midst of it parts into four heads (Genesis 2:8-10). This is the same fountain which Ezekiel later on describes as issuing out of the temple and flowing towards the rising of the sun, until it heals the bitter waters and quickens those that are dead” (Ezekiel 47:1, 8).

John Chrysostom stated⁵⁴ that the purpose of all these visions was to lead men to desire to become like the prophets who had the visions. The Scribes and Pharisees knew the Scriptures that stated these things quite well. But they didn’t have the desire to be like the prophets.

“Imagine only what sort of men it was intended for the hearers to become, when they considered that they were at once to be like the prophets, and like those great ones. It was on this account, you see, that he made mention of all the fire (Ezekiel 1:27); that he might lead them to reflect on the memory of those men. Of all the visions that appeared to them, the greater part appeared in fire; thus God

⁵² Jerome, Letters, LXIX, 6.

⁵³ This implies that Jerome understood that a water canopy existed prior to the Flood of Noah’s day, which would create a “greenhouse effect” on the earth. During the Flood, the water canopy precipitated to cause the 40 days of heavy rain (Genesis 7:11-12).

⁵⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, XI, 6.

discoursed with Moses at the bush (Exodus 3:2-6), thus with all the people from Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16-20:20), thus with Ezekiel regarding the cherubim” (Ezekiel 1:4-28).

Holy Tuesday Presanctified Liturgy

*The Second Coming and the Last Judgment*⁵⁵

April 19, 2011
Revision B

Gospel: Matthew 24:36-26:2

The Lord introduced His discussion about His Second Coming as follows,

“Now concerning [*peri de*] that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.”

“But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming [*Parousia*] of the Son of Man be. As in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what day your Lord is coming. (Matthew 24:36-42).

Matthew 24:36 Introduces a Different Subject

The previous part of Matthew 24 relate mostly to the destruction of Jerusalem and the events preceding it. With verse 36, a new subject is introduced, namely, details regarding the Second Coming of Christ and the attendant Final Judgment. Details of the subject of the Second Coming continue to the end of Matthew 25.

The grammatical consideration here that is important to understand begins with the expression in Greek, *Peri de* (Matthew 24:36), and is used to change subject matter and introduce a new topic. The same expression is used by Paul where he takes up *seriatim* a list of items, about which the Corinthians had asked questions, with the introductory phrase, “Now concerning”, which in Greek is *peri de*. Following are some examples⁵⁶:

- “Now concerning [*peri de*] the things on which you wrote to me” (1 Corinthians 7:1).
- “Now concerning [*peri de*] virgins” (1 Corinthians 7:25).
- “Now concerning [*peri de*] things offered to idols” (1 Corinthians 8:1).
- “Now concerning [*peri de*] Spiritual gifts” (1 Corinthians 12:1).
- “Now concerning [*peri de*] love of the brethren” (1 Thessalonians 4:9).
- “Now concerning [*peri de*] the times and the season” (1 Thessalonians 5:1).

The practical impact of this grammatical change is that Jesus is returning to answer the original question His disciples had posed (Matthew 24:3), “Tell us, when will these things be”? His answer begins, “now concerning [*peri de*] that day and hour”. He describes not just what it will be like when He comes, but also what He will be looking for and what the basis will be for His judgment.

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⁵⁵ This study adapted from a study prepared by Robert W. Newsom, *The King Judges His People: Jerusalem, Jesus and Judgment*, a series of studies on the Olivet Discourse and related texts in the Gospel of Matthew. Presented at Saint Athanasius Antiochan Orthodox Church, Isla Vista, California, 2002.

⁵⁶ For other examples, see Matthew 20:6; 22:31; 27:46; Mark 12:26; 13:32; John 11:8-11; Acts 21:25.

Description of the Last Days: Matthew 24:36-44

Jesus refers to *that* day and hour. The force of the *far demonstrative*, "that", being that other day; i.e., that other day the Lord mentioned by way of contrast in verse 22. This refers to the Second Advent.

The expression "that day and hour" also gives evidence of a change of subject matter by way of contrast. In the previous section (Matthew 24:4-35) the plural "days" is employed; in the present section (Matthew 24:36-46) the singular "day" is used. In verse 19, 22, 29 the plural "these days" describes the period under consideration; the singular "that day and hour" is not employed. But the second section, the period now under discussion, uses the singular (Matthew 24:36, 42, 44, 50 and 25:13). It is true that in Matthew 24:37 and 38 the plural "days" is found but that is in reference to the days of Noah previous to "the day" when Noah entered the ark. The distinctive use of the plural and singular in these sections points to different events; namely, the Destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, and the Return of Christ at the Last Day.

John Chrysostom presented a contrast⁵⁷ between the righteous and the transgressors in the days before the Second Advent. There is also a contrast in their state of affairs: tribulation for some versus peace and safety for others. All the while, there will be a state of total unawareness on the part of the transgressors as to what is happening.

"If there is luxury then, and peace and safety, as Paul said (1 Thessalonians 5:3), how does He say, 'after the tribulation of those days?' (Matthew 24:29) If there is luxury, how is there tribulation? It is luxury for those that are in a state of insensibility and peace. Therefore He did not say, 'when there is peace', but 'when they speak of peace and safety', indicating their insensibility. They are just like those in Noah's time, in that in the midst of such evils they lived in luxury".

"But not so the righteous; they were passing their time in tribulation and dejection. He shows that when Antichrist has come, the pursuit of unlawful pleasures shall be more eager among the transgressors, and those that have learned to despair of their own salvation. There will then be gluttony, reveling, and drunkenness. Most of all He gives an example corresponding to the thing. Just like when the ark was in the making, they didn't believe. But while it was set in their midst, proclaiming beforehand the evils that are to come, when they saw it, they lived in pleasure, just as though nothing dreadful were about to take place. So also now, Antichrist indeed shall appear, after whom is the end, and the punishments at the end, and vengeance intolerable. But they that are held by the intoxication of wickedness shall not so much as perceive the dreadful nature of the things that are on the point of being done".

Defining "The Last Days"

"The day", "the great day", "that day and that hour" are expressions in the Scriptures for the final Day of Judgment. Christ has often spoken of the great judgment in connection with a

⁵⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVII, 2.

certain day. The disciples should not have had any difficulty understanding that Christ had changed the subject in verse 36 from the judgments upon Jerusalem to the judgment that was to occur at the End of the World. The use of the term “the day” by Matthew in his Gospel, indicates that it would be understood by the Apostles to refer to the final judgment, a concept basic to Old Testament Judaism. Jesus had said, speaking on the final judgment: “many will say to Me in that day” (Matthew 7:22). “But I say to you (Chorazin, Bethsaida), it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the Day of Judgment, than for you”. “But I say to you (Capernaum), that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the Day of Judgment, than for you” (Matthew 11:22, 24). “But I say unto you, that every idle word that men speak, they shall give account of it in the Day of Judgment” (Matthew 12:36). All these statements refer to the final, the Last Judgment.

Another observation is that nowhere in the New Testament is the *plural* – “the days”, “days of vengeance”, “those days” -- used in reference to the Second Coming. One exception⁵⁸ seems to be, “You have laid up treasure *for* the last days” (James 5:3).

There is a general impression among many Christians that the “last days” has reference to a short period just before the Second Coming of Christ, but the term is not so defined in the Scriptures nor understood by the Fathers. Concerning the “last days”, the Fathers, following the Scriptures, hold that they began with the First Coming of Christ. This is found in a number of places in the Scriptures.

