

CHATTING WITH CHRIST

(VOL. I)

CHAT WITH THE LORD
ENGAGE HIS MEMOIR
AFFIRM HIS WILL.

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Rex Bassey
Zelia Bassey

Oil of Gladness MPCS Limited

CHATTING WITH CHRIST (VOL. I)

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DEDICATION

*To everyone who yearns for a deeper,
more intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.*

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PREFACE

What if you could sit with our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and listen as He gently recounts His earthly journey – not as distant history, but as a living conversation meant personally for you? This book invites you to that.

The Gospel according to Matthew the Apostle has transformed hearts for centuries through its testimony of the life, teachings, sacrifice, and victory of Jesus Christ. In view of that, we believe that many readers will appreciate something intimate, rather than observation reading alone. They desire not just to study the Scripture, but to encounter the Saviour within it. We also know that whenever we read or study God's Word, we instinctively begin to place ourselves within its narratives, embrace its truths as our own, and respond to what the Lord is saying. Thoughts, prayers, affirmations, and moments of worship naturally arise. This book simply gives expression to and encourages such heartfelt responses.

In these pages, the familiar passages of Matthew's Gospel are thoughtfully restructured into a dialogue between Christ and the reader. Here, it is a firsthand account of the Lord speaking personally and narrating His earthly experiences with compassion, authority, exhortation, and truth. The reader, in turn, responds with reflection, faith, surrender, gratitude, and appropriation of God's promises, as one who has the mind of Christ. Each subsection ends with reflective questions and practical steps for living out the truths it contains.

Readers will notice a distinct format—normal print and italics. This is adopted to portray the dialogue structure of the book: the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ appears in normal print, while that of the reader is italicized. The format will help the reader to clearly distinguish the speakers, while preserving the natural rhythm of conversation. More so, the contrasting styles symbolize different perspectives meeting in this profound solemn engagement.

This approach does not in any way seek to replace or undermine the authority of Scriptures. The Holy Bible remains the final authority. This book is simply intended to deepen the reader's engagement with God's Word. By presenting the Gospel conversationally, the reader is not just an observer, but is invited to move beyond passive reading into active participation in the unfolding dialogue—hearing the Master's words as living and present, and responding with the openness of a close disciple.

As you journey through these conversations with Christ, you will have imagery that you may find yourself standing beside Him at the Jordan, listening on the mountainside, walking through storms, witnessing miracles, confronting doubt, earning His kudos, apologizing and embracing mercy, and ultimately beholding the cross and resurrection with renewed wonder. This dialogue format encourages meditation, self-examination, prayer, and personal application of eternal truths.

More importantly, this book reminds us that the Gospel has

always been deeply personal. Our Lord did not come just to speak to crowds; He came primarily to call individuals. He still speaks to hearts today – inviting the weary to rest, the broken to healing, the sinner to repentance, and the faithful to deeper communion with Him. So as He speaks to you through this conversational style of Gospel presentation, may you not only read. Instead, it is hoped that you will have an enduring edifying experience.

Consequently, may these pages forge in you a more intimate relationship with Christ, renewed hunger for His Word, and greater confidence in the blessings and promises of God. May you not regard the contents as mere letters and words of men, but may you accept and understand them as the words of our Lord—which of course they are—and real chats between You and your Saviour, so that they may continue to work in you, ultimately bringing glory to the Father.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is a synergistic product of many minds.

Before we appreciate others who have helped in the production of this book, we acknowledge and honour You, our heavenly Father. But for You, there would be no book to write. We are grateful to You, our Lord, King Jesus Christ, who walked this earth about 2,000 years ago as God who became man. Your grand purpose of coming to earth was to restore our fellowship with God, which You did by paying the supreme price. We thank You, Holy Spirit, through whom this work has come to be.

There are people whom God graciously chose to assist in bringing this book to completion. They deserve special mention and our heartfelt appreciation. We acknowledge our late parents, Aloysius and Cecilia Bassey, for laying within us the foundation of “chatting” with God by teaching us to cultivate an intimate relationship with Him.

We also gratefully acknowledge the organisations and servants of God whom He has used to bless us in one way or another throughout the course of this work. We acknowledge Bishop Monday Ned, Pastor and Pastor (Mrs.) Emmanuel Bassey, Pastor Ebebe Ukpong, Dr. Sylvanus Ukafia, Pastor James Enemakwu, Rev. (Dr.) Effiong Isangedighi, Apostle John Anso, Dr. Effiong Ekerendu, Engr. Utin Ntofon, Apostle Bonny Akaduh, Rev. Saviour Owokere, Blessing Bassey, Peter Abang, Samuel Essien, Francis Okon, some officials of the

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The list is by no means exhaustive, but we cannot fail to mention some of our loved ones—Sylvia, Mfon, Ubong, the Victors, Grace, Augustine, Mercy, Isaac, Matthew, Patryce, Janice, Ethan, and David—whose love, support, and the conducive environment they provided greatly contributed to the completion of this work. You are truly awesome!

To our consultants, Mr. Victor Eyo and Mr. Yinka, and to all our contributors, whose diverse contributions have enriched this book, we say, “Thank you.” You rock!

READER'S GUIDE

Welcome to Chatting with Christ. This book is designed as a personal conversation through the Gospel of Matthew. In these pages, Christ speaks in the first person, drawing from the truths of the Scripture, while you, the reader, are invited to respond through reflection, prayer, and meditation, as illustrated by the sample responses.

The book features a unique format designed to make the conversation easy to follow. Christ's words are presented in normal print, while your responses as the reader appear in italics. This simple distinction will help you easily recognize who is speaking as you engage in each conversation.

Every subsection of this book includes Checkpoints and The Grace Challenge. Checkpoints invite you to reflect honestly on what you have read and how it applies to your life. The Grace Challenge presents kingdom-oriented tasks designed to help you live out the truths you have encountered.

To gain the most from this journey:

Read slowly — Do not rush through the conversations. Take time to listen carefully to Christ's words and allow them to speak to your heart.

Reflect Prayerfully — After each statement from Jesus, pause and consider what He may be saying to you personally.

Respond Honestly — Use the meditative responses as a starting point for your own conversation with the Lord. Speak openly with gratitude, questions, repentance, or praise.

Act on the Word — Don't skip the Checkpoints and The Grace Challenge. Embrace these activities prayerfully and faithfully, and you'll get the most out of this book.

Keep a Journal — Consider writing down insights, prayers, resolutions, and even testimonies that may arise during or after your reading and the activities.

Pray Before and After Reading — Ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate God's Word and help you apply its message to your daily life.

Return Often — This book is not meant to be read only once. Revisit its passages regularly, allowing Christ's words to deepen your faith and strengthen your relationship with Him.

May these sacred conversations draw you closer to Jesus, deepen your understanding of His teachings, and inspire a richer life of prayer and discipleship.

CHAPTER

1

What a privilege!

My Lord and Saviour, thank You for revealing the Father to me. I no longer wonder what He is like, for whoever has seen You has seen Him. Long ago, He spoke through the prophets, but in these last days, He has spoken to us through You—His beloved Son, my King, the Heir of all things, through whom He created the worlds.

Please, Lord, help me to pay very careful attention to what You say, so that I don't drift away from You. Speak Lord, for Your servant is listening.

The Genealogy

Come, let Me begin by showing you My earthly genealogy through Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom I was born. It testifies that I am the Son of David and the Son of Abraham—the promised Messiah foretold in the Scriptures.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac was the father of Jacob, and Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah whose mother was Tamar, Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron was the father of Ram. Ram was the father of

Aminadab, Aminadab was the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon was the father of Salmon.

Salmon was the father of Boaz whose mother was Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed whose mother was Ruth, and Obed was the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David the king, and David was the father of Solomon whose mother, Bathseba, had been Uriah's wife.

My Lord, I'm surprised to see women included in a Jewish genealogy. It really shows that You came for everyone—men and women, Jews and Gentiles... and yes, even sinners like me. In fact, that's why You came: to make sinners like me righteous. Thank You, my Lord.

Solomon was the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam was the father of Abia, and Abia was the father of Asa. Asa was the father of Jehosaphat, Jehosaphat was the father of Joram, and Joram was the father of Uzziah. Uzziah was the father of Jotham, Jotham was the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah.

Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh, Manasseh was the father of Amon, and Amon was the father of Josiah. Josiah was the father of Jechoniah and his brothers around when the people were carried off to Babylon. After the exile, Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel was the father of Zerubabel. Zerubabel was the father of Abiud, Abiud was the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim was the father of Azor.

Azor was the father of Zadok, Zadok was the father

of Achim, and Achim was the father of Eliud. Eliud was the father of Eleazar, Eleazar was the father of Matthan, and Matthan was the father of Jacob. Jacob was the father of Joseph, who married Mary, My earthly mother, whom My Father had chosen.

My Lord, from what I understand, there were fourteen generations from Abraham to David, and another fourteen from David until the people were carried off to Babylon.

Yes, and another fourteen generations from then till when I came.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about how much Christ values relationship? What does this reveal about my relationship with Him?

The Grace Challenge: Commit yourself to a task or responsibility that demonstrates your relationship with Christ.

My Earthly Incarnation

When I came into the world, here is how it all unfolded: Mary, whom the Father had chosen to bear Me, was engaged to Joseph, my earthly guardian. But before they came together, Mary became pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. So Joseph, her husband, being a righteous man, and not willing to make her a public example, intended to put her away secretly.

One day while Joseph was thinking about these things, he dozed off. Then an angel appeared to him in his

dream and told him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, for it is the Holy Spirit who has caused her to conceive; and that she would bear a Son—Me—whom he should name Jesus.

And that's because You'll save us from from our sins. It's true, Lord. You're the God who saves—the Saviour of the world! You're the Lord, my salvation.

All these had happened to fulfill that which the Father had spoken through Isaiah the prophet, that a virgin would conceive and bear a Son.

...and Lord, that we'll call You Emmanuel – God who's with us. I'm so grateful that You're always with me – and that, through Your Spirit, You even live in me.

When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel had told him, and married Mary, but he did not sleep with her until she delivered. Thereafter, he named Me Jesus.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from the birth of Christ? What does it reveal about my purpose on earth?

The Grace Challenge: Take actions that show you have yielded, like Christ's earthly parents, for Him to manifest through you.

CHAPTER

2

Wise Men from the East

Some time after My birth in Bethlehem of Judea, during the reign of Herod, some wise men came from a country in the East to the city of Jerusalem and said, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? We saw his star in the East and have come to worship Him.”

Lord, how amazing that even the Gentiles heard the Good News of Your coming! So just as Prophet Isaiah foretold, nations actually came to Your light, and kings to the brightness of Your rising.

They truly lived up to their name—they diligently sought You, found You and worshipped You. Please Lord, keep quickening my heart to seek and worship You.

When Herod heard what the wise men said, he was worried, and so were many people in Jerusalem who also heard the news. So he assembled all the chief priests and teachers of the law, and asked them where the prophets had said I would be born; and they told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea.”

Lord, Prophet Micah had written that though Bethlehem

of Ephrathah was small among the clans of Judah, it would by no means be the least among Judah's rulers, 'cos out of it would come a Leader who would shepherd God's people, Israel; a Leader—You—whose goings forth are from everlasting. Please Lord keep teaching me to know You more and more—not merely to know facts about You.

When Herod heard the prophecy, he secretly called the wise men and found out from them exactly what time the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, telling them to search carefully for “the Child.” He said that when they had found Me, they should return and inform him, so that he too could come and worship Me.

Lies!

So they left after they had heard him. Then surprisingly, the same star which they had seen in the East appeared again. When they saw it, they were very happy; and it went before them until it stopped above where I was. Then they entered the house, saw Me with Mary, My earthly mother; and prostrated and worshiped Me.

Surely the host of heaven joined in. All hail the King! I worship You, Lord.

And when they opened their treasure chests, they gave Me gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Later on, God warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod, so they went back to their country through a different route.

My Lord, that's just like the many times You've wisely led me away from the enemies' pit and delivered me from the snare of the

fowler—often without me even realizing it. I can't thank You enough.

Checkpoints: What new thing have I learnt about the Kingship of Christ? Have I surrendered my will to Him? How?

The Grace Challenge: Present what you value most to Christ as a gift of worship.

The Flight to Egypt

Not long after the wise men had left, one day while Joseph was sleeping, an angel appeared to him in his dream and told him to get up, take Me and My earthly mother, Mary, and flee to Egypt, where we were to stay until he received further instructions, because Herod was planning to search for Me and have Me killed.

My Lord, angels were regularly chatting with Pa Joseph, instructing and counselling him on what to do. It just reminds me... Please, Lord, keep instructing and teaching me in the way I should go. Thank You for Your Spirit's gentle prompts and for being my Friend.

So when Joseph woke up, he took Me and My earthly mother, Mary, and left for Egypt that night; and we stayed there until Herod died. Then was fulfilled that which the Father had spoken through Hosea the prophet, that He would call Me out of Egypt.

And Lord, that's the same way You've called me out of darkness into Your marvellous light and rescued me from the

power of darkness into Your kingdom. Thank You, Lord!

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about prompt obedience to God? Have I overcome procrastination?

The Grace Challenge: You have carry what the world is waiting to see manifested. Obey God's Word concerning it NOW, as confirmed by His Spirit.

Massacre of the Innocents

Shortly after we had left for Egypt, Herod realized that the wise men had deceived him, and that made him very angry. So he ordered his men to kill all the boys who were two years old or under in and around Bethlehem.

Lord, that matched the time which those wise men told him they'd seen the star in the East.

Exactly! And it fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, that lamentation was heard in Ramah, weeping and great wailing. Rachel was weeping for her children, and she would not be comforted, because they were no more.

A whole generation... gone!

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about God's grace and the blessing of preservation? Am I trusting and obeying Him?

The Grace Challenge: Commit to making the Lord your refuge and your habitation, as the Psalmist wrote.

The Return to Nazareth

When Herod was dead, an angel appeared again to Joseph in a dream and told him to get up, take Me and My earthly mother, Mary, and return to the land of Israel, for those who had sought to kill Me were dead. So when Joseph woke up, he took us and went back to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Herod's son, Archelaus, had succeeded his father as the king of Judea, he was afraid to go and live there.

Lord, Pa Joseph must have been really stressed – escaping to another country, starting over there, returning home, and relocating again. Yet he always obeyed the angel right away. Please, my Lord, continue to give me the grace to always obey You in the same way.

Then being warned in a dream, he withdrew into the region of Galilee, and settled in the city of Nazareth.

My Lord, and that's how You fulfilled what the prophets had said – that You would be called a Nazarene. Then, the Jews regarded those from Nazareth as lowlives... so You were rightly tagged – born poor, Nazareth-bred, later despised and rejected by men, all for my sake. Truly, a real Nazarene!

It is written that Moses regarded reproach for Your sake of greater value than the treasures of Egypt. Please Lord, may no shame or insult I face for Your sake ever be too much for me to bear.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about Pa Joseph's commitment and obedience? Am I committed to preserving the legacy of Christ, even when it is not

convenient?

The Grace Challenge: Safeguard that which has been committed to you.

CHAPTER

3

The Testimony of John the Baptist

In those days, John the Baptist went to the wilderness of Judea and preach that people should repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. John was the man whom Isaiah the prophet had spoken of—the one who would be crying out, telling people to clear the way in the wilderness and straighten the paths, to prepare for My coming.

He wore simple clothes made of camel's hair and, like Elijah, he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.

At that time, many people from Jerusalem, and some parts of the region of Judea, and the regions around the Jordan River went out to the wilderness to listen to John.

My Lord, it had been prophesied that Your forerunner would come and they were expecting him, but when John showed up, many didn't know he was the one. Please give me the grace to always see and acknowledge You and Your promises.

As they confessed their sins, John baptized them in the Jordan River. But when he saw many of the Pharisees

and Sadducees coming to be baptized, he sternly rebuked them, calling them brood of vipers and asking them who had warned them to flee from the wrath to come.

He challenged them to prove their repentance by the way they lived, instead of thinking they would escape God's judgment just because they claimed Abraham as their father.

That age-old confidence...!

But it was useless because they were disobedient. Indeed, I am able to raise up descendants for Abraham even from these stones.