- “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds” (Hebrews 1:1,2). “In these last days” obviously refers to the time in which the author of Hebrews was writing and is contrasted with the time past of the prophets.
- The Apostle Peter referred to the events of the Day of Pentecost as events of the last days. “But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh’” (Acts 2:16, 17).
- John said: “Little children, it is the last time: and as you heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time” (1 John 2:18).
- Peter said, “He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake” (1 Peter 1:20).
- Paul warns young Timothy about things are the perils that would come to pass in the last days (1 Timothy 4:1-3). The people in Timothy’s Bishopric would be personally affected by those events. In particular, they needed the assurance that the coming apostasy was part of the overall pattern of events leading up to the end of the old order and the full establishing of Christ's Kingdom

⁵⁸ The Epistle of James, written early, 47-48 AD, provides on the historical side, one of the earliest insights into the nature of Jewish Christianity at its most promising period. It reveals the strong influence of the Old Testament and later Judaism, particularly the wisdom literature, and the degree to which the teaching of Christ had permeated and enriched this background. Another evidence for an early date is the striking absence of any Pauline influence. James is writing in the last days of the Old Covenant age; the Church is awaiting the arrival of the age to come (1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 9:26). From the great respect and love that James had for Paul (Acts 15:25-26), one would expect that there would be some indication in James’ Epistle of Paul’s work if James had written after Paul began his missionary journeys.

There is no Scriptural ground for believing that “the last days” indicate a short period just before the Second Coming of the Lord. Rather, we should understand the last days as that period between Christ's birth and the destruction of Jerusalem.

Apostolic testimony is unmistakably clear: when Christ came, the ‘last days’ arrived with Him. He came to bring in the new age of the Kingdom of God. The old age was winding down, and would be thoroughly abolished when God destroyed the Temple.

The contrast between Matthew 24:4-35 and Matthew 24:36-25:46 is between known and unknown, between specific signs and general conditions, respectively. Table 1 shows a comparison between the two sections illustrating the contrast:

Table 1
Contrast Between Specific Signs and General Conditions

Local Judgment upon Jerusalem		Universal Judgment in the Life to Come	
Matthew 24:4-35		Matthew 24:36-25:46	
24:4, 14	Don't be led astray by specific sign-events and preconditions	24:36 24:39	no one knows did not know
24:15-16	When you see . . . then . . . flee!	24:42	do not know
24:25	I have told you beforehand	24:50	day when he is not looking
24:33	When you see all these things, you know that it is near	24:44	hour you do not expect
24:34	This generation will not pass away until all these things take place.	25:13	Keep awake therefore for you know neither the day nor the hour

The Comparison to the Days of Noah: Matthew 24:37-41

Our Lord, having taught that the time of His Second Coming is unknown because it is the Father's unrevealed counsel, now proceeds to teach His disciples that the time is unknowable because there shall be no signs. There are no means of foretelling the precise events, which will usher in the end of age. Those events will be as unforeseen as the coming of the flood in the days of Noah, or the breaking into a house by a burglar. Men and women will be engaged upon their usual occupations when it occurs.

John Chrysostom commented⁵⁹ on the Lord's statement that only the Father knows the day and hour. If the Son created everything that exists, and He knows everything the Father knows, how is it that He doesn't know the hour of His Second Advent? As God He knows; but since His disciples don't need to know, He refers them to His Father's judgment.

“‘But of that day and hour no man knows, no, not the angels of Heaven, neither the Son, but the Father’ (Matthew 24:36). By saying, not the angels, He stopped their mouths, that they should not seek to learn what the angels don't know; and by saying, ‘neither the Son’, He forbids them not only to learn, but even to inquire. In proof that He said this, after His Resurrection, when He saw they were becoming overly curious, He stopped their mouths more decidedly. For

⁵⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVII, 1.

the present time (i.e. early 1st century) He has mentioned infallible signs; but then He said merely, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons'" (Acts 1:7).

"That they might not say, we are driven to perplexity, we are utterly scorned, we are not held worthy to know this, He says, 'which the Father has put in His own power' (Acts 1:7). He was exceedingly careful to honor them, and to conceal nothing from them. Therefore He refers it to His Father, both to make the thing awesome and to exclude that of which He had spoken from their inquiry".

There is a he counter argument: "If it is not this, and He is ignorant of it, when will He know it? Will it be together with us?" This implies that He is some kind of a lesser god! Who would say this? The Father He knows clearly; and of the day is He ignorant? Moreover, 'the Spirit indeed searches even the deep things of God' (1 Corinthians 2:10), and does He not know so much as the time of the judgment? How He ought to judge He knows, and of the secrets of each person He has a full perception; what is far more common than that, could He be ignorant of this? How, if 'all things were made by Him, and without Him was not even one thing made' (John 1:3, Colossians 1:16), was He ignorant of the day? He who made the worlds, it is quite plain that He made the times also; and if the times, even that day. How then is He ignorant of that which He made?"

The flood story is used to hammer home the point (Matthew 24:37-41). Whether the *good* are the ones left or taken may be stretching the illustration. Actually, a close reading of Noah and comparison with Matthew 13:41-42 would indicate that it is the wicked, who are gathered out and swept away!

How does our Lord describe these times? The people of Noah's day were living a very normal life. Christ does not stress wickedness, gluttony, drunkenness or sexual debauchery, even though those things were present. He uses the terms that express the normal, civilized and lawful affairs of eating, drinking, and marriage. The idea seems to be that all things went on as usual as if nothing were going to happen. That was -- in Noah's day -- and will be -- at Christ's Return -- the problem. Life as usual when something else was called for! (Matthew 24:38)

In Noah's day the end of that world came suddenly, in the absence of any special signs. All that the ancient world had was Noah's preaching of righteousness, which it chose to ignore.

"God did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly" (2 Peter 2:5). "The world that then existed was deluged with water and perished" (2 Peter 3:6).

The Return of Christ will be sudden and without any signs of warning regarding the exact day; but there will be the preaching of the Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes (1 Corinthians 1:21; compare Matthew 24:39).

In the days of Noah, there was a sudden and determinative division among persons accomplished by God when "the Lord shut him in" (Gen. 7:16). There had been 100 years of warning while Noah was building the Ark. If people had eyes to see, they could ascertain that something was coming. The Second Coming will do the same thing; and there is no hint of a "second chance" opportunity (Matthew 24:40-41).

The Lesson from a Thief: Matthew 24:43-44

Jesus says that if one knows when a thief is coming to break in, he can protect himself and his property. The expression the Lord uses [*ei eidei . . an*] supposes a condition contrary to fact, i.e. *he does not know when*. “Therefore you also must always be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect”. His disciples must be prepared for the unexpected; they must not be like a robbed homeowner who had allowed his house to be broken into because he failed to realize that burglars do not advertise beforehand the hours of their arrival. But there is something more of importance in the following parable.

The Parable of the Servant-Made-Ruler: Matthew 24:45-51

Our Lord had rebuked the leaders of Israel for being unfaithful shepherds of the flock and lax in their stewardship over the Household of God. So he turns to the leaders of the New Israel in the following parable in much the same way He had dealt with the Apostle Peter (John 21):

“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed *is* that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat *his* fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for *him* and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 24:45-51).