Yes Lord, and You've been doing that – grafting in new branches like us, who are of the faith.

John also warned them that the axe is already laid by the root of the trees, so every tree that does not produce good fruit would be cut down and burnt.

Lord, I'm so glad 'cos by Your grace, I'm fruitful. You've filled me with the fruit of Your Spirit.

He baptized them with water for repentance...

But Lord, You baptize with Your Spirit, just as Prophet Joel had said. You've baptized me, and You're purifying me... like gold – through fire. Thank You, Lord. But for those who reject You... eternal fire!

Yes. I will soon separate those who have repented from others who have not, just like a farmer separates the seeds from the husks and straws; and thereafter clears off the wheat and the chaff by gathering his wheat into the barn and burning the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Checkpoints: What does the Scriptures say about me? Am I fulfilling those prophecies in Christ?

The Grace Challenge: Stir up the Spirit of God in you! Be a burning light like John.

The Baptism

At that time, I went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John, but he tried to stop Me, and asked Me, "I need to be baptized by You, and You come to me?" But I told him to allow it to be so, because it was the right thing for us to do in order to fulfill all righteousness. So he agreed.

After being baptized, as I came up out of the river, the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove and rested on Me. Then suddenly the Father spoke from heaven, saying I am His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased.

My Father, I can't thank You enough. You've opened the heavens for me; You've sent me Your Spirit. In You, my Lord Jesus, I'm Your beloved child in whom You're well pleased.

Checkpoints: What new lesson have I learnt about Christ's

baptism? Am I humble enough to humble myself before those I lead?

The Grace Challenge: Humble yourself before all, knowing that whatever you do for the least of Christ's brethren, you are doing it for Him.

CHAPTER

4

The Temptations

After the baptism, the Holy Spirit led Me into the wilderness, where I was tempted by the devil. Having fasted for forty days and forty nights, I was hungry. Then Satan came to Me and said that since I am the Son of God, I should command stones to become bread. But I answered him with the Scripture, saying, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by obeying every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

Yes Lord, Your Word is my food – every bit of it. I don’t need miracles to believe You – I believe ‘cos Your Word is true.

Thereafter the devil went with Me to Jerusalem, the holy city; and when I was at the pinnacle of the temple, he told Me to jump off, for as the Son of God, it is written concerning Me, that Father would command His angels to protect Me and to bear Me up in their hands so I would not strike My foot against a stone.

Lord, that’s how he tries to deceive me, so that if it were possible, I could tempt You and risk losing my inheritance. But thank You for always giving me Your Word – the sword of the spirit – by which I overcome him.

I then reminded him of the warning in the Scripture, that no one should put the Lord God to test.

Yes, Lord. You're the Head of all principalities and powers. The complete essence of the Godhead was fully expressed in You when You came in the flesh. You're the only God.

Again, the devil went with Me to a very high mountain and showed Me all the nations of the world and their glory, then he offered Me all of them if I would bow down and worship him.

As if he didn't know that all things were made through You and they all belong to You! Lord, that's the same way he deceived Eve – tempting her with what he couldn't give. I'm so glad You didn't fall for it, though I sometimes do. Thank You, Lord. Your victory became my victory.

At that, I told him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and only Him shall you serve.'" Then he left, and angels came and attended to Me.

My Lord and my God, my whole duty is to serve You. Yes, You, and only You... and that's just how he flees from me whenever I resist him with Your Word. Coward!

Checkpoints: What strategies have I learnt from Christ for overcoming temptation?

The Grace Challenge: Overcome temptation by the Word. It is written...!

Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

Thereafter, when I heard that Herod had arrested and put John in prison, I left Judea and went back to the region of Galilee. Then later, I left Nazareth and went and stayed in Capernaum, which is by the Sea of Galilee, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Then was fulfilled that which Isaiah the prophet had spoken concerning the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea beyond the Jordan River... Galilee of the Gentiles!

Yes Lord, just as he had prophesied, those Gentiles who had been living in the darkness of sin saw You – the great Light of the world... and now You're shining through me as You shone on those who lived in the land of the shadow of death.

The kingdom of heaven was at hand, so I began from that time to preach that people should repent, just as My Spirit still proclaims till this day.

Checkpoints: Has anything struck you about Christ's interest in the Gentiles?

The Grace Challenge: Walk in God's light. He has bestowed on You His kingdom.

The Call of My First Four Disciples

One day, while I was walking by the Sea of Galilee, I saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew, his

brother — they were casting their net into the sea, for they were fishermen. Then I called them to follow Me and told them that I would teach them to become fishers of men for God's work. Immediately, they left their nets and followed Me.

When we went a little further, I saw two other brothers, James and John, in a boat with Zebedee, their father. They were mending their nets. I called them too, and immediately they too left the boat and their father, and followed Me.

My Lord, those fishermen left their businesses and kept following You always, and You made them legends in Your kingdom. Thank You for calling and choosing me. Thank You too for the grace to follow You, and for Your plan towards me.

Checkpoints: What is my reaction and attitude towards God's call and tasks? Do I respond immediately?

The Grace Challenge: "Come!" He is still calling. Arise and follow.

Great Multitude Receive Healing

After that, I went with my disciples throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing people who had every kind of disease and sickness.

Glory be to You, Lord, for even now, You're still doing that; and Your gospel has spread, not only to all parts of Syria, as

it was then, but it's now going to every nation of the earth.

Then they brought to Me all who were sick, afflicted with various diseases and torments, demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and I healed them. And great multitudes were coming to Me from Galilee, and the Decapolis, Jerusalem and other areas in Judea. They even came from the other side of the Jordan River.

And Lord, now it's all over the world!

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about Christ? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: "By His stripes you were healed." Claim it!

CHAPTER

5

The Beatitudes

When I saw the multitudes that had gathered, I went up the mountainside and sat down to teach. Then My disciples came to Me and I began teaching them about the blessed life. I said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Yes, Lord. I know I can do nothing apart from You. Thank You for making me part of Your kingdom as I depend on You. Lord, You carried my grief and bore my sorrows, so no pain I experience is foreign to You. Thank You for comforting me through Your Spirit.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Oh Lord! Please keep blessing me with the grace to be meek, 'cos by it, You've given me the earth as my inheritance. You've blessed my desire also, 'cos as I long to get things done the right way, You've filled me with Your Spirit. Thank You, my Lord!

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

My Lord, You've blessed me so much. You've taught me to show mercy to others, and I know Your mercy towards me endures forever. As You keep purifying my heart – my thoughts and my desires – I see You more clearly each day. Thank You, Lord. I know You'll continue to reveal even more of Your glory to me.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Yes Father, I'm being called Your child; and that's because of the manner of love You've bestowed on us.

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

Lord, most times it weighs me down, but deep inside, I feel blessed and at peace – 'cos You're reigning over me.

Also, blessed are you when people insult you, mistreat you, and lie, saying all kinds of evil against you for My sake. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for that is how they persecuted My servants who were before you.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about true blessedness? Is it different from the way the world defines being blessed?

The Grace Challenge: Consciously align your attitude with the beatitudes today, as opportunities unfold.

The Salt of the Earth, the Light of the World

You are the salt of the earth.

Thank You, Lord, for Your kind words. As the world fades and decays, You've made me the salt of the earth – to preserve, purify, and add flavour. And it's all by Your grace.

But if salt loses its saltiness, it cannot be made salty again. It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by people. And You are the light of the world. A city on a hilltop cannot be hidden.

My Lord, it's such a honour for You, the Light of the world, to call me so. I'm the light of the world! Yes. I'm like that city, and by Your grace, I'll never be hidden.

For no one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but it is set on a lamp-stand, so that it shines for everyone in the house. Likewise, let your light so shine before men.

By Your grace, Lord, this little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine...! Yes. It'll so shine before people, and as they see Your works through me, they'll keep glorifying You, my heavenly Father.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about being the salt and the light? How am I living as the salt and the light in a way that reflects Christ?

The Grace Challenge: Choose someone and intentionally stir up hope and joy in their heart. Let the light and the flavour of God reach the person through you.

The Law Fulfilled

You should know that I did not come to destroy the Law of Moses and the writings of the prophets, as some people thought. Rather, I came to fulfill them. Truly, as long as the heaven and the earth last, not even the smallest detail will pass from the Law till all is fulfilled.

Therefore whoever breaks one of these least commandments and teaches others to do same will be considered insignificant in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches them will be considered prominent in the kingdom of heaven. Listen, except people's righteousness exceeds that of the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, they will not enter the Kingdom of heaven.

I'm glad, Lord, that You're my righteousness – a righteousness found in You and far greater than that of the scribes and the Pharisees. Thank You for bringing me into Your kingdom. By Your grace, I'll keep living out the higher righteousness You've called me to, 'cos I'm seated with You in the heavenly places.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about Christ? What does this section reveal about my life in Christ?

The Grace Challenge: Live today as the righteousness of God in Christ.

On Grievances and Reconciliation

Lord, I've heard that the people of old were told not to commit murder.

Yes, and that whoever murders must face the law. But listen to me, anyone who is angry with his brother shall be brought to trial; anyone who calls his brother, 'Good-for-nothing' shall face the Council; and anyone who calls his brother a worthless fool shall be guilty of the fire of hell.

My Lord, I trust that You'll continue to give me the grace not to be angry with any of my brethren without a cause, or mock or insult them; and not to regard any of them as a fool. By Your grace, I've escaped judgement! I've escaped the fire of hell!

And Lord, if I'm presenting my gift at Your altar, but then I remember someone has an issue against me...

Leave it there, and go and make peace with the person immediately, before you come and offer it. Always try to make peace quickly with your adversary while you are still with him on the way. If not, he could take you before the judge, and the judge could hand you over to the officer, and then you are jailed. If that happens, honestly, there is no way you will be free until you have paid all your debt!

I can't risk that, Lord. Please continue to give me the grace to do all I can while I still walk this earthly path.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about how God's expects me to handle grievances and pursue reconciliation? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Reconcile with someone who has offended you before the end of today.

On Sexual Lust

You have heard that people in the past were told, “You shall not commit adultery.” But here is what I am telling you: whoever looks at a woman with an intention to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.

My Lord, I believe this applies both ways. Whether man or woman, You call us to purity of heart.

If your right eye or your right hand causes you to sin, get rid of it and cast it from you. It is better for you to lose a part of your body than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about Christ’s view on sexual lust? What does this reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Let go of anything that causes you to fall. Do that now, for the sake of your soul.

On Marriage and Divorce

Lord, regarding divorce, the Scripture says that Moses permitted it if a man gave his wife a letter of divorce.

Yes. It was also said that whoever divorces his wife

must give her a certificate of divorce. But listen to Me, anyone who divorces his wife for any reason except for sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries such a woman is committing adultery.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about Christ's view on divorce? Does my view conflict or align with His?

The Grace Challenge: Avoid divorce; abhor sexual immorality!

On Swearing

I know you have also heard that in the past, people were told not to break any promise they have made, but that they must do that which they had vowed to the Lord. But what I am telling you is this: do not swear at all when making a promise. Do not swear by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth...

'Cos it's Your footstool, my God.

Or by Jerusalem...

For that's Your city, O great King!

Do not also swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair to become white or black. But just say 'Yes' if you mean 'Yes,' and 'No' if you mean 'No.'

My Lord, please keep guarding my tongue. Help me to always speak the truth, just as You've taught me. May my "Yes"

always mean "Yes," and my "No," "No." No swearing – just honest, truthful words, all by Your grace.

Anything beyond that is from the devil.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from Christ's warning against swearing? What does it reveal about the way I speak?

The Grace Challenge: Bridle your tongue. Be known as a person of integrity.

On Going the Extra Mile

Have you heard that people were told to avenge an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth?

Yes Lord, injury for injury!

But listen! Do not take revenge on evil people. If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn your left cheek to him also; and if someone wants to sue you and take your shirt, give him your coat also. Go extra mile with whoever compels you.

My Lord, this has been one of the hardest part of the journey. Yet I'm thankful that Your grace is teaching me not to repay evil for evil. Let me rather be wronged, let me rather be cheated; and please keep teaching me to walk in Your ways.

Lord, I understand the Roman soldiers used to force people to carry their luggage.

If anyone compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to those who ask you for something, and do not refuse

to lend to those who want to borrow from you.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about meekness and pursuit of right? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Repay no evil for evil. Rather, when you are wronged or defrauded, bear it and trust God.

On Loving of Enemies

I know you have also heard that people were told to love their neighbour and hate their enemy.

Yes, my Father and my Lord. But I'm Your child; and as You've instructed me, by Your grace, I'll continue to love even my enemies and pray for the good of those who ill-treat me.

That shows you are indeed My beloved child, for I am He who makes the sun to shine on both the good and the bad, and I send rain to the righteous and to the unrighteous. If you love only those who love you...

Then, my Lord, I deserve no reward from You.

Because even the corrupt tax-collectors do the same. And if you greet only your brethren, You have done nothing extra; even unbelievers do that.

Whew! My Lord, what a high standard You've set! The depth of these kingdom ways... They've shown me just how destructive sin is and how much I need You.

I can't do this on my own. I just have to keep trusting You more and more every step of the way, 'cos You're the only One who cleanses my mess, declares me righteous, and gives me the

grace to live the life You've called me to. Thank You for always being there for me, Lord.

You must therefore be perfect...

Yes Lord. Thank You, my Father, for Your Word, which is perfecting me from glory to glory. By Your grace, You're indeed making me more and more like You every day.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from our Father's attitude towards everyone? How did Jesus Christ reflect that?

The Grace Challenge: Keep looking into the perfect law of liberty, and live by what you see.

CHAPTER

6

On Doing Good Works

Be careful not to do your good deeds in front of people, to be seen by them. Whoever does that, all they will ever get is praises from people—but no reward from our Father. Do not let even your left hand know what your right hand does, so that your good deeds could be in secret.

My Lord, You've taught me that true giving isn't about being seen by people but about pleasing You. So, by Your grace, when I give to the needy, I don't seek praise or honour from anyone; I choose to give in secret. Thank You, Lord, 'cos as I do this, You, my Father, who see what's done in secret, will reward me openly.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about giving of alms? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Do not let your left hand know what your right hand does.

On Praying

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly in places of worship and on the corners of

the streets, that they may be seen. Truly I tell you, they have already received their reward in full.

Thank You, Lord. Instead, just as You've told me, whenever I want to pray, I enter my room, shut the door, and pray to You in secret. And You, my Father, who see even what's done in secret, will reward me openly.

And when praying, do not use vain repetitions like the unbelievers do, thinking that they will be heard because of their many words. So do not pray like them.

Father, You know what I need even before I ask. So, just as You've taught me, Lord, that's how I pray: Heavenly Father, hallowed be Your name. Thank You, for it has pleased You to give me Your kingdom; Lord, may it come in its fullness! And let Your will be perfectly done on earth as it is in heaven.

Thank You for giving me my daily bread today. You've forgiven my sins. By Your grace, I also forgive those who have sinned against me. Lord, You do not lead me into temptation, but You deliver me from evil. For Yours, my Lord, is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

You can pray for God's forgiveness, for if you forgive people who sinned against you, then your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive them, your Father will also not forgive you.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about praying? What does this reveal about my prayer life?

The Grace Challenge: Spend time in prayer today. Pray honestly, sincerely, and from the depths of your heart as an act of devotion to the Lord.

On Fasting

When you fast, do not make it obvious like the hypocrites do. They wear long faces so that people can see they are fasting. Truly, I tell you, they have already received their reward in full.

Lord, instead, just as You've instructed me, when I fast, I wash my face and groom my hair, so that no one will know I'm fasting except You, my Father, who sees even in secret places. And You, who see even what's done in secret, reward me openly.

Checkpoints: What new lesson have I learnt from this section? What does this reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Do every act of self-denial in secret, not to be seen by people, but to please God.

On Single-mindedness: Treasures, Inspiration and Loyalty

Do not store up treasures for yourselves here on earth, where moths and rust destroy, and thieves break in and steal.

Lord, instead, I'm doing as You've instructed me. By Your grace, I'm storing up my treasures in heaven, where nothing can destroy, and no one can steal.

Do that, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eyes are like the lamp for the body. So, if one's eyes are good, the whole body will be full of light.

Lord, You've taken the veil off me and You've anointed my eyes with Your salve. Your amazing grace has opened my eyes, so now my whole body is full of light.

But if one's eyes are bad, the whole body would be full of darkness. If, therefore, the very light that is in someone is darkness, then that darkness is indeed great and terrible!

No one serves two masters at the same time; either the person will hate one and loves the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other.

By Your grace, Lord, You're the only One I serve. I'll never let money be my master; nor will I serve any other god.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about setting of priorities and single-mindedness? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Stay focused on heaven by laying all your treasures there. That way, you will be committed to serving only one Master – God.

On Worrying

This is why I tell you not to worry about the food and drink you need, or about clothes for your body. For life is worth more than food, and the body worth more than clothes. Look at the birds! They do not sow or reap, and they have no barns to store their food.

Yes Father. Yet, You are always feeding them, they don't

go hungry; and I know I'm worth much more than them.

Can worrying add any good thing to your stature or lifespan?

No Lord. Instead, it saps! And by Your grace, I'm also not worried about clothes.

Right! Consider the flowers that grow in the wild: they do not toil, neither do they make clothes; yet, even Solomon in all his splendour was not dressed as beautiful as any of them.

My God, I know that if You care that much for mere grass, which is here today and burnt tomorrow, then I know for sure You'll always take care of what I'll wear. O Father, please pardon my little faith!

So do not worry about what to eat, drink, or wear. For these are the things the heathen seek after, and I know that you need them; but seek first My kingdom and My righteousness...

Your kingdom... Your kingdom, Lord! My God, please keep giving me the grace to remain concerned with Your kingdom and to continue living in the right way that pleases You.

Keep doing this, and I will give you all those things.

Lord, I've noticed that as I focus on Your kingdom, You're faithfully taking care of my needs. So I'm not worried about tomorrow, 'cos tomorrow'll have its own worries. Please keep giving me the grace to live one day at a time.

Sufficient for each day is the trouble thereof.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from the vanity of worrying? Does it reveal anything about my pattern of life?

The Grace Challenge: Today, faithfully recommit yourself to the Father's business, trusting Him to faithfully provide for your needs.

CHAPTER

7

On Judging Others

Do not judge others, so that you will not be judged. For it is the way you judge others that you will be judged, and you will be dealt the same measure you deal out to others. And why do people like to look at the speck in their brother's eye and pay no attention to the log in their own eye? How can one tell his brother that he wants to remove a speck from the brother's eye while there is a plank in his own eye?

May I not, Lord. Please help me! May I not be like the hypocrites. May Your grace continue to enable me to always deal with my fault first before pointing out my brother's small fault, which is like a mere speck compared to the plank in my own eyes. And as You've advised me, I no longer give what is holy to those who don't value them.

They are like wild dogs. They will turn around and attack you. Neither throw your pearls before pigs, else they will trample them underfoot, for they will not value the pearls.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about having a judgmental attitude towards others? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Show love to someone who deserves to be judged by you. Let mercy prevail over judgment.

On Asking, Seeking and Knocking

My Father, You're such a faithful God. Just as You've promised, I always receive what I ask for when it's according to Your will. Yes, I find what I keep seeking; and when I keep knocking, the door is opened to me.

Truly, everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and the door gets opened for anyone who knocks. Would any parent give the children stone if they ask for bread; or snake if they ask for fish? Though humans are evil, they know how to give good gifts to their children.

And Father, You're always giving me much more good things than that whenever I ask. Lord, please continue to give me the grace to do unto others whatever I would want them to do unto me.

Do that, for that sums up the Law and the teachings of the prophets.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about asking, seeking and knocking in accordance with God's will? How does it apply to me?

The Grace Challenge: Treat others the way you would want them to treat you. This is the way of God's kingdom and the heart of His Law and the Prophets.

On Entering by the Narrow Gate

Broad is the way and wide open is the gate that leads to destruction, and so many people are going that way; because narrow is the gate and difficult is the road that leads to life, and only a few people find it.

Thank You, Lord, for Your grace that has enabled me to enter the kingdom through its narrow gate.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? How does it aid me in my life's journey?

The Grace Challenge: Choose life today. Remember, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."

On Knowing of False Prophets

My Lord, based on Your warning, I'm very careful of people who claim to be Your prophets, but they're actually fake. They pretend to be gentle, disguising as sheep, but they're dangerous like hungry wolves.

You should know them by their fruits. Do people pick grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? Likewise, a good tree cannot produce bad fruit and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit. But a good tree produces good fruit and a bad tree produces bad fruit. Every tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down, and thrown into fire. Therefore, know them by their fruits!

Not everyone who calls Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of My Father, who is in heaven. On the judgement day, many will say to Me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and do many miracles in Your name?” But I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Get out of My sight, you who practise lawlessness.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about false prophets and their fate? How does that affect my knowledge and attitude?

The Grace Challenge: To enter the kingdom of heaven, know and DO the Father’s will. Keep DOING!

On Hearing and Doing the Word

I am telling you now exactly what I told them then: anyone who hears My words and obeys them is like a wise man who built his house on the rock, so that it would be strong. That house... truly, though the rain fell heavily, the floodwater rose, and the winds blew hard against it, it did not fall, because it was built on the rock.

Copied, my Lord. Please keep giving me the grace to obey You. Lord, my faith is built on You, 'cos You are my Rock. Thank You that, no matter the storms that come my way, I'll stand firm, 'cos my life is founded on You.

But anyone who hears My words and does not obey them is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.

When the rain fell heavily, the floodwater rose, and the winds blew hard against that house, it fell completely with a great crash.

When I had finished teaching the multitudes, they were amazed.

Lord, I'm also overwhelmed and filled with awe... fully charged! Your words are deep and powerful – so different from the teachings of other teachers.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about the import of hearing and doing what God's Word says? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Don't only hear the Word – do it and you will be blessed in what you do. Keep track of how you are living it out.

CHAPTER

8

Cleansing of the Leper

When I came down from that mountain, great multitudes followed Me. Then a leper came and knelt down and worshiped Me, and said that if I am willing, I can make him clean.

Lord, You're always willing to help. I remember You stretching out Your hand and touching me, just as You touched that leper. You told me, "I am willing," and You cleansed my mess, just as You cleansed him. Thank You, my Lord.

After being cleansed, I warned him not to tell anyone, but to go and show himself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses had commanded, as a testimony for his cleansing.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from Jesus Christ? Am I mirroring Him?

The Grace Challenge: Engage in at least five acts of compassion towards others, then do more.

Healing of the Centurion's Servant

Later, when I entered Capernaum, a centurion of the Roman army came and pleaded I should come and heal his servant who laid at home paralyzed and in severe pains; and I agreed to go with him.

Lord, just like that centurion had said, I know I'm not worthy to have You in this my tent – yet You don't mind, as You've made it Your home. All I ever need are Your words, for they are life... and health to all my flesh.

And Lord, I acknowledge Your authority, just as he did. Just as he understood authority, I know that You're the Head of all principalities and powers; and Your words are commands that must be obeyed – even by demons!

When I heard what that Gentile said, I was surprised at his faith in Me, so I told those who followed us that I had not found anyone with such great faith in Israel.

I also told them plainly that many will come from other nations and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in My kingdom, while many Israelites, the supposed partakers of the kingdom, will be cast out into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. I then told the centurion to go home, for it would be done for him as he had believed.

Lord, that's the same thing You often tell me; and Your Word has made me whole, just as it healed the centurion's servant.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about the centurion?

What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Exercise your faith in Christ today for something that is in line with His will.

Healing of Peter's Mother-in-law

Later on, I went to Peter's house. There, I saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. So I touched her hand, and immediately she was well. Then she got up and served us.

Lord, that's exactly how You've been taking care of my problems. Thank You for restoring me again and again. By Your grace, I'll continue to serve You faithfully for the rest of my life.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from Christ? To what extent is my life impacting people?

The Grace Challenge: Make a positive impact, no matter how small — even if it's just a smile — on the next person you meet, then the next, and the next... Let God's love flow through you to each one.

Healing of the Multitude After Sabbath Sunset

That evening, people brought many who were demon-possessed, and I cast out the demons, and healed all who were sick.

And that's how You've been saving lives, even till today. Lord, this is exactly what Prophet Isaiah said about You: that You would take away our sicknesses and bear our diseases.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from Christ? Am I truly reflecting His compassion?

The Grace Challenge: Use what you have to touch as many lives as you can over the next 24 hours, until you lose count.

The Cost of Being a Disciple

When I saw great multitudes gathered around Me, I told My disciples we have to cross to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Then one of the teachers of the law came to Me and said he would follow Me wherever I went. But I told him that foxes have holes and birds have nests, but I have nowhere to lay My head—no home of My own!

After that, one of My disciples asked Me to allow him first to go and bury his father. But I told him to follow Me, and let those who were spiritually dead to bury their own dead.

My Lord, please let Your grace sustain me. May I never look back, now that my hand is on the plough; and may zeal for Your house consume me, O God.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about the cost of discipleship? What price have I paid, or am I willing to pay, to follow Christ?

The Grace Challenge: Make a commitment, or renew your commitment, to follow Christ faithfully.

Calming the Storm

When I got into the boat, My disciples joined Me. Then suddenly a fierce storm hit the sea and water began to fill our boat, but I was asleep. Then My disciples came and woke Me up, screaming, "Save us Lord! We are dying!" And I asked them, "Why are you afraid, O you men of little faith?"

Lord, even me – at times, my faith fails because of fear.

Then I got up and rebuked the wind and sea, and instantly there was great calm.

Lord, at times it seems You've gone quiet in the middle of the storm, but just when all hope seems lost, You speak and there is peace. Thank You, Lord, 'cos You're always right on time. You always make everything beautiful in its time.

My disciples were amazed and wondered what kind of Man I was, that even the wind and the sea obeyed Me.

Lord, I'm glad You've revealed Yourself to me. You are Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace! Yes, Lord, I know You are God!

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about Christ? What does this section reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Know that Christ is always with you. Acknowledge Him even in the midst of your storms.

Healing of the Demoniacs

When we got to the other side of the sea, in the country of the Gergesenes, two demon-possessed men came out from caves that were used as tombs, and met Me. They were so fierce and strong that everyone avoided walking through that area. All of a sudden, they yelled, “What do we have to do with You, Jesus, Son of God? Have You come to here to torment us before the appointed time?”

At that time, there was a large herd of pigs feeding at a distance. The demons pleaded that if I cast them out from those men, I should allow them to go into the pigs, and I told them to go; so they went out from the men and entered the pigs.

Lord, that shows me how much You care for people. Thank You, 'cos I'm worth far more than many sparrows in Your sight. You value us so much that You willingly delivered that man, even though a whole herd of pigs was lost.

Suddenly, the whole herd of pigs rushed down the steep cliff into the sea and drowned.

When the herdsmen saw what had happened, they fled into the city and told the townspeople everything that had happened – to their pigs, and to the men who had been demon-possessed. Then about the entire town came out to meet Me; and when they saw Me, they pleaded that I should leave their territory.

Instead of rejoicing that salvation had come to them, they rejected You? So sad! O my Lord, please may I never miss my season of visitation!

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about Christ? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Acknowledge and rejoice in your day of visitation. Behold, today is your day of salvation.

CHAPTER

9

Forgiving and Healing the Paralytic

So I got into the boat, crossed over, and came to Capernaum, the town I lived. There, they brought to Me a man who was paralyzed, lying on a bed. When I saw their faith, I told the paralytic to cheer up, for his sins are forgiven. But some teachers of the law who were there said to themselves that I am blaspheming.

Lord, that was a clear clue that You're the Christ. Long before then, it had been written that You would justify many, forgiving our iniquities and remembering our sins no more. Compassion and forgiveness belong to You—yet they still missed it! I'll keep thanking You, Lord, for revealing Yourself to me.

I knew their evil thoughts, so I rebuked them and asked, “Tell Me, which one is easier to say: ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or, ‘Get up and walk’?” But that they may know that I have power on earth to forgive sins, I told the paralytic to get up, pick his mat and go home; and he got up, picked up his mat, and walked to his house. When the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

Glory! Marvellous are Your works, O Lord!

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from Christ? To what extent am I reflecting His light?

The Grace Challenge: Jesus has the power to forgive sins and to heal. Like the friends of the paralytic, exercise faith in Christ for the salvation and healing of your loved one(s).

The Call of Matthew

As I passed by from there, I saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collection office. I told him to follow Me, and he got up and followed Me. Later on, Matthew invited Me to his house; and while I was eating there, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Me and My disciples.

When the Pharisees saw it, they asked My disciples why I was eating with tax collectors and sinners, and I heard it. So I told them that those who are healthy do not need a doctor, but it is those who are sick that do.

Lord, You've truly taught me the meaning of what Prophet Hosea wrote, and I know it's true: You desire mercy, not sacrifice. By Your grace, may I always reflect that mercy to others.

Yes, of course! I did not come to call those who thought they were righteous, but to call sinners to repent.

Checkpoints: What new lesson have I learnt from the call of Matthew? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Respond now to whatever the Lord is calling you to do, and let Him transform your life for the

better.

On Fasting, and Mixing of Old and New Teachings

Then the disciples of John the Baptist came to Me and asked why they and the Pharisees fasted often, but My disciples did not. And I answered with a parable, asking them whether the friends of the bridegroom could mourn while he was still with them.

Of course not, Lord! You're the Bridegroom.

So I told them that the time would come when the Bridegroom would be taken away from them. Then they would fast.

I also used this other parable to explain it to them: no one patches an old garment with a piece of new cloth, for the new cloth will shrink and pull away from the garment, making the tear even worse. Likewise, no one puts new wine into an old wineskin, or else pressure will burst the wineskin, cause the wine to spill, and ruin the wineskin.

Yes Lord. I can't thank You enough. Please, by Your grace, may I never mix Your teachings with old traditions. They simply don't fit, for walking with You goes far beyond mere religious routines and rituals.

So always put new wine into a new wineskin, to preserve both.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about nurturing a relationship with God? How has it impacted me?

The Grace Challenge: Follow God's commands, not man-made traditions and doctrines.

Resurrection of a Girl and Healing of a Woman

While I was telling them these things, one Jewish official named Jairus came and knelt down and worshiped Me, saying that his daughter had just died, but I should come and lay My hand on her so she could live again. So I got up and followed him, and My disciples went with Me.

Just then, a woman who had suffered hemorrhage for twelve years came up behind Me, and touched the hem of My clothe, for she had said within/to herself that if she could just touch My clothes, she would be healed. When I turned and saw her, I told to cheer up, for her faith had made her well; and immediately she was healed.

My Lord, this reminds me of the times I suffered in silence for so long, drained emotionally, financially, and in so many other ways. Yet, the only One who finally healed me was You. Thank You, my Lord.

Later, when I arrived at the man's house, I saw flute players and noisy crowd crying and wailing; so I told them to leave the place because the girl was not dead, but sleeping. But they laughed at Me and mocked Me. But when they had been put out, I entered where the girl was lying, and took her by the hand, and she got up.

Just as You've given me a new life! Your words, O Lord, are life to all who find them. My Lord, I understand the news spread throughout the whole region; it's still being told even today.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from Christ and the healed woman? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Exercise your faith in Christ now. Act!

Healing of Two Blind Men

As I left that house, two blind men followed Me, shouting that I should have mercy on them. When I got home and went inside, the blind men also came inside.

Persistence!

Then I asked them if they believed that I could heal them, and they said they do. So I touched their eyes and said it should be unto them according to their faith; and their eyes were opened. Then I warned them not to tell anyone about it.

Lord, You've told me that so many times. Prophet Isaiah said You would come to our rescue, and that when You come, the eyes of the blind would be opened. Amazing grace! But Lord... How can I stop talking about Your goodness to me? You know that's a tall task! Please Lord, I ain't stopping!

That is how they went out and spread the news all over that region.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from Christ and the blind men? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Believe that God can do it. Just believe!

Healing of a Mute Man

As they were leaving, some people brought a demon-possessed man who could not talk. When I cast out the demon, the man began to speak, and everyone marvelled, saying they had never seen anything like it in Israel.