Above all, the parable of the faithful and unfaithful servants shows that those who have been placed by their Lord in positions of special responsibility, the leaders and teachers of the Church, must be so continuously and faithfully occupied with their work. When He returns they will be found rendering service to their Lord by feeding the members of His household. On the other hand, should they ‘trade upon’ the apparent delay in their Lord's return, bully those committed to their charge, and make the satisfaction of their own appetites their primary concern, their ultimate fate will be no better than that of the hypocritical Pharisees.

The word translated “punish” (Matthew 24:51) is from *diksotomeo* which means *cut in two in reference to the dismemberment of a condemned person*. The next time one is tempted to be lax on the lesson or slip-shod with the homily, he might want to remember this parable and also to reflect upon the words of James. “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness” (James 3:1). This is not an occasional consideration but is to be a constant concern; therefore, the basic warning about when is repeated: “The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know” (Matthew 24:50).

John Chrysostom stated⁶⁰ that the servant-made-ruler was one who was overcome by the love of carnal pleasure. The giving food in due season applies to every aspect of stewardship, including money, speech, power, etc. Everything was given to us by the Lord and was intended

⁶⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVII, 3-5, LXXVIII, 1..

for the benefit of our fellow man. There is no difference between those possessions that we call “our own” and the alms given by the Church to the poor. All were given by the Lord to allow us to give in due season and all require our dutiful attention.

“But these things are spoken not of money only, but also of speech, of power, of gifts, and of every duty, that we are entrusted with. If it is wisdom you have, or power, or wealth, or what it may, let it not be for the hurt of your fellow-servants, neither for your own ruin. For this cause, He requires both things of the servant, wisdom, and fidelity; for sin arises from folly also. He calls him faithful then, because he has pilfered nothing, neither misspent his Lord’s goods without aim or fruit; and wise, because he knew how to dispense the things given him, according as was fit”.

“Let us also that have money listen to these things. Not to teachers only does He speak, but also to the rich. Both are entrusted with riches; those that teach with the more necessary wealth, the rich with what is inferior. Let us hear the honor of him that is approved. ‘Truly I say to you, He will set him over all His goods’ (Matthew 24:47). What can be equal to this honor? What manner of speech will be able to set forth the dignity, the blessedness, when the King of Heaven, He that possesses all things, is about to set a man over ‘all His goods?’”.

“You are entrusted with your own possessions no less than he who dispenses the alms of the Church. As he has no right to squander at random the things given by you for the poor, since they were given for the maintenance of the poor; even so neither may you squander your own. Even though you have received an inheritance from your earthly father, and have in this way all you possess; even thus all are God’s. You desire that what you have given to the Church should be thus carefully dispensed, and don’t you think that God will require His own of us with greater strictness? For this end, He left these things in your hand, in order ‘to give them their food in due season’ (Psalm 104:27). But what does He mean, ‘in due season?’ To the needy, to the hungry! As you gave to your fellow servant to dispense, even so does the Lord want you too to spend these things on what is needful. Therefore though He was able to take them away from you, He left them that you might have opportunity to show forth virtue and to make our love for one another more fervent. But this He speaks, hinting at the insolent and the covetous, and indicating that the charge will be heavy, when they beat them whom they were commanded to feed”.

“He seems to be hinting here also at those that live in luxury, since for luxury too there is laid up a great punishment. ‘He eats and drinks with the drunken, pointing at gluttony’ (Matthew 24:49). It was not for this purpose that you received, that you should spend it on luxury, but that you should lay it out on alms. What! Are they not your own things, which you have? No! With the goods of the poor have you been entrusted, though you acquired them by honest labor or through an inheritance from your father! Could not God have taken away these things from you? He does not do this; He gives you power to be liberal to the poor”.

“Let us listen, as many as please the belly, as many as lay out on costly banquets the riches that pertain not at all to us, but belong to the needy. Do not therefore suppose these things to be your own. He lent them to you, that you might be able to approve thyself. Do not then suppose them to be yours, when

giving Him His own. If you had lent to anyone that he might go and be able to find means of gain, would you say the money was his? To you then also has God given, that you might do business for Heaven. Make not then the exceeding greatness of His love to man a cause of ingratitude”.

Basil the Great suggested⁶¹ that the “cutting in half” of the ungodly on Judgment Day (Matthew 24:51, Luke 12:46) refers to the eternal alienation of the soul from the Spirit. “Thus in hell there is no one who confesses, no one in death who remembers God, because the help of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3, Matthew 16:17) is no longer available”.

Parables on the Last Judgment

The three “parables” in chapter 25: the Ten Virgins (1-13), the Entrusted Wealth (14-30), and the Sheep and the Goats (31-46), are not precisely the same in their literary character. While the first two are certainly parables, the third is not a parable in the conventional sense. Rather, it might be called a poetic description of the way in which the prophecy of Jesus will be fulfilled. He had said, “The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works” (Matthew 16:27). All three parables are related to the preceding two and reiterate and expand their theme. The parable of the Thief (Matthew 24:43-44) states that the Son of man will return at an unexpected time, so be prepared because you do not know when. The parable of the Servant-Made-Ruler (Matthew 24:45-51) states that the Son of man will come after an apparent delay, so do not give way to evil because you do not know when he will return.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins: Matthew 25:1-13

“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be compared to ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were wise, and five were foolish. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise replied, ‘Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he replied, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man will come” (Matthew 25:1-13).

The wise will be ready always because they do not know when; and when the Bridegroom comes it will be too late to prepare. Jesus emphatically stressed the certainty of the suddenness of the Parousia, and the paramount necessity for disciples to be ready for it. From the Lesson of the Fig Tree⁶², the righteous may know the season, but they will not know the day and hour. The parable of the ten virgins is complementary to the Parable of the Servant-Made-Ruler, which immediately precedes it. The Parable of the Servant-Made-Ruler seems to focus on

⁶¹ Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, XL.

⁶² See the Study for Monday Evening of Holy Week.

the leadership while the Parable of the Ten Virgins seems to have all disciples in view without any distinction in responsibilities. It gives a further picture of the predicament in which disciples will find themselves at the Parousia if they have failed to prepare themselves for it. The day of opportunity, they will then discover, will have passed forever. The time will have come for a speedy and permanent separation to be effected between those who are prepared to enter into the eternal life made possible for them by Him whom they have accepted as their King. Those others, who though nominally subjects of that King, have failed through thoughtlessness, lack of foresight, or irresponsibility to discharge their spiritual obligations. Against the latter the way to the marriage feast, a symbol of the joy of the kingdom of heaven, will be barred. There is a terrible finality about the words “and the door was shut” (Matthew 25:10).

In 1st Century Judea, there were normally three stages in the matrimonial procedures that were customary among the Jews. The engagement came first, when the respective fathers of the bride and groom made a formal settlement. This was followed by the betrothal, a ceremony held in the home of the bride's parents, when mutual promises were made by the contracting parties before witnesses and presents were given by the bridegroom to his betrothed.

“The man and the woman were bound⁶³ to one another by the betrothal ceremony, though they were not yet actually man and wife. In fact, so binding was the betrothal that if the man died during the period that it lasted, the woman was regarded as a widow. The canceling of a betrothal was not permitted; if, however, such a thing took place, it was parallel to divorce”. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35) when Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they were married. When Joseph discovered this, he began private divorce proceedings (Matthew 1:18-19, Luke 1:27), until the Lord told him otherwise.