And the Pharisees?

No. They said I was casting out demons by the power of the ruler of demons.

Checkpoints: What did I learn about Christ's power? What does it reveal about my heart?

The Grace Challenge: Know that Christ is the Head over all powers. Don't allow fear of demonic powers to rule over your life.

The Harvest is Great

So in those days, I travelled through all the cities and villages in that area, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every kind of sickness and disease. When I saw the multitudes, I was filled with compassion for them, because

they were weary and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

There's still so much to be done, Lord.

That is why I told My disciples, as My Spirit still says, that the harvest is indeed great but the labourers are few.

My Lord, I pray, trusting that You, the Lord of the harvest, will continue to raise up and send out more labourers into Your harvest.

Checkpoints: What did I learn here about the ministry of Christ on earth? Am I following in His footsteps?

The Grace Challenge: Go out today as a co-labourer with Christ to bring in His harvest!

CHAPTER

10

The Twelve Apostles

After that time, I called My twelve disciples together and gave them authority to cast out demons from people and to heal every kind of disease and sickness, as I have also given you.

The twelve disciples were Simon, also called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James and his brother John, the sons of Zebedee; Philip; Bartholomew; Thomas; Matthew who had been a tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus; Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot; and Judas Iscariot, who later betrayed Me.

Checkpoints: What did I learn here about Christ and discipleship? Am I truly His disciple?

The Grace Challenge: You have the power in Christ! So pray over that sickness or situation, and trust the Lord for a change.

Sending Out of the Twelve Apostles

Then I sent the twelve of them out, after I had told them not to go to the Gentiles, nor enter any of the towns in the land

of Samaria, but to rather go to the people of Israel, who had left their God like lost sheep that had strayed from their shepherd.

The same charge I gave them is what I have given to you: proclaim that My kingdom has come, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons from people. Charge nothing, because I have freely given you My power, just like I gave them.

I told them to take no money with them, no travelling bag for their trip, no extra clothe or extra shoe, and no walking stick, for it is proper that people take care of God's servants as they go about His work. Yes, a worker is worthy of support. I also told them whenever they enter any city or village, they should find a hospitable person and stay with that person until they were ready to leave.

Lord, as You instructed, so I do: when I enter a house, I pray Your peace upon those who live there. If they welcome me, Your peace remains with them; but if not, it returns to me.

If any household or town does not receive you or listen to your message, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet. On the day of judgement, their punishment will certainly be greater than that of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Checkpoints: What new thing have I learnt about Christ, as it relates to His ministry? What is my attitude towards the ministry of Christ?

The Grace Challenge: Purpose today to give as freely as

you have received.

On Persecutions

Listen, I am sending you out to evil people, like sheep among wolves. So be as wise and cautious as a serpent, and as gentle as a dove. Just as I have been telling you, I told them to be careful with some people, because they would arrest and arraign them in courts, scourge them in synagogues, and drag them before rulers because of Me.

Please Lord, as You've said, may I always see such moments as opportunities to tell those people about You, just as the apostles did.

Whenever you are facing such trial, do not worry about what to say and how to say it, because I will give you what to say when the time comes; for the words you will speak will not be yours, rather it will be your Father's Spirit speaking through you.

Some people will betray their siblings who believe in Me, and cause them to be put to death. Some unbelieving parents will betray their children who are believers. Also, some unbelieving children will rebel against their parents who are believers, and cause them to be put to death.

My Lord, as You've said, even now we, Your servants, are being hated by some people because of You. But I know You'll see me through, for You've granted me the grace to endure.

Just keep enduring, keep trusting in Me till the end, and you will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you most certainly, I will come before you finish your work in all the cities.

No disciple is greater than his teacher and no servant is greater than his master. It is the desire of a disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master.

Yes Lord. Though it hurts, I'm honoured to be treated the way You were. That's why Your grace keeps me going, even when people call me names. After all, they said far worse things about You.

If they called Me, the Master of the house, Beelzebub, how much more will they slander you and the others in My household!

Checkpoints: What have I learnt here about the teachings of Christ on persecution? What does it reveal about my reaction to persecution?

The Grace Challenge: Ask God for the grace to be able to continue to proclaim the truth of the gospel, even in the face of persecution.

On the Fear of God

Therefore do not be afraid of those who persecute you, for there is nothing now covered that will not be revealed, and there is nothing hidden that will not be exposed.

Lord, as You've instructed me, I'll never hide the truth. So what You've told me in secret, I say it openly; and I tell others what You've whispers to me. By Your grace, I'm not afraid of man, 'cos they can only kill this body, but they can't destroy the life You've given my soul.

The only fear worth having is the fear of offending You, 'cos You're awesome, and anyone who refuses to obey You will end up in hell—body and soul!

I then asked them, “Are not two sparrows sold for just a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unless it is our Father's will. I know even the number of hairs on your head.”

Thank You, Lord. So I ain't scared of anyone or anything, because I'm the apple of Your eye. I'm worth much more than many sparrows, and You care so much for me.

Checkpoints: What is my attitude towards God? Do I have reverential fear of Him?

The Grace Challenge: Acknowledge that only God has power over death and hell; revere Him.

On Confessing or Denying Me

My Lord, please keep giving me the grace to confess You before others. Thank You for being my Advocate before our Father in heaven. Here on earth, I won't stop telling others about Your goodness to me. You're everything to me, for in You I live and move and have my being.

But surely, whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny

him before our Father who is in heaven.

Checkpoints: What did I learn here about being a follower of Christ? In what way am I denying Him in my life?

The Grace Challenge: Advertise Christ; refuse to be a “secret” disciple.

On Losing Life for My Sake and Finding Eternal Life

Many people think I came to bring peace. No! Instead, I came to create division, even within families, setting children against their parents, and daughters-in-law against their mothers-in-law.

It's true Lord. You didn't come to bring the kind of peace people have in mind. Instead, Your message breaks old bonds and demands a decision. Just as You said—and as You had spoken through Prophet Micah—some members of one's own household are now one's enemies.

Know that those who love their parents or their children more than me are not fit to be my disciples; and those who really want to be my disciples must take up their cross and follow in my steps. And whoever finds his life will lose it.

My Lord, by Your grace, I now see that losing my life for Your sake is actually finding the true life You've given me—life eternal. Thank You, Lord, for the grace to follow You.

Checkpoints: What did I learn here about faithfulness and

commitment to Christ? How am I reflecting this in my life?
The Grace Challenge: Reevaluate that relationship or habit that is hindering your commitment to the Lord.

On Being Rewarded

Whoever receives you receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives our Father who sent Me. Whoever welcomes God's prophet because he is God's prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward.

Lord, please give me the grace to keep receiving Your servants. As You've said, I know that my reward is great. By Your grace, may I never overlook an opportunity to help anyone who belongs to You, even if it's only as little as giving a cup of cold water. Thank You, my Lord.

Checkpoints: What did I learn here about giving to God's messengers? What has been my attitude towards it?

The Grace Challenge: Purpose to give more to genuine servants of God.

CHAPTER

11

On My Ministry, and John the Baptist

When I had finished giving those instructions to My twelve disciples, I left there to teach and preach in the nearby towns. John the Baptist, who was then in prison, had heard about the things I was doing. So he sent two of his disciples to ask Me whether I was the One whom the prophets had said would come, or if they should still keep expecting.

So I told them to go and tell John the things they had heard and seen: the blind seeing and the lame walking; lepers cleansed and the deaf hearing; the dead coming back to life and the gospel being preached to the poor. Blessed are those who do not fall away.

My Lord, when I'm in dire straits, I often expect You to act in certain ways; so I look for specific miracles that I think should change my situation. Yet, even while I behold Your wondrous works all around me, my own circumstances sometimes remain unchanged. Please keep reminding me that regardless of the challenges I face, You're still God—God of the hills and God of the valleys.

My Lord, thank You for blessing me. Please continue to give me the grace not to doubt You and turn away from Your truth.

As John's disciples were leaving, I began to tell the multitude about John. Then I asked them what they had expected to see when they went out into the wilderness to meet John—a reed swayed by the wind, or a man dressed in soft, expensive clothes like those in king's palaces, or a prophet.

Lord, as You said, John the Baptist was more than a prophet. He's the very one whom Prophet Malachi wrote about long ago when Father said He would send His messenger ahead of You, to prepare Your way before You. Then Prophet Isaiah also wrote about him.

Yes, indeed. Among those born of women, no one greater than John had arisen up to that time.

Lord, he truly deserved it. Father honoured him by revealing You to him and gave him the privilege of introducing You to the world.

Yet you are greater than him, and same with even the least person in My kingdom. See, from when John began preaching until now, the kingdom of heaven has suffered violent attacks, and violent people have been trying to seize it by force.

My Lord, Your kingdom is worth pursuing with everything in me. The Law and the prophets had been talking about it long before John the Baptist came. Then You made it plain that John was the Elijah who was to come. My Lord, Your message couldn't be clearer. Please keep my ears open and my heart eager to hear and obey You.

I had told them then, and I am telling you now: What can I compare the people of your generation to? They are like children sitting in the marketplace, complaining to their mates, “We played cheerful music for you, but you did not dance; we sang a dirge for you, but you did not cry.”

Exactly, my Lord. Because when John came, he didn't eat normal food or drink wine, and they rejected him, saying he's demon-possessed.

But when I came, I ate and drank wine, and they called Me a glutton and a drunk, a friend of hated people like tax collectors and other sinners. But wisdom is justified by its results.

Checkpoints: What new thing have I learnt here about believing in Christ? Do I allow circumstances to weaken my faith?

The Grace Challenge: Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Refuse to entertain doubt.

On the Fate of Impenitent People

After that, I began to rebuke the people in the towns where I did most of My miracles, because they did not repent. I rebuked the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida, as I am now rebuking some; for if the miracles I did there had been done in Tyre and Sidon, their inhabitants would have repented and put on rough clothes as well as put ashes on their heads, to show repentance. That is why I tell you: on the Day of Judgment, it will be more bearable for Tyre and

Sidon than for them.

Also, there were some in Capernaum who felt so entitled—they thought they ought to be exalted to heaven. But I told them they would be brought down to Hades; for if the miracles which I performed there had been performed in Sodom, its people would have repented and Sodom would have remained even till now. I tell you: on the Day of Judgment, it will be more bearable for Sodom than for them.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about relating with unbelieving people? What is my attitude towards my unbelieving neighbours?

The Grace Challenge: Arise, go and let more people know about the Good News.

On Getting True Rest

My Father, thank You, O Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding the truth from the wise and the learned, and revealing them to us who are like little children. Yes Father, this is how it pleases You.

Father has given Me authority over all things. He is the only One who really knows Me; and no one truly know our Father except Me, the Son, and those like you to whom I chose to reveal Him.

Thank You, Lord, for revealing the Father to me. I'm here in You, Lord, because I was tired of carrying heavy loads, and You've given me rest. I've gladly taken Your yoke upon myself

and I'm learning gentleness and humility from You. My soul has found rest in You, 'cos by Your grace, it's joy to follow Your teachings, and the burden of serving You is light.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about the relationship between the Father and the Son? What is my relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?

The Grace Challenge: Release that burden to Him!

CHAPTER

12

As the Lord of the Sabbath

After a short while, as I was walking through some fields of wheat on a Sabbath, My disciples were hungry, so they began to pluck some grains of wheat and eat. When the Pharisees saw it, they complained to Me that the disciples were breaking the law of the Sabbath. But I asked them if they had not read about what David did when he and his men were hungry—how they entered the house of God and ate the sacred bread.

And Lord, it was against the Law, 'cos only the priests could eat.

I also asked them, “Have you not read in the Law of Moses how the priests in the temple break the Sabbath law every Sabbath?”

Lord, the priests work in the temple on the Sabbath to offer sacrifices, yet they're not considered guilty. How much more when it's all about You! And You reminded them that You're greater than the temple.

Oh, that people would know that You desire mercy, not sacrifice. If they did, they wouldn't keep condemning the guiltless. And yes, my Lord, You're the Lord, even of the

Sabbath.

Checkpoints: What new thing did I learn about the authority of Jesus? What is my attitude as it relates to His authority?

The Grace Challenge: Let Your life be a living sacrifice. Don't allow man-made protocols to hinder you from worshipping God in spirit and in truth.

Healing on the Sabbath

From there, I went into their synagogue, and there I saw a man with a withered hand. Some Pharisees who were there asked Me if it was against the Jewish law to heal on the Sabbath.

Lord, everywhere You went, they seemed to be lurking around—not to learn from You, but to find fault with You. Yet, everytime, Your wisdom and grace exposed their hypocrisy. And sadly, people still do same today.

So I asked them if any of them had a sheep that fell into a pit on a Sabbath, if he would not go and grab it and pull it out. As valuable as a sheep is, it does not compare to man. That is why it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath! I then told that man to stretch out his hand. As he stretched it out, it was completely restored as the other.

Lord, even after seeing such a miracle, how could their hearts have still been so hard?

Instead of yielding to God's will for their life, they left that place and made plans to kill Me. But I left there because I knew their plot, and great multitudes followed Me. As I healed all their sick, I warned them not to tell anyone about Me or what I had done.

Checkpoints: What new thing did I learn about Christ's love for humanity? What is my response to it?

The Grace Challenge: Do that "good deed" NOW.

As God's Servant

Lord, You perfectly fulfilled Father's words through Prophet Isaiah. You're His chosen Servant, His beloved, in whom He is well pleased. His Spirit rested on You, and You declared justice to the nations. Yet You didn't quarrel or shout or seek attention in the streets.

Also, You were so gentle with the weak. You wouldn't break a bruised reed or snuff out a smoldering wick. Instead, You strengthened the weary and gave hope to the fainthearted. And You never gave up until You caused justice to triumph. Just as it was written, in Your name do people put their hope.

Checkpoints: What attribute of Christ have I learnt about in this section? What does it reveal about me?

The Grace Challenge: Pray NOW that God's Word, prophecies and promises will find expression in your life.

A Divided House Cannot Stand

After that, some people brought a man who was blind and

could not talk because he had a demon. I cast out the demon and healed him, so he was able to talk and see. It amazed the multitudes and they kept asking one another, "Could this be the promised Son of David?"

Lord, with the Pharisees?

No! Instead when they heard it, they said it was Beelzebub, the ruler of demons, that gave Me the power to cast out demons. I knew their thoughts, so I told them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand?"

Lord, I understand some of their followers used to cast demons from people. Whose power were they using—Beelzebub's?

I told them that those their followers would stand as their judges. But since I was casting out demons by the Spirit of God, then surely the kingdom of God had come upon them.

Now listen! No one can break into the house of a strong man, like Satan, and loot his things unless he first overpowers him and ties him up. Anyone who is not for me is against me, and anyone who does not gather with me is scattering.

By Your grace, Lord, I'm on Your side. Please keep using me to gather people into Your kingdom.

Checkpoints: What new truth have I learnt here about Jesus Christ and His kingdom?

The Grace Challenge: As a child of God, shine your light wherever darkness is found.

The Unpardonable Sin

That made Me reveal to them that God may forgive people for any sin and any evil thing they say, but He will not forgive them for blaspheming the Holy Spirit. God may forgive anyone who speaks evil against Me, but those who speak evil against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven—now or ever.

Lord, that's really frightening! Yet the Father, You, and the Holy Spirit are one. Please, Master, guard my heart and my tongue, and never let me speak carelessly about the things of Your Spirit.

Checkpoints: What is my relationship with the Holy Spirit really like?

The Grace Challenge: Pray and worship in the Holy Spirit.

A Tree is Known by Its Fruit

Lord, as You've said, it is wise to always have the same assessment of both a tree and its fruit—just as a person's works reveal who they truly are.

Yes. Either call the tree good and its fruit good, or

consider it as being bad and its fruit bad, for a tree is known by its fruit. But they were brood of vipers! How could they, being evil, speak anything good? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

A good person speaks good words, for his heart is filled with good thoughts; but an evil person speaks evil, for his heart is filled with evil thoughts. See, on the Day of Judgment, people will give account for every idle word they have spoken; for by their words they will be justified, and by their words they will be condemned.

Please my Master, set a guard over my mouth and keep watch over my lips. By Your grace, my tongue will not become a spark that sets a forest on fire.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section about the relationship between my character and my words?

The Grace Challenge: Examine your heart carefully, then ask the Lord to purge you of everything that dishonours Him.

The Scribes and Pharisees Ask for a Sign

After that, some teachers of the law and the Pharisees demanded for a sign from Me to prove that I was sent by God. But I told them that only evil and adulterous generation goes about seeking signs.

And Lord, they're still around today.

I told them no sign would be given to them except the sign of Jonah, the prophet. For just as Jonah was in the belly of a big fish for three days and three nights, so would I be in the tomb for three days.

On the Day of Judgement, the people of the old town of Nineveh, who had repented at Jonah's preaching, and the Queen of Sheba, who travelled a long distance to listen to King Solomon, will rise and speak against some people of this generation.

Lord, You're greater than Prophet Jonah and King Solomon. But even now, some haven't still repented. I trust that You'll continue to guide me to obey Your words.

Checkpoints: What new thing have I learnt about Christ?

The Grace Challenge: Believe God's Word. Don't chase signs and wonders—ask God to increase your faith.

On Those Who are Without the Holy Spirit

Lord, what happens when a demon is cast out of a person?

Listen, when an unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it wanders through dry places looking for rest. If he find none, he will say, "I will return into my house from which I came out."

When he returns, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with himself seven other spirits more evil than him, and they enter and dwell there.

Lord, then the person's last state will become worse than the first! Please, keep filling me with Your Spirit. I never want my life to be empty of You.

And that is what happens to the evil people of this generation.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about Christ's power to set people free from demonic bondage?

The Grace Challenge: Intentionally break away from that habit; don't return to your vomit.

Who are My Brethren?

I was still speaking to the multitudes when Mary, My earthly mother, and My brothers came around. They stood outside, wanting to speak to Me, and someone told Me they were around. So I asked him if he knew whom I truly regarded as My real family. Then pointing to My disciples, I declared that they had become members of My family; and so is everyone who does the will of My Father.

Lord I'm proud to belong to You. Thank You for adopting me into Your family. Please keep strengthening me to do Your will.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about Christ's view of relationship?

The Grace Challenge: Reach out with love to that neighbour or fellow believer, for in Christ, we are one family.

CHAPTER

13

The Parable of the Sower

That same day, I left the house to the shore of the Sea of Galilee and sat down there to teach. The multitude that gathered was so large, so I went and sat in a boat while the multitude stood on the shore; and I taught them many things in parables.

One of them was the parable of a farmer who went out to sow seeds on his farm. As he sowed, some seeds fell on the roadside, and the birds came and ate them up. Some fell on rocky ground, where they soon sprouted, as the soil was shallow. But when the sun became hot, the young plants wilted; and because the roots had not grown deep enough, they died.

Some seeds also fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Yet other seeds fell on good soil, where they sprang up, grew and produced a good harvest. Some yielded a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold. Then I warned them to listen carefully. I hope you too have taken it to heart?

Lord, this parable is deep! But why do You speak to some people in parables—even today?

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about the fruitfulness of God's Word? To what extent have I allowed God's Word to bear fruit in my life?

The Grace Challenge: Determine to be receptive to God's Word. Be teachable.

The Purpose of the Parables

You are blessed to know the mysteries of the kingdom, but others are not.

Thank You, Lord, for giving me these things. I know You'll give me even more.

But for those who do not have, even what they have will be taken from them. This is why I speak to them in parables: though they look, they do not see; and though they hear, they do not understand.

In them is fulfilled what Father spoke through Isaiah the prophet, that, "Hearing they will hear but shall not understand; and seeing they will see but not perceive. For their hearts have grown hard; they hardly hear with their ears; and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see, hear, and understand the truth; and turn from their ways, and I would heal them."

Lord, I'm grateful. Thank You for blessing me with this experience—one that many prophets longed to have: to see You and hear from You, but couldn't.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? What does it reveal about me?

The Grace Challenge: God has entrusted you with this special experience. Use it to point others to Him today.

Explaining the Parable of the Sower

Later, I explained the parable of the sower to My disciples. Listen, when anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, the devil comes and snatches away that which was sown in their hearts. This is what was sown by the roadside.

What was sown on the rocky ground, this is who hears the Word, and immediately receives it gladly. He believes it for a while, yet he has no root in himself, hence the Word does not grow deep in his heart. So when oppression and persecution arises because of his belief in the Word, he stumbles immediately.

What was sown among the thorns, this is he who hears the Word, but the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the Word so much that he does not give much thought to it. So the Word bears no fruit in his life.

And what was sown on the good ground...

My Lord, I claim that! I've heard Your Word, and You're giving me understanding. By Your grace, it's transforming my life from glory to glory, and I'm bearing much

fruit—hundredfold! Others are also producing, some hundred times as much, some sixty, and some thirty. To You alone be all the glory.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Live a fruitful life that glorifies God, and let Him prune you for more fruitfulness.

The Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds

I went on to tell them another parable: The kingdom of heaven is like a man who planted good seed of wheat in his field. But while people slept, his enemy came and planted seeds of weed in that farm and went away.

Then when the plants grew and the heads of grain began to form, the weeds appeared as well. So the man's servants came and asked him, "Sir, you planted good seeds. How come we are seeing weeds? Where did they come from?" And he told them the enemy did it. So they asked if they should go and remove the weeds.

My Lord, while weeding the farm, if they're not careful, they could also uproot some wheat.

Yes. The man told them to allow both the wheat and the weeds to grow together till the time for harvest. Then, he would tell his workers to first uproot the weeds, tie them in bundles and burn, and thereafter gather the wheat into his barn.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from the fate of the wheat and that of the weed? Which one best reflects my life today?

The Grace Challenge: Every tree is known by its fruit. Bear good fruit that glorifies God.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

I told them another parable, comparing the kingdom of heaven to the growth of a mustard seed which a man planted in his farm.

Lord, that's one of the smallest seeds.

But later, as I told them, it grew bigger than all the garden plants. It became a tree, and the birds came and made their nests in its branches.

Thank You, my Lord, 'cos by Your grace, the seed You've sown in me—Your Word—is flourishing. It's become like a spring of living water within me, and it is flowing on into eternal life.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? To what extent is Christ being formed in me?

The Grace Challenge: Don't quench the Spirit. Let God's Word sanctify you and transformed you from glory to glory.

The Parable of the Yeast

Then I told them yet another parable about the kingdom of

heaven: it is like yeast that a woman mixed into three large measures of flour until the whole batch was leavened.

Lord, by Your grace, that's exactly how Your Word is quietly and powerfully working through every part of my life, transforming me from inside out. Thank You, Lord.

Checkpoints: What has this parable revealed about my life? Am I growing in Christ as I should?

The Grace Challenge: Let the mind that was in Christ Jesus be in you.

The Prophecy about Parables

My Lord, You truly fulfilled the Scriptures. You spoke to the crowds in parables and revealed things hidden since the foundation of the world. Thank You, 'cos by Your Spirit, You've made these truths known to me. What a privilege it is to be taught by You!

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? What does it reveal about the Person of Jesus Christ?

The Grace Challenge: Spend time thanking God for revealing the mysteries of His kingdom to you. Live each day in the light of that revelation.

Explaining the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds

When I sent the multitude away and went inside the house, My disciples came and asked Me to explain to them the parable of the wheat and the weeds.

Lord, I can do that, by Your grace. Based on what You've taught me, You're the One who planted the good seed; the field is this world; we, who are under Your rule, are the good seeds; the weeds are evil-doers; and the enemy who planted the weeds is Satan. Harvest time is the end of the age, and the reapers are Your angels.

Good! As those reapers gathered the weeds and burnt them, so shall it be at the end of the age. I will send My angels to come and remove from My kingdom everything that causes sin and everyone who does evil, and they will be thrown into the fiery fire of hell, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Lord, then we, whom You've made righteous by Your grace, will shine like the sun in our Father's kingdom. Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear!

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? Am I truly living in readiness for the end of the age?

The Grace Challenge: Every tree is known by its fruit. Bear good fruit—let your life glorify God.

The Inestimable Worth of the Kingdom

My Lord, Your reign in My life means more to me than anything this world can offer. I'm like the man You spoke about who found treasure hidden in a field, hid it again, and in his joy went and sold everything he had and bought that field. Nothing compares to the treasure of Your Spirit within me. Thank You, my King, my Lord, and my Saviour.

Also, a wise person in the kingdom of heaven is like a trader who was searching for beautiful pearls to buy. One day, he found a pearl of great value; so he went and sold everything he had and bought it.

Your reign in my life is far more valuable, Lord.

Checkpoints: How much do I value God's kingdom? What have I given up for its sake?

The Grace Challenge: Live for life's greatest pursuit—seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

The Parable of the Fishing Net

The kingdom of heaven could be compared to a fishing net that caught many different kinds of fish after it was cast into the sea. When it was full, it was pulled ashore and people sat down and sorted the good ones into containers, while they threw the bad ones away.

So shall it be at the end of the world. The angels will come and separate the wicked from among the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Checkpoints: Do I truly understand what the kingdom of heaven means? What does my life reveal about my understanding of it?

The Grace Challenge: Allow God to have absolute control over your thoughts and actions. Let His kingdom reign in your life.

On Scribes Who Become Disciples

I hope you understand all that I have said?

Yes Lord. Your Spirit is teaching me, even beyond words.

I told them that every teachers of the law who had become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven was like the owner of a house who brings out both old and new treasures from his storeroom.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Let God's Word reach someone through you today.

Rejected at Nazareth

When I finished telling them those parables, I left that area and went back to My hometown of Nazareth. There, I taught in the synagogue.

Lord, they must have been astonished at Your teaching.

Yes. They kept asking each other, "Where did this Man get this wisdom and the power from? Is this not the that carpenter's Son—the Son of Mary? Is He not not the brother of James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? Are His sisters not with us?"

Lord, they thought they knew who You were. I appreciate

You for revealing Yourself to me and for being ever faithful. Thank You, Lord, for teaching me not to judge people by human standards, as they did.

You know... a prophet is honoured everywhere except in his own hometown and among his own people. I did not do many miracles there since they did not believe in Me.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about the life of Christ, and what does it reveal about my life? Am I faithfully following Him, even when it brings rejection, or am I seeking the approval of people more than that of God?

The Grace Challenge: Rejoice when you are insulted, humiliated or persecuted for Christ's sake, for great is your reward in heaven.

CHAPTER

14

John the Baptist Beheaded

At that time, Herod, who was the ruler of Galilee, heard some news about Me and thought I was John the Baptist, raised from the dead. That is what he told his servants. You know, he had earlier had John arrested and put in prison because of Herodias, who had been married to his brother Philip. John had told him it was not right for him to marry her; so he wanted to kill John...

Then Lord, there could have been trouble, 'cos the Jewish people regarded John as a prophet.

That is why he could not. But one day, when Herod was celebrating his birthday, Herodias' daughter danced before Herod and his guests, and Herod was so pleased that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she would ask. So the girl went and asked her mother what she should request, and the mother told her to ask for John's head to be given to her right there on a platter.

What a request, Lord! Sheer evil!

It made Herod sad, yet because of the oath he had made before his guests, he ordered her wish be granted. So

he sent a soldier to behead John in prison; and his head was brought on a platter to the girl, who took it to her mother. Later, John's disciples went, and took the body, and buried it. Then came and told Me.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section about John the Baptist's boldness and righteousness? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: He who practices righteousness is righteous, so live righteously, always doing what is right in the sight of God.

Feeding of Over Five Thousand People

After hearing the sad news, I left there in boat to a deserted place apart.

Lord, that must have been such a difficult time for You—losing Your relative and Your forerunner. It was also a sign of what awaited You. Thank You so much for enduring all You did for my sake.

When the multitudes heard it, they followed Me on foot from the cities; and when I landed and saw a great multitude, I had compassion on them and healed their sick.

Later that evening, since that place was remote and it was getting late, My disciples came to Me and said I should send the multitudes away, so they could go to the nearby villages and buy food for themselves. I, however, told them that the people did not need to leave; they should

give them something to eat. But they said they only had five loaves and two fish, so I told them to bring them to me.

After I had told the multitudes to sit down on the grass, I took those five loaves and two fish, looked up to heaven, blessed them and gave them to My disciples; then I told them to share to the multitudes. When they had eaten, the disciples gathered the fragments that remained and filled twelve baskets. Those who had eaten were about 5,000 men.

...and that didn't include women and children! Lord, You've done this so many times and You're still doing it—making little become plenty. Sometimes it seems so ordinary that people don't even notice the miracle, but I do. Thank You for always supplying all I need according to Your riches in glory.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about the benevolence of Jehovah Jireh—the Lord my Provider? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Reflect on the goodness and generosity of Christ.

Walking on the Sea

Immediately after that, I made the disciples to get into a boat and cross to the other side of the sea while I dismissed the multitudes. When I was done with them, I went up the mountainside alone to pray, and I stayed there until it was dark.

By then the boat was far from the shore, being tossed about by the waves because the wind was against it. Then, as dawn approached, I walked on the sea towards My disciples. When they saw Me, they were scared and they screamed out of fear, saying, "It is a ghost!" But I immediately let them know it was Me, cheered them up and told them not to be afraid.

Then Peter said if it was truly Me, I should command him to come to Me on the water; and I told him, "Come." So Peter climbed out of the boat and began to walk on the water towards Me; but when he saw that the wind was strong, he became afraid...

Lord, this speaks to me. Sometimes the storms of life seem so overwhelming that my faith wavers, and like Apostle Peter, I begin to sink.

And as he began to sink, he cried out that I should save him. So I stretched out My hand immediately and grabbed him.

My Lord, this is so me. Whenever I cry out to You for help, You're always there—right on time! Yes, I still doubt sometimes, but this my little faith, eh...! I know Your grace is growing it day by day. Thank You for never letting me sink.

When we climbed into the boat, the wind ceased. Then the disciples who were in the boat came and worshiped Me.

The same way I'll always worship You, my Lord, 'cos

truly You're the Son of God—our God who became Man. Oh yes... whenever You step in, there's always calm.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section about the omnipotence of God? How has it helped in my walk with Him?

The Grace Challenge: Keep walking. Keep looking to Jesus. Stay focused!

Many Got Healed

When we crossed and landed at Gennesaret, the men of that area recognized Me, so they quickly spread the news throughout the neighbouring regions; and they brought all who were sick, and begged that I should let them touch even the hem of My clothe; and all who touched it were healed.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Let God's compassion flow through you to everyone you meet today.

CHAPTER

15

God's Commandments and Man-made Laws

Later, some teachers of the law and Pharisees came from Jerusalem and asked Me why My disciples went against the tradition of the elders by not washing their hands before they ate. And I also asked them why they disobeyed God's command for the sake of their tradition. For the law says they should honour their parents, and that those who speak evil of their parents must be put to death. But they taught that it was okay for people to say, "What I could have used to help my parents have been devoted to God."

Lord, by so doing, they were teaching that people didn't need to honour their parents, hence encouraging them to disobey Your law. Please, may Your Word continue to abide in me—not man-made doctrines! That's sheer hypocrisy! As You said, Isaiah's prophesy about them was right.

Yes, because many people honour Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain, for they teach their doctrines as divine laws.

So I called the multitudes to come, and I told them to listen and understand. You also listen! It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person before God, but it is

what comes out of the mouth.

Lord, what You said must have offended those Pharisees.

Yes. Later, My disciples came to Me and said they were upset; and I told them that as a farmer uproots everything he has not planted, so would everyone who does not belong to My Father be uprooted. Then, and even now, there are people who do not understand my teachings, yet they are leading others who also do not understand. It is like the blind leading the blind!

Thank You, Lord, for giving me understanding. Otherwise, I could have followed them into the ditch.

Then Peter asked Me to explain the parable to them, so I asked why he still did not understand what I was saying; for they ought to have understood it.

I explained it this way, and now you should understand it too: whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eventually passed out of the body. But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and they are the things that defile. For from the heart comes evil thoughts—murder, adultery, other sexual sins...

Theft, lies, slander.

These are the things that defile a person, but eating with unwashed hands does not.