About a year after the betrothal, there was the marriage, when the bridegroom, accompanied by his friends went to get the bride from her father's house⁶⁴. He brought her back in procession to his own home for a weeklong marriage feast, where singers and musicians often led this procession. The bride was wearing a veil at this time. At some point, the veil was taken off and laid on the bridegroom's shoulder, and the declaration was made, “The government shall be upon his shoulders” (Isaiah 9:6). At this occasion, the ten virgins in the story are pictured as going to meet them, though whether as official bridesmaids, servants of the bridegroom, or children of friends and neighbors we have no way of knowing. It was this weeklong marriage celebration that was the setting for Jesus' first miracle when the wine ran out (John 2:1-11).

To be included in the wedding feast, one had to be present in the right place at the right time. If the ceremony wasn't perfectly punctual, one may have had to wait a while. For a weeklong celebration, there wasn't the hurry we have today where the bride and groom are anxious to leave. As they waited, they kept an oil-burning lamp. It was customary to leave an oil-burning lamp lit all night long in one's bedchamber but with the wick turned down to generate a dim light. While the virgins waited, they turned the wicks down. When they heard the procession coming, they all trimmed their lamps up bright. It was then that the five foolish virgins realized they didn't have enough oil to make it to the groom's house -- and had to go buy more. With no oil or coming late, either way they became indistinguishable from party crashers, and were left out.

⁶³ W. O. E. Oesrterley, The Gospel Parables in the Light of their Jewish Background (S.P.C.K.), 1936, p.134.

⁶⁴ Ralph Gower, The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times, Moody Press, Chicago, 1987, p. 66.

Because the parable is concerned with the *Parousia* of the Son of man, the bridegroom is the central figure; there is no mention of the bride. Since the primary purpose of the parable was to stress the importance of being prepared for the final coming of Jesus, mention of the bride would have been misleading. Moreover, it is the ten virgins in the story who represent the Church waiting for the return of its Lord.

What differentiates the foolish from the wise is precisely the failure of the foolish to face the possibility that the bridegroom, their returning Lord and King, may come earlier or later than they expect. And that in any case the coming will be so sudden that there will be no opportunity for making good any deficiencies that are then discovered.

“Nor could those who had spare oil in their flasks necessary for this purpose render last minute assistance to those who has come without it. Saving grace, it is here taught, is a personal possession and is not transferable. When the final day of salvation comes, none can deliver his brother. Each man is in this respect the arbiter of his own destiny. This truth is underlined in the reply of the wise, when they are asked to share their spare supplies with the foolish. ‘Never! There will certainly not be enough for you and us’. This uncompromising refusal is followed by the semi-ironical injunction go rather to them that sell and buy for yourselves. As it is now after midnight it is not surprising that the purchase could not be made in time”.

The parable ends with the command to be vigilant and ready, and with a reasoned statement for it which echoes, “But of that day and hour no one knows” (Matthew 24:36), and the day and the hour of the Lord's Personal Appearance remain unknown.

This parable with its exclamation, *The Bridegroom comes!* sets the beautiful theme for the first days of Holy Week with the Orthodox celebration of Bridegroom Matins. These services focus the attention of the Church on the *Parousia* of Christ at the End of the world to receive His Bride, the Church. This is the present anticipation of all the faithful.

John Chrysostom stated⁶⁵ that Jesus used the illustration of virgins in the Parable to direct His remarks to those people dedicated to a very noble and worthwhile cause -- celibacy. The Twelve, to whom He is speaking, had left everything to follow Him, including such things of the world as sexual intimacy (Matthew 19:29).

“Great things Jesus had spoken of virginity, saying, ‘There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven’s sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it’ (Matthew 19:12). He knew also that most men would have a great opinion of it. For indeed the work is by nature great. Yet He did not command this, but left it to the choice of His hearers. Wherefore Paul also said, ‘Now concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord’” (1 Corinthians 7:25).

However, even if one⁶⁶ has dedicated his life to a good cause, such as celibacy, yet does not show the fruitfulness of good works such as almsgiving and showing mercy, everything is wasted and the Lord says, “I do not know you!” (Matthew 25:12).

⁶⁵ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXXVIII, 1.

⁶⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXXVIII, 1.

“Since the dedication to virginity is great and has great honor with the multitude, one might feel as though he had attained it all and be careless about other things. Therefore He put forth this Parable to persuade them that virginity, though it should have everything else, if destitute of the good things arising out of almsgiving, is cast out with the harlots. He called the five virgins foolish for undergoing the greater labor and yet betraying all for want of the lesser. By lamps, He means the gift of virginity, the purity of holiness; and by oil, He means humanity, almsgiving, and aid to them that are in need”.

When the five wise virgins said to the five foolish virgins, ‘Go to those that sell, and buy for yourselves’ (Matthew 25:9), Chrysostom interpreted⁶⁷ the ‘sellers’ as the poor.

“Do you see what great profit arises to us from the poor? Should you take them away, you would take away the great hope of our salvation. It is here that we must get together the oil, that it may be useful to us there, when the time calls us. Nothing is more defiled than celibacy that doesn’t have mercy”.

The Parable of Entrusted Wealth (The Talents): Matthew 24:14-30

There are similarities between this parable and the Parable of the Minas (Luke 19:11-27); both are a corrective to the disciples' erroneous supposition, “that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately” (Luke 19:11). However, the differences between the two are such that it is better to see them as two distinct parables though with the same basic theme of servants trading with their master's money. Gregory the Great said⁶⁸ that the man or nobleman traveling to a far country represents our Lord ascending into heaven in the flesh that He assumed at the incarnation. Table 1 gives the basic structure of both the Parable of the Talents and the Parable of the Minas.

**TABLE I
Comparison of Parables of Talents and Minas**

	PARABLE OF TALENTS	PARABLE OF MINAS
master called	“Lord”	nobleman
journey	to a far country	to a far country
purpose	-----	to receive a kingdom
distribution of silver	5, 2, 1 talents	1 mina each
earnings	5 yielded 5 more 2 yielded 2 more 1 yielded 0	1st yielded 10 more 2nd yielded 5 more another yielded 0
rewards	5: ruler over much 2: ruler over much 1: cast into outer darkness	1st: authority over 10 cities 2nd: authority over 5 cities another: mina taken away

To call this “The Parable of the Talents” is misleading in English, since the English word “talent” refers to natural aptitude of inherent ability of certain people for certain functions. In 1st Century Israel, however, a “talent” was a measure of weight, in this case silver. The “talents”

⁶⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVIII, 2.

⁶⁸ Gregory the Great of Rome, Parables of the Gospel, IX.

given to the slaves in the parable are assets that belonged to the Master, and were entrusted by him to others to be used not only in their interest, but also in his.

The story starts abruptly with “For it is like” without any explanation of what “it” signifies. But since it immediately follows a parable said to explicitly refer to “the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 25:1), this certainly carries forward that theme. The previous story sets forth the importance of being ready; this one carries on that theme by showing what readiness means. After a long time the Master will return, and all will give an accounting of their stewardship.

“It is not a matter⁶⁹ of passively ‘waiting’, but of responsible activity, producing results which the coming ‘Master’ can see and approve. The period of waiting was not intended to be an empty, meaningless ‘delay’, but a period of opportunity to put to good use the ‘talents’ entrusted to the ‘slaves’”.

An important aspect to understand is that this series of parables on the Second Advent describe what Jesus will do when He returns. He goes into details regarding what He will be looking for and what basis He will use for judgment. The lesson of the Parable of the Servant-Made-Ruler and the Parable of the Ten Virgins is watchfulness. The lesson of the Parable of the Talents is judgment based on works.

The text of the Parable of the Talents reads:

“For it will be as when a man going on a journey called his servants and entrusted to them his property; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them; and he made five talents more. So also, he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.’ And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.’ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed, and gather where I have not winnowed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to every one who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth’” (Matthew 25:14-30)

⁶⁹ R. T. France quoted in Morris, Leon, The Gospel According to Matthew (Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids) 1992, p.627

It is not necessary for the understanding of the story to know the exact worth of the money⁷⁰. The point is that different amounts of money were given to three servants in the Parable of the Talents. The two, who received the larger sums, used them in profitable transactions and doubled their value, while the man with the smallest sum buried it, where he knew that at least it would be out of the range of burglars and the hazards of a fluctuating market. Similarly in the Parable of the Minas; each of three servants were given equal amounts of their master's money. Two of the servants used them in profitable transactions and increased their value, while one servant hid it in a handkerchief.

The lord of those servants was gone for an unexpectedly long time; but when he returned he called them all to give an account, congratulating and rewarding the first two for the practical evidence of their trustworthiness. But the third man in each parable, who tries to excuse himself, finds that he stands accused. He is condemned as 'a lazy ne'er-do-well'. He tries to shift blame to his master's overbearing personality, but his own behavior contradicts his excuse. If he really had believed what he had alleged about his master, he could have gone and received safe interest from the bankers. His questionable caution is treated as a breach of trust, for he was not dealing with his own money but with someone else's; the sum committed to him is now transferred to the man who has proved to be the most enterprising and successful. The highlight of the parable is found in the sentence passed on the third servant for his faithless inactivity (Matthew 25:30, Luke 19:14, 27); and with that the story ends.

The talents or minas that the Lord gave to his servants represent "the Grace that was given to us according to the measure of Christ's gift" (Ephesians 4:7). Paul quoted Psalm 68:18 regarding this: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men" (Ephesians 4:8). In the Parable of the Minas, all were given the same gift; in the Parable of the Talents, some were given more than others. This denotes that "there are varieties of gifts, but the same spirit. There are differences of deaconates (Greek: *diakonia*), but the same Lord" (1 Corinthians 12:4-5). And yet also, "for everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48). In the words of Gregory the Great⁷¹, this should make a man more humble and inspire him to use his gift more diligently in God's service.

The conclusion to be drawn: in the interval between the two comings of Christ, which may be longer than expected, "after a long time", the disciples must make continuous, practical use by the effort of their wills of those gifts of the Spirit with which they are endowed. No one is to grow tired, become "weary of well-doing" (Galatians 6:9), because it seems to take longer than expected.

⁷⁰ The Hebrew word *kikkar* corresponds to the Greek word *talanton* and is transliterated into English from Greek. It was a measure of weight and in its original usage, denoted the maximum weight a man could carry. For example, the golden lamp stand in the tabernacle was made from a talent of gold. The Greek word *talanton* has its root meaning implying a balance (that is used to weigh precious metals) and may have been a more precise measurement. In the 1st Century, the talent represented a weight of about 75 pounds Troy. When the master gave his slaves 1, 2 or 5 talents, this refers to that weight in silver, the common currency. In terms of buying power, 84 denarii were minted from one pound of silver and one denarius was a day's wage for a laborer (Matthew 20:1-13). Thus, translating talents to denarii: one talent = 6,300 denarii.

⁷¹ Gregory the Great of Rome, Parables of the Gospel, IX.

Cyril of Alexandria applied⁷² the Parable of the Minas to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Yet he said that the scope of the Parable covers the whole purpose of the dispensation to man and of the mystery of Christ from the beginning to the end. To illustrate this, Cyril reviewed what the Scriptures had said regarding the beginning of the Parable: “A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for Himself a Kingdom and to return” (Luke 19:12).

“Christ ascended to the Father, and became a man journeying to a far country; for heaven is a different country from earth; and He ascended that He might receive for Himself a Kingdom. When He ascended into heaven, He sat down at the Right Hand of the Majesty on High until His enemies are made a footstool for His feet (Psalm 110:1)”.

“However, ‘His citizens hated Him and sent a delegation after Him saying, ‘We will not have this Man to reign over us’” (Luke 19:14). Cyril mentioned that Christ had reproached the Jewish leaders: “If I had not done among them the works which no one else ever did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and hated both Me and My Father” (John 15:24).

“The prophets had continually told the nation of Israel to expect the King. But the Jewish leaders rejected their King. Pontus Pilate asked them, ‘Shall I crucify your King? They answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar!’ (John 19:15). Cyril concluded that they denied the Kingdom of Christ and fell under the domination of Satan, and brought upon themselves the yoke of sin, which cannot be thrown off. Israel in its madness was not open to instruction, and therefore it has continued in slavery”.

Cyril pointed out⁷³ that the nobleman did not give the minas to those that hated Him (Luke 19:14), but only to His servants. “These have been entrusted with these gifts according to the measure of each one’s readiness and disposition. The distribution was made suitably to the measure of each one’s faculties. ‘These are those who eat solid food (not babies who drink only milk) and are mature, those who by reason of practice have their senses exercised to discern good and evil’ (Hebrews 5:13, 14). Examples of these are the wise disciples and those who succeeded them, including those who stand at the head of the holy Churches who ‘shine as lights in the world holding fast the Word of Life’ (Philippians 2:15). These do business with their minas (Luke 19:13) and trade with their talents (Matthew 25:16) and seek spiritual increase. ‘Who then is that faithful and wise steward (literally household manager) whom his Master will make ruler over His household, to give them their portion of food in due seasons? Blessed is that slave whom his Master will find so doing when He comes; He will make him ruler over all that He has’ (Luke 12:42-44). Giving one’s fellow servants food is the distribution of the benefits of spiritual instruction and satisfying those who hunger after righteousness”.

Gregory went on to suggest⁷⁴ that the gift of the five talents represents external (that is, physical or scientific) knowledge or the use of the five senses. These persons, he said, may not understand interior or mystical things, but yet, “by their desire for their heavenly home, teach sound doctrine to all whom they meet, doctrine concerning those exterior matters which they can understand”.

⁷² Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on Luke, Homily 128.

⁷³ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on Luke, Homily 129.

⁷⁴ Gregory the Great of Rome, Parables of the Gospel, IX.

The gift of the two talents as suggested by Gregory represents understanding and action. “They understand the subtleties of the interior life and when they teach by their learning and example, they derive as it were a double profit from their trading”.

Of the one talent hidden in the ground, Gregory said, “To hide one’s talent in the earth is to occupy the intelligence God gives us in purely earthly matters, not to seek spiritual profit, never to lift our heart above worldly considerations. There are some who received the gift of understanding, but who understand only the flesh. Of these, the Prophet says (Jeremiah 4:22) ‘they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge’”.

As Gregory interpreted the Parable of the Talents, the one given five talents was not necessarily greater in the Kingdom of God than the one given just two. Each was given gifts according to his ability (Matthew 25:15), but Gregory interpreted them as being for different purposes. In the Parable of the Minas, on the other hand, each slave was given an equal amount. Some members of the Body of Christ may seem to us to be greater in the Kingdom of God than others, like an eye may seem more important than an ear (1 Corinthians 12:14-18); but that is not our call to judge. After all, the Lord has said that the first will be last and the last, first (Matthew 16:28-30). In both parables, the one rewarded the most was the one who earned the most return (Matthew 25:21, 28; Luke 19:16-17, 24). In some cases, it may be that the person who was forgiven much and therefore loved much (Luke 7:40-47) was the more motivated. This was likely the case of the Apostle Paul, who considered himself the least of the Apostles because of his former persecution of the Church (1 Corinthians 15:9-10).