My Lord, please may Your grace keep me from the things

that defile!

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? How has it affected my view of man-made doctrines?

The Grace Challenge: Always choose to obey God's commands rather than man-made doctrines. Pray for wisdom, discernment, and guidance.

A Gentile Woman Shows Her Faith

As I left there and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon, a certain Canaanite woman who lived in that area came, shouting that I should pity her, as her daughter was severely possessed by a demon. But I did not respond to her, and she kept following us, shouting and pressing on. So My disciples came and told Me to dismiss her, and I told them that I came to first save the people of Israel who were like lost sheep.

Then the woman came before Me, knelt down and worshiped Me, and begged that I should help her. Even when I told her it was bad to take the children's food and cast it to dogs, and she agreed, yet still she said, "Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

Lord, that response always wows me, and I know such great faith moves You.

Yes, and because of that, I told her it had been done for her, just as she desired. And from that very moment, her

daughter became well.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section about the woman's faith? What does it reveal about my faith in Christ?

The Grace Challenge: Persist with humility and in accordance with the will of God. He gives grace to the humble and will faithfully accomplish His purpose for your life.

Healing of the Great Multitudes

When I left there and came near the Sea of Galilee, I went up the mountainside and sat there. Then great multitudes came to Me with the lame, the blind, dumb, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down before Me, and I healed them.

Lord, the crowd must have marvelled when they saw the dumb speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing!

They were indeed, and they glorified the God of Israel.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section about Christ?

The Grace Challenge: Know that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Trust Him without wavering.

Feeding of Over Four Thousand People

Later on, I called My disciples and told them that I had compassion on the multitude, for they had been with Me for three days, and they had nothing to eat. I did not want them to go back hungry lest they faint on their way home. But My disciples told Me there was nowhere they could get enough food in the wilderness to satisfy such a great multitude. When I asked them what they had, they said, "Seven loaves, and a few small fish."

So I told the multitude to sit down on the ground. After that, I took the seven loaves and the few fish and gave thanks, broke them and gave to My disciples, and the disciples shared to the multitude; and they all ate and were filled, after which the disciples took up seven baskets full of the leftovers. Those who ate were about four thousand men.

Again Lord, that didn't include the women and children. This miracle of multiplication... I've experienced it firsthand so many times. It's so regular that people often take it for granted, but I know it's Your hand at work. Thank You, Lord.

After I had sent the multitudes away, I got into a boat and went to the region of Magdala.

Checkpoints: Do I truly believe that nothing is impossible for God? How does this truth speak to my present needs and strengthen my faith?

The Grace Challenge: Trust God to supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

CHAPTER

16

The Pharisees and Sadducees Seek a Sign

There were some Pharisees and Sadducees who came to Me and told Me to show them a sign to prove I was God-sent, just to test Me. And I told them, “In the evening, you say, ‘The weather will be fine, for the sky is red,’ and sometimes, in the morning, you say, ‘Today, it will be stormy, for the sky is red and dark.’ Hypocrites...!”

Lord, that’s quite amusing, and it served them right. They could forecast the weather, yet they couldn’t read the signs of the time. Thank You for opening my eyes to what time it is.

It is an evil and unfaithful generation that keeps asking for a sign. I told them no sign would be given to them, and then I left.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? What does it reveal about the attitude of the generation we are living in?

The Grace Challenge: Believe Christ’s words that signs follow those who believe. Seek Him first, and experience His power through His Word.

The Yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees

Later, we got into a boat and after we had crossed to the other side of the sea, My disciples realized they had forgotten to take bread. It was about that time I told them to guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

But Lord, they didn't get the gist. Bread, then yeast...! They thought it was because they had forgotten to take bread. I would've thought the same too.

That was what they were discussing and I knew it. They still lacked faith, so I asked them why they were still talking about bread.

Thank You, my Lord, for not giving up on me either. You had just multiplied bread, and You'd done it before... yet they still couldn't connect the dots. In the same way, You've taught me so much, yet... Please may Your grace continue to help me understand, and never forget Your goodness to me.

At first they thought I was talking about bread; but they later realized I was telling them to beware of the teachings of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? What does it reveal about the attitude of our generation?

The Grace Challenge: Abhor hypocrisy. Live wholeheartedly for the Lord, knowing that nothing is hidden from Him

Peter's Confession

When I went with My disciples to the region of Caesarea Philippi, I asked them, "Who do people say I am?" And they said some people thought I was John the Baptist, others thought I was Elijah, while others said I was Jeremiah or some other prophets. Then I asked them, "But who do you yourselves say I am?"

Lord, Apostle Peter got it! Yes, like him, I know You're the Christ, the Son of the living God. You're God who became Man.

Thank You, Father. You've blessed me by opening my eyes to this truth. By Your grace, my faith will remain firmly rooted in You—the Rock on whom You've built Your church. Even death can't overcome it.

Thank You also, Lord, for entrusting me with the keys of Your kingdom. By Your authority and in accordance with Your will, whatever I bind on earth is bound in heaven, and whatever I loose on earth is loosed in heaven.

After that, I warned them not to tell anyone that I was the Christ.

Checkpoints: What did I learn about Christ? Who is He to me?

The Grace Challenge: Make decisions only after considering their alignment with God's Word. This is how we know we are in Him: when we keep His commands.

My Death and Resurrection: The First Prediction

From then on, I started preparing My disciples for what was coming. I told them that I had to go to Jerusalem, where the elders, the chief priests and the scribes would make Me suffer many things and kill Me, and that I would rise again on the third day.

Then Peter took Me aside and told Me I should not be saying things like that. He said, “Lord, no! That will never happen to You!” But I turned around and said, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a hindrance to Me because your mind is set on man’s concern, not on God’s will.”

My God, please help me to always think according to Your will. And Lord, I understand why he was scared. Until You came to set us free, we’d lived our whole lives in bondage to the fear of death. But by Your death, You rendered powerless the devil who had the power of death. Thank You, my Lord, for the victory You’ve given me.

Checkpoints: What are the lessons I have learnt from this section? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Only entertain thoughts that align with God’s will. Take every thought captive and bring it into obedience to Christ.

Take Up Your Cross and Follow Me

Lord, I so much long to follow You. Please may all that I do continue to be according to Your will. Strengthen me, Lord, when I have to suffer for Your sake, even if it’s unto death.

Yes, Lord, by Your grace, my mind affection is no longer on the fleeting things of this world. I've lost my life by surrendering myself to You, dying to this world; and in You, I've found true and eternal life. Even if I'd gained the whole world, it would never have been worth losing my soul. My Lord, nothing compares to this.

Stay on course; for at the fullness of time, I will come with My angels in the glory of our Father, and I will reward everyone according to their deeds, good or bad.

While talking to them then, I told them that some of those standing there would see Me coming in My kingdom before they died.

And it came to pass, Lord; they saw Your glory and Your kingdom.

Checkpoints: What are the lessons I have learnt from this section? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Choose and remain committed to the most important decision of life—receiving eternal life—by losing your life for the sake of Christ.

CHAPTER

17

The Transfiguration

Six days later, I took Peter, James and John with Me to a high mountain. There, they saw Me as they'd never seen Me before. My face shone like the sun, and My clothes were dazzling white; and they saw Moses and Elijah discussing with Me.

Then Peter told Me how wonderful it was for us to be there, and said if I wanted, he would build three tents: one for Me, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. As he was still speaking, a bright cloud appeared and covered them, then Father spoke from the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him!"

When they heard it, they became very afraid and fell with their faces to the ground. But I later went to them, touched them, and told them to get up and not be afraid. When they looked up, they saw no one again except Me.

Later, as we were coming down from the mountain, I warned them not to tell anyone what they had seen until after I had died and risen again.

But Lord, they believed what the teachers of the Law were

saying at the time—that Elijah had to come before You. But they didn't realize...

Yes, I told them it was true: Elijah was to come first and prepare everything. But he had already come, and they did not recognize him. Instead, they mistreated him however they pleased. Then I told them that I, too, would suffer in the same way. It was then that they realized I was telling them about John the Baptist.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about Christ? What would seeing Christ's glory do to my faith?

The Grace Challenge: See the glory of God everywhere—the whole earth is filled with it; the heavens declare it. Behold His glory in His Word and be transformed into His image from glory to glory.

Healing of a Boy with Epilepsy

When we got to the multitude, a man came and knelt before Me and said I should please have compassion on his son and help him, as he was epileptic and had terrible attacks that often made him fall into the fire, and sometimes into water.

He had brought the boy to My disciples to heal him, but they could not. So I rebuked them for their unbelief, and the faithless, corrupt generation they were part of.

Lord, I understand. They were slow to learn—just like me. But thank You for being so patient with me and never giving up

on teaching me.

So I told him to bring the boy. Then I ordered the demon that was causing the seizures in the boy to leave, and it left, and the boy was cured from that very moment.

Later, when I was alone with My disciples, they asked Me why they could not cast it out, and I told them it was because of their lack of faith. As I told them then, I am telling you now: even if your faith is as a mustard seed, you can tell this mountain to move, and it will. Nothing will be impossible for you. But you see that kind of demon? It will not go out except through prayer and fasting.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about Christ and the disciples? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Bear with one another. Trust in Jesus Christ.

My Death and Resurrection: The Second Prediction

When we were in Galilee, I told My disciples again that I would soon be betrayed into the hands of My enemies. They would kill Me, but three days later I would rise again.

*Lord, that must have made them very sad.
Yes, they were.*

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section about the omniscience of God? Do I live each day trusting that God already knows tomorrow?

The Grace Challenge: Do not be afraid, for the Lord—the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End—has you covered.

On Payment of Tax

Then when we arrived in Capernaum, those who collected the temple tax went to Peter and asked him, “Does your Teacher pay the temple tax?” And he replied, “Yes.”

Lord, You know what I’m thinking?

Yes. But when he came into the house, before he could even mention it, I asked him, “Peter, what do you think? From whom do the kings of the earth collect taxes—from their own children or from others?” He said it was from others. That meant the children were exempted.

But Lord, You still paid, so as not to offend them.

Yes, I told Peter to go to the sea and cast his fishing line, then take the first fish that he would catch, and after opening its mouth, he would find a coin that would pay for two. So he should use that and pay for Me and himself.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about Christ? What impact does that have on me?

The Grace Challenge: Submit to authorities, for they are instituted by God.

CHAPTER

18

On Becoming Great

Soon after that, My disciples came to Me and asked, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” So I called a little child and made him stand among them; and I told them if they would not change their way of thinking and become like that little child, they would not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Lord, from what You’ve taught me, I know that You’ll only continue to rule in my life as long as I remain like a little child before You. I’ve noticed that, as Your grace makes me to be humble, You’re lifting me higher.

Yes, by that same grace, I know I’m becoming great in Your kingdom—not by exalting myself, but because You are exalting me. Please Lord, keep helping me to continue to welcome, encourage, and serve other humble believers.

Keep doing that for My sake, for you are doing it for Me.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about greatness? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Consciously humble yourself in all that you do. Hate pride.

On the Danger of Causing Temptation

But whoever causes any of these people who are like little children to sin, it would be better for him if a large millstone is hung on his neck and he is drowned in the deepest part of the sea. It will be terrible for people in the world who cause others to sin. Yes, temptations must come, but it will be so terrible for those who cause them!

If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into the eternal fire of hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

My Lord, thank You for this warning. By Your grace, please help me to let go of anything that leads me into sin. I'd rather lose anything in this life than lose eternity with You.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Avoid causing others to stumble, even when it means denying yourself certain privileges.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

My Lord, please continue to give me the grace to guard against looking down on or discriminating against any lowly believer. May I always see them through Your eyes and value them as You

do.

I am telling you now, their angels are always in My Father's presence in heaven. And you know I came to save that which was lost. What do you think? Suppose a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one strays away and gets lost. Will he not leave those that are safe on the hillside and go searching for the one that is lost?

Lord, he will; and if he finds it, he'll be happy.

Yes! Happier over that one than even over the ninety-nine that were not lost. That is the same way our Father does not want any of these humble ones to be lost.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about God? What can I sacrifice to reflect God's love in someone's life today?

The Grace Challenge: Show respect to the downtrodden. Whatsoever you do for them, do as though you are doing it for Christ.

On Dealing with a Brother Who Sins Against You

Thank You, Lord. As You've instructed me, if anyone offends me, I'll approach the person privately, point out the fault, and seek to win him back. If he listens and he's sorry, then we've made up.

If he doesn't listen to me, I'll take one or two others with me and talk with him again, so that every matter may be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses. But if he still refuses to listen, I'll report the matter to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, I'll cut my ties with him.

Yes. Avoid him and regard him as a pagan and an evil tax collector. For I'm telling you truly, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

What a honour! Thank You, Father. You've also promised that if I agree with another believer concerning anything we ask in prayer, You'll do it for us.

Yes, for wherever two or three people gather in My name, I am there with them.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? Is there a brother or sister who has sinned against me?

The Grace Challenge: Lovingly follow the instructions of Christ.

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

After that, Peter came and asked Me how many times he should forgive a brother who kept sinning against him—whether up to seven times. I told him, not just seven times, but even seventy times seven.

That is because affairs in the kingdom of heaven is like the story of a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. When he began, a servant who owed him ten thousand talents was taken to him; and since he could not pay, the king ordered that the man, his wife, children, and all his properties should be sold to pay off the debt.

When the servant heard the king's order, he fell down before the king and pleaded for more time, promising to pay everything he owed. Then the king had compassion on him, cancelled all his debt, and let him go.

After he had left, he found a fellow servant who owed him just a hundred denarii. Then he grabbed that one on the neck and began to choke him, saying he must pay him all the debt. So that fellow servant fell down before him and begged him to be patience and he would pay off the debt, but he refused. Instead, he caused the man to be thrown into the prison until when he would pay.

When other servants saw what he did, they were very angry, and they went and reported everything to the king. So the king summoned that unforgiving servant and said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave all your debt because you begged me. Why could you not also have compassion on your fellow servant as I had on you?"

He was very angry, so he ordered that the servant should be thrown into the prison and tortured until he paid back all that he owed. So will My Father also do to anyone who does not forgive his brother from his heart.

My Lord, please keep giving me the grace to forgive others, no matter how deeply they've hurt me. May Your love for me always soothe my pain. May I continue to understand that Your love is stronger than any hurt, thought or belief that could ever make me choose anything other than forgiveness.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about the king? What

does it reveal about me?

The Grace Challenge: Forgive... and forgive... and keep forgiving—even up to seventy times seven times for the same person. Just keep forgiving.

CHAPTER

19

On Marriage and Divorce

Now, when I had finished telling them those things, I left Galilee and crossed over the Jordan River to the land of Judea. Great multitudes followed Me, and I healed the sick ones among them.

Then some Pharisees came and tried to trap Me by asking Me, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” And I asked them if they had never read in the Scripture that the Creator made them in the beginning as male and female. For that reason, a man would leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two of them would become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one put asunder.

Then they asked Me why Moses had instructed that a man could give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away. And I told them it was because of their hardness of heart. But it was not so from the beginning.

The fact is, whoever divorces his wife, except for her sexual immorality, and marries another woman, commits adultery; and whoever marries the divorced woman

commits adultery. Then the disciples said to Me, “If that is the case between a man and his wife, then it is better not to marry.”

My Lord, I understand why the disciples said that. But as You said, this is not something everyone can accept.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about God? To what extent do I know His Word and His power?

The Grace Challenge: Set a target, read and study a certain number of chapters of the Bible everyday.

On Celibacy

Yes. I told them that not everyone would accept that, but only those who had been given the grace for it. For some men were eunuchs from birth, others were made eunuchs by men, and others made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom. Whoever can, let him accept and live it.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? What have I let go for the sake of the kingdom?

The Grace Challenge: Decide today to let go of anything—no matter how small—that could hinder your progress in the kingdom of God.

Blessing the Little Children

Then some parents brought their little children to Me so I could lay hands on them and bless them, but My disciples

rebuked those who brought them. When I saw it, I said to them, as I still say today, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are like these little children.” Then I laid My hands on the children, blessed them, and left.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about little children? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Act as God’s child: trust Him fully, depend solely on Him, and obey Him out of love—not fear.