A result common to both parables is that the one talent or mina that was taken away from the slave who didn’t use it, was given to the one who had the most (Matthew 25:28, Luke 19:24). In both cases, the slave who didn’t use his silver was called wicked and made excuses as to why he did nothing. His master said that at least he could have deposited his money with the bankers; they would have used it and would have given him interest for the use of the money (Matthew 25:27, Luke 19:23). Chrysostom referred⁷⁵ to the depositing money with the bankers to earn interest as speaking out, admonishing and advising within the Church. How many people who don’t use their gifts could have their gifts be used in the Church if only they would come and participate? On the other hand, those who use their gifts have more gifts given to them (Matthew 25:29, Luke 19:26).

Chrysostom continued, “Let no man say, ‘I have but one talent’, and can do nothing; for you can even by one talent approve yourself. For you are not poorer than that widow (who gave two mites, or 1/64 of a denarius, which was all she had (Luke 21:1-4). You are not more uninstructed than Peter and John, who were both ‘unlearned and ignorant men’ (Acts 4:13). But nevertheless, since they showed zeal, and did all things for the common good, they attained to Heaven. For nothing is so pleasing to God as to live for the common advantage.”

Chrysostom also pointed out that the penalty came with heavy accusation: “Cast the unprofitable slave into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:30). “Do you see how not only the spoiler and the covetous, not only the doer of evil things but also he that refuses to do good things is punished with extreme punishment”.

⁷⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVIII, 3.

The 'Parable' of the Sheep and the Goats: Matthew 25:31-46

This is more a 'poetic description' than a parable. The Son of man is presented as enthroned in glory as King and executing His divine prerogative as Judge of all nations. He is not a harsh Judge devoid of sympathy, but one who "can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself was also subject to weakness" (Hebrews 5:2). But "Son of man" is not simply a reference to our Lord's human nature, but to the figure in the prophetic vision (Daniel 7); His lordship, not His lowliness, is the focus here. The metaphor of the Judge as Shepherd comes from Ezekiel, "As for you, O my flock, thus says the Lord God; Behold I judge between the rams and the he-goats" (Ezekiel 34:17). And as usual in Hebrew poetry, there are no varying degrees of light and shade. The picture is painted in sharply defined contrasts of black and white.

In this account, the Lord does not mince words; He tells it like it will be without parables or hidden meanings. He will come with all the angels and sit on the Throne of His Glory. The hymns of the Church paint an awesome picture of this event, where thousands of angels attend Him while a river of fire flows by (Daniel 7:10). And from this vantage point all the nations will be gathered before Him and He will separate the nations as one separates sheep from goats.

The text from Matthew reads:

The Lord said, "When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me'. Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me'. Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food; I was thirsty and you gave me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not welcome me; naked and you did not clothe me; sick and in prison and you did not visit me'. Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me'. And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matthew 25:31-46).

While Jesus repeatedly, even constantly, refers to Himself as the Son of man, this is the only place in the Gospels where He speaks of the Son of man as **the King**. He did not disclaim the title when Pilate asked Him whether He was the King of the Jews. But during His incarnate

life on earth there was the possibility that He would be accepted as a conventional, political, earthly king, for He had not yet fully entered into His true kingdom. We must remember the words of the penitent thief, “Lord, remember Me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42).

All men are pictured here, as falling into one or the other of two classes, which are as clearly distinguishable as are sheep and goats to a shepherd (Matthew 25:32). The sheep, identified with the righteous (Matthew 25:37), are placed in the favored position on the right hand of the Judge's throne; and the goats, who have no other identification, occupy the unfavored position on the left.

In ancient cultures⁷⁶, sheep and goats were raised together (and still are today in some parts of the world) since both need grazing and they eat more or less the same thing. Yet sheep and goats are quite different. Goats were generally dark in color and sheep generally white. Goats are able to cope with mountains and rocks, but sheep prefer the flatter valleys. Goats will eat the leaves off trees, whereas sheep prefer grass. Goats graze all day while sheep lie down in the shade during the heat of the day. Goats were less popular than sheep because goats are destructive, grazing closer to the ground and destroying pasture. Goats also have a more stubborn, less pleasant disposition. It was the “scapegoat” that took the sins of the people to the wilderness on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:22). On the other hand, a sheep was preferred in many sacrificial offerings over a goat.

Both sheep and goats produced benefits for their owners. Sheep produced wool for clothing, milk for food and reproduced rapidly. Goats also produced milk (3 quarts per day) plus hair for a sackcloth tent covering and skin for leather. Goat meat was not as tasty as lamb, however. For a shepherd, who has raised both sheep and goats, separating them is easy.

The sheep are the elect, who have been gathered from the four corners of the earth (Matthew 24:31), for the gospel has been proclaimed to the entire world. They have “made their calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10), not by constantly saying, Lord, Lord, nor by repeated verbal expressions of their faith, but by numerous acts of self-sacrificing service, rendered unobtrusively to their fellow men. In virtue of the divine compassion and the infinite sympathy shown in His life on earth, the Son of man has come to feel the sorrows and afflictions of the children of man as though they were His own. He can therefore in a very real sense refer to the suffering men and women as His brethren (Matthew 25:40).

The righteous have all unwittingly been rendering service to their Lord by feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming strangers, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and visiting the outcasts in prison. By the very spontaneity and unselfconsciousness of their love, by their unaffected goodness, and their perseverance in well doing, they have proved themselves true sons of their heavenly Father. They are worthy, therefore, both to be addressed by the King as those who are “blessed by His Father”, and also to receive from His lips the gracious invitation to enter into their rightful inheritance, which has been prepared for them from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34).

⁷⁶ Ralph Gower, The New Manner and Customs of Bible Times, Moody Press, Chicago, 1998, pp. 132-145.

John Chrysostom noted⁷⁷ that the Lord said to the righteous not “take”, but “inherit”. The righteous are referred to as “blessed of My Father” (Matthew 25:34) by the Lord. For what are they blessed? For very small deeds that are well within their power to do!

“And in return for what do they receive such things? For the covering of a roof, for a garment, for bread, for cold water, for visiting, for going to prison! For indeed in every case it is what is needed, and sometimes not even that. For surely, the sick and one who is in bonds do not seek only for this, but the one to be delivered from his infirmity, the other to be freed. But He, being gracious, requires only what is within our power, leaving to us to exert our generosity in doing more. For even if they had done ten thousand things, the munificence would be of grace, since in return for services so small and cheap, such a heaven, and a kingdom and such great honor should be given them”.

In stark contrast, those on the left, so far from being welcomed into the divine kingdom, are banished from the presence of its King. They are designated cursed rather than blessed, for they have no place in the family of God, having none of the characteristics of His children. They are assigned to the ‘conflagration’ prepared for the devil and his angels.

They have adopted Satan’s position that self-interest should be the only motive in all their conduct. Consequently, they have shut their eyes to the spectacle of human misery, and turned a deaf ear to the cries of their suffering fellows. Without loving-kindness themselves, they cannot receive loving-kindness from their Lord. Yet they excuse themselves for having failed to render service to their Lord, saying that they had no opportunity to do so. The righteous had done so without even thinking about it, and thus were surprised to be rewarded for doing so. To those on the left, it had never occurred to them to consider their fellow man.