On Trusting in Wealth and Entering the Kingdom

After that, a certain young man came to Me and asked what good thing he should do to have eternal life. So I asked why he should ask me about what was good.

Lord, I find it fascinating that You asked him why he called You good. You truly are the good Lord and God.

I am. That is why I advised him to keep the laws if he wanted eternal life. Then he asked, “Which ones?” And I began to list them: Do not murder...

Do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness against your neighbour; honour your parents...

Right! And love your neighbour as yourself. But the young man said he had kept all those laws, and asked if there was anything else he needed to do. So I told him if he wanted to be perfect, he should go and sell everything he

owned and give the money to the poor, and he would have wealth in heaven; then he should come and follow Me. When he heard that, he became very sad and left because he was very rich.

Avarice! My Lord, may no earthly possession ever keep me from doing Your will. By Your grace, may I continue to use all You've entrusted to me for the good of Your kingdom.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from Christ's advice to the rich young man? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Prioritize following Christ. Take a decisive step today to renew your commitment to Him.

With God All Things Are Possible

Lord, so is it actually so hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven?

Yes! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for those who trust in their wealth to submit themselves to God's rule, hence enter the kingdom of heaven.

Lord, that must have surprised the twelve.

Yes. They asked Me, "In that case, who then can be saved?" And I told them, as My Spirit still says, that man cannot save himself; but with God, all things are possible.

So Lord, what's in store for those of us who've left

everything to follow You?

Interesting! Peter once asked Me that very question—what they would gain after leaving everything to follow Me. And I told them that in the regeneration, when I sit on My glorious throne, they who had followed Me would also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribe of Israel.

Thank You Lord. And as You've also promised, because I've left my house, my family, and everything I have for Your sake, You'll give me a hundredfold of what I've left behind. But above all, thank You for the greatest gift of all—eternal life.

But many who are first will become last, and the last will become first. Yes! many who are great now will be humbled, and the lowly will become great.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about trusting God? What have I given up for the sake of Christ?

The Grace Challenge: Act to save a soul today. It is your Father's will that no one should perish.

CHAPTER

20

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

I told them a parable to illustrate this: The kingdom of heaven is like the story of a certain owner of a vineyard who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his farm. After he had agreed with them for a denarius per day, he sent them to the farm.

Later at about 9 am, he went out and saw some people standing idle in the marketplace, and he told them to also go and work in the farm, promising to pay them a good wage; so they went. He went out again and hired more workers at about noon, and again at about 3 pm.

Then at about 5 o'clock, just before sunset, he went out again and found some people standing idle, and he asked them, "Why have you been standing here all day doing nothing?" They told him no one had hired them, so the man told them to also go and work in his farm.

At the end of the day, he told his manager to call all the workers and pay them their money, beginning from the last batch of workers he hired to the first batch. So those who were hired at about 5 o'clock came, and each of them received a denarius. Now when those who were first hired

came, they thought they would be paid more, but each of them was also given a denarius.

So after collecting their money, those first batch of workers grumbled against the owner of the vineyard, saying he should not have paid those who worked for only about an hour the same wage with them, since they had done most of the work and had borne the heat of the day.

Jokers! Lord, but the owner didn't cheat them. They'd agreed for a denarius per day.

That is exactly what the man told one of them. He advised them to take their money and go.

If he decided to give all of them the same, that was entirely up to him. He had every right to do as he pleased with his money. May I never envy those You chose to favour. Instead, please Lord, teach me to rejoice with them and trust Your goodness towards me.

That is why I say that the last will become the first, and the first will become the last! Yes, those who are now considered irrelevant—the lowly—will become prominent, and the prominent ones will be humbled; for many are called, but few are chosen.

Checkpoints: What lesson have I learnt from this section? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Always be content. Remember, godliness with contentment is great gain.

My Death and Resurrection: The Third Prediction

While we were going up to Jerusalem, I took My twelve disciples aside and told them I would be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes, and they would all decide that I must be killed. Then they would hand Me over to the Gentiles, who would mock and beat and crucify Me; but on the third day I would rise again.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from Christ? Do I ever think or talk about about my death?

The Grace Challenge: Die to the world in the very areas you are thinking of.

Greatness Comes Through Serving

Then the mother of James and John—Zebedee’s sons—came with her two sons, and knelt before Me, and said she wants to ask for a favour. So I told her to go ahead, and she said I should promise her that her two sons would sit, one at My right hand and the other at My left, in My kingdom. And I asked them, “Do you really know what you are asking? Are you ready to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” And they said they were ready.

And Lord, they drank it later.

Yes. I told them they would indeed suffer as I would suffer, but those positions they sought were reserved by the Father for those whom He had chosen.

When the other ten disciples heard about it, they were angry with the two brothers. So I called them together and reminded them that My kingdom works differently. The rulers of the nations like to lord it over their people, and those in high positions enjoy exercising authority over them. But that is not how I want my followers to live.

No bossing, Lord!

Rather, if you want to become great, be the one who gladly serves everyone else; and if you long to become the most important person, be willing to take the place of a servant—even as a slave.

My Lord, please help me to always understand how greatness is measured in Your Kingdom. I want to remain very close to You—to keep being the apple of Your eye—so please continue to give me the grace to serve other people’s needs.

Indeed, you should be like Me, for I did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give My life as a ransom so that many might be saved.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about Christ’s path to greatness? What is my motive for serving?

The Grace Challenge: Look for opportunities to serve others with humility.

Two Blind Men Receive Their Sight

Later as we were leaving Jericho, a great multitude

followed us, and there were these two blind men who sat by the road. When they heard I was the One passing by, they shouted, “Oh Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us.” Many people rebuked them, telling them to be quiet, but they kept shouting even louder that I should help them. I heard it, stopped, then called them over and asked, “What do you want me to do for you?”

Lord, that’s how You always deal with me. Even though You know exactly what I need, You still keep asking me what I want. You care so much, wanting to hear from me.

When they said they wanted Me to heal them—to make them see—I felt compassion for them and touched their eyes. Immediately, they were able to see; then they also joined the multitude and followed Me.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from Christ? Is my life truly reflecting His character?

The Grace Challenge: Keep on seeking, don’t give up, and you will find.

CHAPTER

21

The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

As we approached Jerusalem, we came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. There I sent two of My disciples to go to the village that was ahead of us. I told them they would see a donkey tied up with its colt; that they should loosen them and bring them to Me. And if anyone asked them anything, they were to say, “The Lord needs them,” and the person would let them go immediately.

Lord, that’s what the Father had earlier revealed to Prophet Zechariah to tell the people of Zion: that they should watch, ’cos You, their King, would come to them riding on a donkey—yes, humbly on a young donkey.

So the disciples went and did just as I had told them, and brought the donkey and the colt. Then they laid their cloaks on the donkey’s back, and I sat on it.

A great multitude spread their cloaks on the road while others spread branches of trees. Some people walked in front while others were behind Me; and they all shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna to God in the highest!”

Lord, I can imagine how the whole of Jerusalem was stirred when You entered... and everyone asking, "Who is this?"

Yes, they asked, and the multitudes told them who I was.

King Jesus, my Lord! They called You the Prophet from Nazareth, but I worship You as my King.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about Christ? Has He come into my life, and is He ruling it as my King?

The Grace Challenge: Let the King of glory come in. Let the King of glory reign!

Cleansing of the Temple

When I entered the temple courtyard, I saw some people buying and selling there. So I drove them out, overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those selling doves. I told them, "It is written in the Scriptures that My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves!"

My Lord, please keep me from anything that would defile this Your temple. Help me to live in a way that honours You, Lord!

Then the blind and the lame came to Me, and I healed them.

Lord, the chief priests and scribes must have been very angry when they saw all the wonderful things You were doing.

They were! And when they saw the children in the temple courts shouting praises to Me, they asked Me, “Do You hear what these children are saying?” And I told them that I have indeed, for it was already written in the Scriptures.

They ought to have remembered what the Scriptures say: “Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise.” My Lord, everything in me—and indeed, everything that has breath—must praise Your name.

It was getting late, so I left them and went out of Jerusalem to Bethany, where I spent the night.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from Christ’s action? Is it really reflecting in my life?

The Grace Challenge: Get rid of every bad attitude today. Remember, you are God’s temple—live accordingly.

The Lesson from the Withered Fig Tree

Early the next morning while we were on our way back to Jerusalem, I was hungry. Then I saw a fig tree by the road; when I went closer, I found nothing on it except leaves. So I declared that it would never bear fruit again, and immediately, the fig tree began to wither.

My disciples were amazed and asked Me how the fig tree had withered so quickly. So I told them just what I am telling you now: if you have faith in God and do not doubt, you will do the same thing. And not only that, you

will even command the mountain to move from where it is and cast itself into the sea, and it will obey them. So all things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.

Lord, thank You for the power of faith. Thank You for the grace. As You've said, whatever I ask in prayer, I will receive if I believe. Yes, Lord—I believe!

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from the fig tree? Is my life bearing fruit, or merely displaying leaves?

The Grace Challenge: Bear the fruit of the Spirit always.

The Jewish Leaders Question My Authority

When I went back to the temple, the chief priests and the Jewish leaders came around while I was teaching. They sought to know by what authority I was doing those things, and the person who gave Me the authority. And I told them that I would also ask them a question, and if they answer, then I would answer theirs.

So I asked them. “Who gave John the authority to baptize? Was it God or man?” They discussed it among themselves; and they knew if they said it was from God, I would ask them why they had not believed what John preached.

And they dared not say it was from men. Everyone believed John was God's prophet, so they were afraid of what the crowd would do if they said otherwise.

Yes. So they said they did not know who gave John the authority, and because of that, I also said I would not tell them whose authority I was using to do those things.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? Whose authority do my thoughts and actions reflect?

The Grace Challenge: Act boldly, but always under the authority of Christ.

The Parable of the Two Sons

I then told them a story about a man who had two sons. How he went and told the first one to go and work in his vineyard that day, and the son said he would not be able to go, but he later changed his mind and went. When the man left his first son, he went and said the same thing to his other son, and that one promised to go but...

He didn't.

So which of the two did the father's will?

Lord, the first son.

That is exactly what they said. That is why I told them that the tax collectors and prostitutes were entering the kingdom of God ahead of them. For John the Baptist had gone to them and showed them the right path to take, and they did not believe him; but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did.

And Lord, as You pointed out, even after they saw that, they still didn't repent and believe him.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? What does it reveal about my character?

The Grace Challenge: Do what God has told you to do—NOW!

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

After that I told them another parable. It was about a man who owned a vineyard. He fenced it, dug a winepress in it, and built a watchtower. He then leased it to some farmers and travelled to a far country.

When the time for harvest was near, he sent his servants to those farmers to collect his own share of the harvest. But the farmers grabbed his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. After that he sent more servants to the farmers, and those servants were treated the same way. At last he sent his son to them.

I'm following You, Lord. He was sure they would respect his son.

Yes, but when the farmers saw the man's son coming, they conferred among themselves, saying, "This is the heir. Come on! Let us kill him and seize this farm." So they grabbed him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

When I finished the story, I asked the Jewish leaders what they thought the owner of the vineyard would do to those farmers when he returned. Guess what they said?

Lord, of course he would kill those wicked farmers and lease his vineyard to other farmers who would give him his share of the fruits in due time.

Those were their very words! And I asked them if they had not read in the Scriptures that the stone which the builders rejected would become the head cornerstone...?

It's Your work Oh Lord, and it's marvelous in our eyes. They really shot themselves in the foot!

And so I told them that since they did not believe in Me, the kingdom of God would be taken away from them and given to people who would produce good fruits.

My Lord and my Rock, I'm broken in pieces whenever I fall on You.

But whoever the Rock falls on, the Rock would ground the person to powder. When the chief priests and Pharisees heard those parables, they perceived that I said the parables about them; and so they wanted to arrest Me, but they were afraid of the multitudes.

Because to the crowd, You were a Prophet; but to me, You are my Lord and my God.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from the parable? How

am I treating Christ and all who are His?

The Grace Challenge: Take stock of the fruit you are bearing for God today—the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER

22

The Parable of the Wedding Feast

I continued to use parables to teach the people. I likened the kingdom of heaven to the story of a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding. But when they went and called them, they refused to come.

Later on, he sent another set of servants to tell the invitees that the feast was ready, his large oxen and some fat cattle had been killed and prepared, and everything was set; so they should come to the feast. But they ignored the king's message again and went about their businesses: one to his farm, another to his shop, while others seized those servants, beat and embarrassed them, and even killed them.

When the king heard about it, he was very angry; so he sent his soldiers to kill those murderers and burn down their city. Then he told his servants that since the feast was ready but those who were invited were not worthy, so they should go out to the streets and invite as many people as they could find.

So the servants went out into the streets, and later

brought as many people as they could find, both the good and the bad; and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

Later on, when the king went into the hall to see the guests, he saw a man who was not wearing the right clothes for the wedding, and he asked him, “My friend, how did you come in here without wearing the right clothes for the wedding?” But the man was speechless. So the king told his servants to bind the man’s hand and foot, take him away, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.

Lord, I was so caught up in the story; and then the hymn, “Are You Washed in the Blood?” began to play in my mind. Thank you, my Lord, ’cos You’ve clothed me with garments of salvation and covered me with the robe of righteousness. All because of Your precious blood.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from the parable? Am I wearing the the right clothes?

The Grace Challenge: Let your garment be spotless; let it be a garment of honour.

On Paying Taxes to Caesar

After the Pharisees had heard that last parable, they went and began to plot how they could trap Me with questions. So they sent their disciples and some members of Herod’s party to Me; and after their shallow flattery, they asked Me, “Teacher, please tell us, what do You think? Is it lawful to

pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

But Lord, You knew what they were up to. Hypocrites!

Yes, I knew their evil plan. So I asked them why they were trying to trap Me; and I told them to show me the coin used in paying tax. They brought a denarius; and then I asked them, "Whose image and name is this?" And they said it was Caesar's. So I told them, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God."

My Lord, that reply was timeless! It settled their question then, and it's still settling questions today. If a coin bearing Caesar's image belongs to Caesar, then I—who bear Your image—belong entirely to You. May I always give You my all.

So they left Me and went away.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? What does it reveal about my character?

The Grace Challenge: Pray for the gifts of wisdom and discernment.

On Resurrection

That same day, the Sadducees also came to Me.

Lord, I learnt they didn't believe in resurrection?

They did not, and that was exactly why they came. Moses had given them a law that if a man dies without

having any child, his brother must marry the widow he left behind and have a child who would be considered as the dead man's child.

So after stating the law, they said there were seven brothers who once lived there. The eldest got married and died but did not have a child, so his wife got married to his next brother who also died without a child, then the third, down to the seventh brother. They all died childless; and lastly, the woman also died.

Oh! Lord, they thought they'd finally found a question You couldn't answer. Their puzzle sounded clever to them. They felt they could disprove the resurrection with that hypothetical story.

Indeed. I told them they had erred.

They goofed big time, Lord! And that's because they didn't know Your power, just as You told them.

Neither did they understand the Scriptures. I told them that in the resurrection, people will not marry, but they will be like the angels in heaven.

It's true, Lord. As You rightly told them, they didn't understand what the Father had spoken about the resurrection of the dead...

I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. I am not the God of the dead, but of the living,

.

My Lord, the crowds were astonished at Your teaching. I'm not surprised, 'cos the more I listen to You, the more I'm wowed. I worship You, Lord.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? What does it reveal about my character?

The Grace Challenge: Study God's Word and be endued with His power.

The Greatest Commandments

When the Pharisees heard that I had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, who was a lawyer, asked Me a question, to test Me, saying, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?"

Lord, thank You for teaching me that. It's to love You, my Lord and my God, with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all my mind.

That is the greatest and the most important commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. The entire Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments. That was what I told him.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from the greatest commandments? How well am I keeping them?

The Grace Challenge: Today, manifest God's love towards Him in worship and towards others in service.

David's Son or David's Lord?