In comparing the actions of the righteous (Matthew 25:37-39) with the actions of the cursed (Matthew 25:44) one sees a clear parallel, but with a big difference. So also does the reply to the Judge to their respective questions. It is virtually the same except for the addition of the word *not*.

As in the previous parables of the ten virgins and the entrusted wealth, so in this picture of the Great Judgment, it is not so much positive wrongdoing that evokes the severest censure, as the utter failure to do good. The sins of omission are seen to be even more damning than the sins of commission. The door is shut against the foolish virgins for their negligence; the worthless servant is cast out as a good-for-nothing for doing nothing; and those on the left hand are severely punished for failing to notice the many opportunities for showing kindness which had been given to them. The significance of it all is eternal life or eternal punishment⁷⁸.

Why did the unrighteous refuse to do such small things for members of the body of Christ? Chrysostom summed it up⁷⁹ by saying that “covetousness once for all blinded them that were seized by it; and this though so great a threat was set against it”. They were caught up in the things of this world to the exclusion of the next world.

⁷⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXIX, 2.

⁷⁸ This subject is covered in more detail in the Study for the 5th Sunday of Luke. See this Study especially for details on the various aspects of the mystery of hell.

⁷⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXIX, 1.

Our judges will be our contemporaries (in terms of pointing out that we had no excuse). “The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here” (Matthew 12:41-42).

Some have been troubled that this text is all about works; which in one sense is certainly true. But we must keep in mind that it is common to the whole scriptural picture that we are saved by grace and judged by works. One verse, one paragraph, one book does not cover everything. In the Parable of the laborers hired to work in the vineyard, the ones hired at the 11th hour received the same wage as those hired at the 1st hour and who bore the scorching heat of the day (Matthew 20:1-16).

As we are waiting for His glorious Return, we, as the Church -- the children of God -- need to be doing what He has commanded and being what He has created -- new creatures in Christ.

Jesus Warns His Disciples Again that He Will Be Crucified: Matthew 26:1-2

As Jesus approached the hour of His Crucifixion, He did so with calmness and resolution. After finishing His discussion with His disciples about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and His Second Advent, He said, “You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified” (Matthew 26:2).

John Chrysostom spoke⁸⁰ of Jesus’ state of mind at this point, taking into account the fragile weakness of His disciples. He kept bringing up things that were painful to them. He was in the process of fulfilling the mystery of the salvation of the world. Chrysostom said:

“Note how He has in all His introductions started with what was most painful to them. For He did not say not, ‘You know that after two days I am betrayed’, but, ‘You know that after two days is the Passover’. This showed that what was done was a mystery and that a feast and celebration was being kept for the salvation of the world, and that with foreknowledge He went to His suffering. So then, as though this were sufficient consolation for them, He did not even say anything to them now about a resurrection; for it was superfluous, after having discoursed so much about it, to speak of it again. Moreover, He shows that even His passion is a deliverance from countless evils, having by the Passover reminded them of the ancient benefits in Egypt”.

First Parable from the Old Testament: Exodus 2:5-10 “Moses Abandoned to the Nile”

In a parable from the Old Testament, Moses as an infant illustrates Christ as He approached His Cross. This is the first of two parables during Holy Week from the early life of Moses. As Christ approached His Cross, He took on Himself the sin of the world (John 1:29, 2

⁸⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXX, 3.

Corinthians 5:21), and was forsaken by the Father (Matthew 27:46); that is, in His humanity. Similarly Moses was abandoned to the Nile, which was infested with crocodiles. The text reads:

“And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to the river to bathe; and her maids walked by the river's side, and having seen the ark among the reeds, she sent her maid, and took it up. And having opened it, she saw the baby weeping in the ark: and the daughter of Pharaoh had compassion on it, and said, ‘This *is one* of the Hebrew's children’. And Moses’ sister said to the daughter of Pharaoh, ‘Do you want me to call you a nurse of the Hebrews, and shall she nurse the child for you?’ And the daughter of Pharaoh said, ‘Go!’ And the young woman went, and called the mother of the child. And the daughter of Pharaoh said to her, ‘Take care of this child, and nurse it for me, and I will give you the wages; and the woman took the child, and nursed it. And when the boy was grown, she brought him to the daughter of Pharaoh, and he became her son; and she called his name, Moses, saying, I took him out of the water” (Exodus 2:5-10 LXX).

Moses, the brother of Aaron, was also an ancestor of Christ, although that aspect is not included in either Matthew’s or Luke’s genealogy. According to tradition, the Virgin Mary’s grandfather, Matthan, was a priest⁸¹. Luke records Matthan’s grandson-in-law, Zachariah, as being a priest of the order of Abijah, the 8th Lot (1 Chronicles 24:10) and Elizabeth as being a daughter of Aaron (Luke 1:5). Since the Virgin Mary was Elizabeth’s cousin, Mary was also among the daughters of Aaron as well as being descended from David and Judah. This means that Christ, in His earthly parentage, was descended from both a Priest and a King (See Hebrews 3:1-3, 4:14-15, 5:6-10, 7:1-3, 8:1-5, 1 Timothy 6:15, Revelation 19:16).

Moses’ parents, Amram and his wife Jochebed (Exodus 6:20), had three children: Miriam, the oldest, Aaron and Moses. By faith, they disregarded Pharaoh’s command to drown Hebrew male children (Exodus 1:22) and hid Moses for three months (Exodus 2:2, Hebrews 11:23).]

When Jochebed couldn’t hide Moses any longer, she made a floating cradle and hid it among the reeds by the Nile. Miriam stood at a distance to find out what would happen. When Pharaoh’s daughter came to bathe in the Nile and found Moses, she had pity on him since he was such a beautiful baby. In rushed Miriam and asked Pharaoh’s daughter if she should go find a nurse. Of course, the nurse she found was Jochebed! Pharaoh’s daughter then paid Jochebed to nurse her own son until he was weaned, at which point Pharaoh’s daughter adopted Moses (Exodus 2:3-10). Thus Moses’ parents gave their son up to the Lord’s discretion twice: once to the Nile, and once to the daughter of the evil tyrant.

Josephus, the First Century Jewish historian, adds some details⁸² to the above account. One of the Egyptian magicians, perhaps Jannes or Jambres (2 Timothy 3:8) or their predecessors had foretold to Pharaoh that a Hebrew child to be born soon would bring down the Egyptian kingdom, would free the Hebrews, would excel all men in virtue and would be remembered through all ages. This was why Pharaoh ordered the drowning of all male Hebrews. To enforce the decree, Pharaoh ordered the execution of the entire family of anyone who disobeyed.

⁸¹ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, September 9.

⁸² Josephus, Antiquities II, ix, 2-5

According to Josephus, Amram spent a lot of time in prayer over this and the Lord spoke to him in a dream. The Lord reminded Amram how He provided for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and told him the same prophesy that the Egyptian magicians had told Pharaoh. In addition, He also told Amram that his child will be concealed from the Egyptians and would be brought up in a surprising way.

Josephus also said that Jochebed sent the floating cradle down the Nile where Pharaoh's daughter, Thermuthis, saw it coming and saw it come to rest in some reeds. Miriam followed Moses from the riverbank and watched as Thermuthis found him. At first, Thermuthis tried to get some Egyptian women to nurse Moses, but baby Moses wouldn't accept them. It was then that Miriam offered her solution: a Hebrew nursemaid.

All of this required a great deal of faith on the part of Moses' parents. And God responded to their faith by providing for Moses in a remarkable way. Not only did he get the best education available (Acts 7:22), but he represented Pharaoh's only heir, since Thermuthis was barren. Pharaoh's magicians⁸³ warned him against Moses, but he disregarded their advice to kill Moses and instead protected him and raised him as the heir to the throne.

Second Parable from the Old Testament: Job 1:13-22 "Job Stripped of His Possessions"

In the Second Reading, Job portrayed Christ as He was struck down without a cause as He went voluntarily to the Cross. This is the second of five parables from the life of Job that are used during Holy Week. The text from Job reads:

“And it came to pass on a certain day, that Job's sons and his daughters were drinking wine in the house of their elder brother. And, behold, there came a messenger to Job, and said to him: ‘The yokes of oxen were plowing, and the she-asses were feeding near them. And the spoilers came and took them for a prey, and slew the servants with the sword; and I having escaped alone am come to tell thee’. While he was yet speaking, there came another messenger, and said to Job, ‘Fire has fallen from heaven, and burnt up the sheep, and devoured the shepherds like wise; and I having escaped alone am come to tell thee’. While he was yet speaking, there came another messenger, and said to Job, ‘The horsemen formed three companies against us, and surrounded the camels, and took them for a prey, and slew the servants with the sword; and I only escaped, and am come to tell thee’. While he was yet speaking, another messenger came, saying to Job, ‘While thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking with their elder brother, suddenly a great wind came on from the desert, and caught the four corners of the house. And the house fell upon thy children, and they are dead. And I have escaped alone, and am come to tell thee’”.

“So Job arose, and rent his garments, and shaved the hair of his head, and fell on the earth, and worshipped, and said,

‘I myself came forth naked from my mother's womb,
And naked shall I return thither.
The Lord gave; the Lord has taken away;
As it seemed good to the Lord, so has it come to pass.
Blessed be the name of the Lord’”.

⁸³ Josephus, *Antiquities*, II, ix. 1, 7

“In all these events that befell him Job sinned not at all before the Lord, and did not impute folly to God” (Job 1:13-22 LXX).

Job was a descendant of Esau who lived during the years that Israel was in Egypt. His ordeals began with the Lord pointing out to Satan that Job was unique on the earth, “a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil” (Job 1:8). In his day, Job was unsurpassed in righteousness. Job even offered prayers and offerings for his ten children, consecrating them just in case they had sinned in their heart (Job 1:6). Satan felt that if Job were poor and destitute, he would curse God to His face (Job 1:11).

Satan recognized Job’s godliness, just as he recognized Christ (Matthew 4:1-10). Yet Satan felt that all Job’s righteousness could be attributed to the Lord’s physical blessings in Job’s life. So the Lord allowed Satan to take away all Job’s possessions in sifting him.

The way this happened is first the Sabbeans⁸⁴ attacked and took all Job’s oxen and donkeys, killing Job’s herdsmen in the process (Job 1:14-15). Second, fire fell from heaven and burned up all the sheep, killing the shepherds with the sheep (Job 1:16). Third, the Chaldean raiders came and took all Job’s camels, killing the keepers who were defending. Lastly, while Job’s children were having a feast at the house of the oldest son “on his day” (probably his birthday, Job 1:4) a great wind came from across the wilderness, collapsing the house on top of them and killing them all (Job 1:18-19). Today’s insurance industry would refer to these last two as “acts of God” even though their source is an act of Satan.

Job’s response to all this was to prepare himself to worship the Lord saying, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). Meanwhile, the Lord pointed out to Satan that Job held fast to his integrity “even though you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause” (Job 2:3).

Speaking from the Lord’s perspective, Paul said to give thanks for all things, not just those that we consider blessings. Sometimes, such as during the life of Job, there were things going on that Job had no knowledge of. The Lord had pointed out to Satan Job’s righteousness but Satan had challenged the Lord’s judgment (Job 1:8-11, 2:3-5). Satan was allowed to afflict Job with every evil imaginable such that Job was destitute and in great pain (Job 1:13-19, 2:7-13). Yet Job’s words were “Blessed be the Name of the Lord” (Job 1:21).

John Chrysostom stated⁸⁵, “If you give thanks when you are in comfort and in affluence, in success and in prosperity, there is nothing great, nothing wonderful in that. Compare this to a man giving thanks when he is in afflictions, in anguish, in discouragement”. As an example, one might recall Paul and Silas, broken and bleeding and sitting in a Philippian jail, but praying and singing hymns to God – at midnight (Acts 16:23-25).

Chrysostom encourages us to give thanks even for hell itself: “For surely it is a thing beneficial to those who attend to it, when the dread of hell is laid like a bridle on our hearts. Let

⁸⁴ This is the Kingdom of Sheba (the Sabbeans), from which the Queen of Sheba came (1 Kings 10:4). Their territory approximates what is Yemen today. The LXX translates “Sabbeans” as spoilers.

⁸⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, XIX.

us therefore give thanks not only for blessings, which we see, but also for those, which we don't see and for those, which we receive against our will. For many are the blessings He bestows on us without our desire, without our knowledge". In this regard, we need to remember how the story of Job ended. Job benefited greatly from his affliction both in this world and in the age to come (Job 42:10-17, James 5:10:11).

Whenever poverty, sickness or disasters affect us "then let us increase our thanksgiving; thanksgiving, I mean, not in words nor in tongue, but in deeds and in works, in mind and in heart". He reminds us of the words of our Lord and of the Prophet Isaiah, "What man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father, who is in heaven, give good gifts to those who ask Him" (Matthew 7:9, 11). "Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget you but I will not forget you" (Isaiah 49:15).

Chrysostom also pointed out⁸⁶ that it is possible to give thanks only from fear, which is not a great thing; it is also possible to give thanks even when in sorrow, which is a great thing. In this regard, he quoted Job, 'The Lord gave; the Lord has taken away' (Job 1:21). Not only has the Lord given, but He has also made us strong enough to receive.

"Consider an example, 'If some low person were to become king, he has it in his power to give a governorship to whomever he will. This is the extent of his power, to give the dignity; he cannot make the person fit for the office, and oftentimes the honor makes one so preferred even ridiculous. If, however, he has both conferred on someone the dignity and also made him fit for the honor and equal to the administration, then indeed the thing is an honor. Christ has not only given us the honor, but has also made us strong enough to receive it'".

The Lord saw His Cross as His Glory (John 12:23). Job wasn't aware of what was going on in heaven between the Lord and Satan, but eventually He realized that his ordeal was for his glory also. And as a result, Job was rewarded both in this life and in the age to come (Job 42:10-17, James 5:11).

Paul stated, "For the Word of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the Power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). The Cross is Wisdom, as Paul said: "We speak the Wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory." This wisdom "none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory" (1 Corinthians 2:7-8).

As Jesus went to His Cross, His disciples tried to prevent Him. When Peter cut off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest, Jesus rebuked him. "Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?" (John 18:11) "Do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53) A year earlier as Jesus spoke of His Cross, Peter said, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Matthew 16:22-23).

⁸⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Colossians, II.

In the life of Job, there was a larger event that was taking place: the building of Job's faith, and the proving to Satan that he is impotent in overthrowing the things God has established. The same is true in our lives.