When some Pharisees had gathered together, I asked them, "What do you think of the Christ? Whose Son is He?" And they answered, "The Son of David." So I asked them, "How then does David in the Holy Spirit call Him Lord, saying in the Psalm, 'The Lord said to my Lord, sit on My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet?' "

Indeed, You are the Lord of lords and the King of kings, and You'll always be my Lord and my God. Which father—let alone a king—would call his own Son his Lord?

That was what I asked them: If David himself called Me his Lord, how then could I be his Son? But no one could answer; and from that day on, no one dared ask Me another question.

Checkpoints: Who is Christ to me?

The Grace Challenge: Surrender completely to the Lordship of Christ. Let your will be lost in His.

CHAPTER

23

Rebuking the Scribes and the Pharisees

After that, I told My disciples and the multitudes that the scribes, who were the teachers of God's laws, and the Pharisees—the religious leaders—were the authorized interpreters of God's laws; they sat in Moses' seat. So I said people should obey them and do what they told them to do, but they should not imitate them; for they did not practice what they taught.

Lord, as You've said, even now, they place heavy burdens on people—loads that are hard to bear—yet they themselves won't lift even a finger to help.

Everything they did was for people to notice them. They broadened their phylacteries and enlarged the tassels on their clothes. They loved to sit in prominent places at feasts, and the best seats in the synagogues. They loved when people greeted them with respect in the market and other public places, and when they were called 'Teacher.'

Lord, we still have them today. As You've instructed, I don't seek to be called 'Teacher,' because we're all brethren, and You alone are our Teacher. And I don't call anyone here on earth 'Father,' because I've got only one Father, You, the One in

heaven.

Lord, You've shown me what true greatness is. By Your grace, I'll keep serving others. Yes , I know that as I humble myself, You'll exalt me.

But whoever exalts himself will be humbled.

Woe, indeed, to the teachers of God's laws and the Pharisees, hypocrites! For they shut the kingdom of heaven against people. They themselves do not enter, nor do they allow those who are trying to enter.

Woe to the teachers of God's laws and the Pharisees, hypocrites! They exploit widows, robbing them of their possessions. Also, they like fake long prayers. They will definitely receive greater punishment.

Woe to the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, hypocrites! They travel far across land and sea to win a convert; and when they win him, they make him to become twice as hellbound as they themselves!

Woe to those blind guides! They teach that if someone swears by the name of the temple, he is not bound by his vow; but if he swears by the gold in the temple, he is bound to perform it.

Lord, they're exactly what You called them—blind fools! Which one's more important, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold?

They also teach that if someone swears by the altar,

he is not bound by his vow; but if he swears by the gifts on that altar, he is bound to perform it. You see? Blind fools! Is the altar that sanctifies the gift not more important than the gift? When someone swears by the altar, he is swearing by it and by all the things on it. The same with the person who swears by the temple; he is swearing by it and by God who dwells there. Also, the person who swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it.

Woe to the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, hypocrites! For they pay tithe even of seasoning herbs such as mint, dill and cumin. But they neglect the more important aspects of God's law such as justice, and mercy, and faithfulness to God. They ought to have been practising these important ones, without neglecting the others.

Lord, You've rightly described them... blind guides who strain out a small fly from their drink, but gulp down the drink with a camel that's in it!

Woe to the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, hypocrites! For they clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and unrighteousness. I told them, just as I am urging such people today, to first clean the inside of the cup and of the platter, that the outside may become clean also.

Woe to the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, hypocrites! For they are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead people's bones, and all uncleanness. They appear righteous

to people, but inwardly they are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

Woe to those teachers of the law and the Pharisees, hypocrites! For they built fine tombs of the prophets who had died, and decorate the tombs of righteous people, and they claimed if they had lived in the days of their ancestors, they would not have joined them to kill the prophets.

Lord, as You said, they actually admitted they were the children of those who killed the prophets; and they eventually finished what their fathers had started by committing the mother of all murders—crucifying You, the King of glory! Serpents, children of serpents! How would they escape eternal condemnation?

Indeed, I had sent to them prophets, wise men, and teachers; but they killed some, crucified others, beat some up even in synagogues, and persecuted the rest from one city to another. So I told them that the punishment for the killing of all those righteous people would be on them; from the first murder—that of righteous Abel—to that of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom they killed between the temple and the altar.

And just as You said, Lord, the punishment for all those killings came upon that generation.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Do the things that attract God's blessings, not His woes.

Lamentation over Jerusalem

I really felt for Jerusalem, it grieved Me; for its people had killed many prophets, and had stoned those who were sent to them. I had often wanted to gather its people together and bring them closer to Myself as a hen gathers its chicks under its wings, but they would not let Me!

O Lord, please may I never miss my season of divine visitation. So sad—they missed it!

I told them that their house would be left to them desolate.

And Lord, it wasn't long before Your words came to pass. But when You said them, they didn't understand.

I also told them they would see Me no more until the day they would say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section about Christ's love for me? Am I yielding to Him?

The Grace Challenge: Do what God has told you to do NOW!

CHAPTER

24

Predicting the Destruction of the Temple

I went out of the temple after that; and as I was leaving, My disciples came to Me and showed Me the buildings of the temple. And I told them, “You see these beautiful buildings? A time is coming when they will be completely destroyed—not a single stone will be left on top of another.”

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? Can I differentiate between things that will pass away and those that will last forever?

The Grace Challenge: To enjoy eternal life, live in accordance with the Word of God, for it will never pass away.

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age

Later, as I sat on the Mount of Olives, My disciples came to Me privately and asked, “Tell us, when will these things be? What is the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”

Lord, thank You for warning me to watch out, just as You warned them then. By Your grace, I know no one will deceive me.

You said many people would come in Your name, claiming to be the Christ, and would deceive many. You also said there would be wars and rumours of wars.

Do not be afraid when these things happen, for they must come first but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are like the beginning of birth pangs.

I told them that some of them—My servants, including you—would be arrested, and oppressed even to the point of death. They would be hated by people from all nations because of Me.

Then many people will give up their faith. They will betray one another, and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and deceive many people. Because iniquity will multiply, the love of many will grow cold. But whoever endures to the end will be saved

My Lord, I trust that You'll preserve me till the end. I know Your grace is sufficient for me, so I'll keep standing firm until the very end.

This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? Am I discerning the signs as they unfold?

The Grace Challenge: Live wisely; redeem the time.

The Great Tribulation

I told them they would see the abomination of desolation, which Daniel the prophet spoke about, standing in the holy place (do you understand what that means?).

Yes Lord.

I told them that when it happens, those in Judea should flee to the mountains. Whoever is on the housetop should not go down to take anything from his house, and whoever is out in the field should not return home to get their clothes. It would be such a terrible time for pregnant women and nursing mothers. I told them to pray that when they would have to flee, it should not be in winter or on a Sabbath.

The tribulation in those days will be so terrible that nothing like it has ever happened since the beginning of the world, and nothing like it will ever be again. But I also told them that Father will cut those days short for the sake of His chosen ones; otherwise, no one would survive.

So if anyone says, "Christ is here, or there," do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders in order to deceive, if possible, even the chosen ones. See, I have told you all this beforehand.

Thank You, Lord. By Your grace, no one will deceive me into believing You're either in the wilderness or in any secret place. I won't believe it!

Believe not! For just as lightning flashes across the sky, from east to west, and is visible to everyone, so will My coming be. For wherever the carcass is, that is where the vultures will gather together.

Checkpoints: Do you truly trust in the saving power of Jesus Christ?

The Grace Challenge: Believe and declare: “The Lord is my refuge and my stronghold, my Rock and my salvation.”

My Second Coming

Right after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will no longer shine, the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly powers will be shaken. Then the sign of My coming will appear in the sky. All the people of the earth will mourn, and they will see Me coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Then the great trumpet will sound, and I will send My angels to the four corners of the earth to gather My chosen ones—from one end of the heaven to the other.

Checkpoints: What is my attitude towards the second coming of Christ? When He comes, will I lift up my head with joy, or will I mourn with the world?

The Grace Challenge: Prepare for the coming of the Lord.

The Parable of the Fig Tree

Here is a lesson from the fig tree: When its branches become tender and start growing leaves, you know that summer is near. Right?

Yes, Lord. Thank You for telling me all these things, because as I see them happening, I know that the time is near—right at the door!

I warned them that their generation would not pass away until all these things happened.

And it happened just as You said, Lord. They were persecuted and killed. They witnessed the rise of false prophets, heard rumours of wars, and then came that terrible war that displaced so many. The invading Roman army attacked Jerusalem, and defiled the temple before reducing it and all its beautiful buildings to rubble—right before their very eyes.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away.

Checkpoints: Am I discerning the signs of the times? Does the thought of Christ's return excite me or unsettle me?

The Grace Challenge: Don't put it off—make your ways right before the Lord. He loves you.

No One Knows the Time

However, no one knows when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven, but only the Father. But as it

was in the days of Noah, so also will My coming be. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, right up to the very day Noah entered the ark. They had no idea what was about to happen until the flood came and swept them all away.

So will it be at My coming: Two men will be in a field; one will be taken, and the other left behind. Two women will be grinding at a mill; one will be taken, and the other left behind. Therefore watch!

My Lord, just as You've said, I don't know the exact time You'll return or when I'll be called home. Yet, I know You've called me into Your light, so I'm no more in the dark. Please, by Your grace, may that day not take me unawares as those who are still in the dark. I know You'll keep giving me the grace to watch.

It is just like the owner of a house. If he had known when the thief would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have let the thief break into his house. Right?

Yes Lord.

So you also must always be ready, for I will come at a time when people do not expect.

Checkpoints: Am I living for the few years I have on earth—or for eternity that follows? What strategies am I adopting?

The Grace Challenge: Watch. Be vigilant. Occupy—keep working!

The Faithful Servant and the Evil Servant

Thank You, my Lord, for the gift of wisdom. Thank You for entrusting me, Your servant, to faithfully care for and feed Your household in due season.

Lord, You've blessed me by sanctifying me through Your Word. By Your grace, I'll keep faithfully feeding Your flock. I trust that when You return, You'll find me doing just that.

Most certainly, I will set you and other faithful servants over all that I have. But for the evil servant who thinks it will be long before I return, and so begins to mistreat his fellow servants, and eat and drink with drunkards, I will come in a day he least expect, and in an hour he does not know. And I will punish him severely and make him share the fate of the hypocrites. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? Which of those servants does my life mirror?

The Grace Challenge: Pray for the grace to be wise and to remain faithful to God. Be a good soldier of Christ, and be ready to die at your post.

CHAPTER

25

The Parable of the Wise and the Foolish Virgins

I then told them a parable to show what the kingdom of heaven is like: it is like the story of ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

Five of them were wise, and the other five were foolish. The foolish ones took their lamps but had no extra oil with them, while the wise ones had oil in their lamps and also took extra oil in some vessels. While they waited, the bridegroom was delayed, so they all became drowsy and slept.

At midnight, there was a loud call that the bridegroom was coming, so people should go out to meet him. Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. By then, the oil in the lamps of the foolish ones had gone down and their lamps were going out, so they told the wise ones to give them some oil.

Lord, of course, no wise person would do that. I'd tell them there won't be enough for both of us.

That was the response they got. The wise ones also advised them to rather go and buy theirs.

Now, while they left to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. So the five wise ones who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast, and the door was shut. Later on, when the other virgins had come back, they pleaded, “Sir, sir! Please open the door for us.” But the bridegroom answered, “Most certainly, I tell you, I don’t know you.” That is why I tell you to watch, for you do not know the day or the hour I will come.

Okay Lord. Thank You so much. Since I’m no longer in darkness, I know that day won’t overtake me like a thief. It’s all by Your grace.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? Am I prepared—ready to meet the Lord?

The Grace Challenge: Let your oil never run dry. Keep your light burning, and remain watchful until the Lord returns.

The Parable of the Talents

Now, the kingdom of heaven is also like a man who was about to go on a journey to another country, who called his servants and entrusted his possessions to them. He gave to each one according to his ability: to one he gave five talents; to another, two; and to another, one.

Just as You’ve given us, Lord.

Then he went on his journey. Soon after, the servant who received five talents went and invested them; likewise

the one who got two talents. But the servant who was given one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money.

After a long time, the man came back to reconcile account with his servants. So the servant who had received five talents came with all that he had; by then, he had made five more talents. After presenting an impressive report to his master, the man said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things, now I will put you in charge of many things. Come and celebrate with me!"

The servant who had received two talents also came and said he has earned additional two talents. So his master praised and rewarded him, as he did to the first servant.

Then the one who had received one talent came and told his master, "Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed. 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 lazy servant! You knew I reap where I did not sow and gather from where I did not scatter. Right? You ought therefore to have deposited my money in the bank, and on my return I would have gotten my money back with interest." Then he ordered that the talent be taken away from him and given to the servant who had ten talents.

Thank You, Lord. Just as You've promised, because I'm

faithfully using what You've given me, You'll keep entrusting me with even more, and I'll have in abundance.

But from him who does not have, even that which he has will be taken away from them. Then the master said, "Throw that unprofitable servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Checkpoints: As I pray for more, how well am I using what God has already entrusted to me for His glory?

The Grace Challenge: Be a faithful steward of all that God has entrusted to you—even your time. It's never about how much, but how well it is managed.

On Judging the Nations of the Earth

When I come in My glory, with all the holy angels. I will sit on My glorious throne, and all the nations will be gathered before Me. Then I will separate the people into two groups, just as a shepherd separates his sheep from goats.

I will put the righteous ones, like the sheep, on My right, and others, like the goats, on My left. And I will call those on My right, whom My Father has blessed, to come and possess the kingdom that has been prepared for them right from when the world was made.

Lord, thank You so much for revealing this sacred mystery to me. Please keep giving me the grace to love and serve You more and more, so that on that day, by Your grace, I'll rejoice with gratitude as You recount that when You were hungry, I

gave You something to eat; when You were thirsty, I gave You something to drink; when You were a stranger, I took You in; when You were naked, I clothed You; when You were sick and in prison, I visited You.

Then some righteous folks, not yet understanding what I meant by that, will ask Me, “Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You something to drink? When did we see You as a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? When did we see You sick or in prison and visit You?” And I will let them know that whatever they did for the least of My brethren, they did it for Me.

Then I will say to those on the left hand, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you did not give Me food to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger, and you did not take Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.

Lord, they'll be shocked as well.

Yes. And as they also ask to know when all that happened, I will let them know that, because they did not do it for one of the least of My brethren, they did not do it for Me. And so they will go away into eternal punishment, but you and the other righteous ones will enter into eternal life.

Thank You, my Lord, for the gift of righteousness and

eternal life.

Checkpoints: Am I ready—and truly longing for the Lord to come?

The Grace Challenge: Make choices that reflect your hope in eternity.

CHAPTER

26

The Plot to Kill Me

When I had finished saying all that, I reminded My disciples that the Passover feast is in two days' time, and so my enemies will soon deliver Me to the rulers to be crucified.

Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the Jewish elders met at the house of the high priest, who was Caiaphas, and planned to arrest Me by deceit, and kill Me. But they said it should not be during the Passover feast, else the people could riot.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? Are my plans and decisions grieving the Holy Spirit?

The Grace Challenge: Think and act in ways that please the Lord. He who is not with Him is against Him.

The Anointing at Bethany

Now, when I went to Bethany afterwards, I visited Simon, who was once a leper. While we were eating in his house, a woman named Mary came to Me with an alabaster jar that contained a very expensive perfume, and she poured it on

My head.

When My disciples saw what she did, they became angry, and said, “Why this waste? This perfume could have been sold for much, and the money given to the poor.” I knew what they were saying, so I told them not to bother the woman, for she had done a good work on Me.

Yeah! That was her own way of expressing her love and worship for You, Lord. How beautiful! People express their love and worship for You in different ways. Thank You, Lord. Through her, You’ve taught me a great lesson.

I told them they would always have the poor with them; but I would not always be with them physically. For in pouring that perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial.

Lord, just as You said, what she did has become part of the gospel story throughout the whole world. It’s still being talked about, even to this day. I’m so happy, Lord, because I know by Your grace, Your plans for my life will surely come to pass.

Checkpoints: How can I worship God in a fresh way today? What legacy of worship am I leaving behind?

The Grace Challenge: Let your life be a living sacrifice to the Lord. Worship Him in the beauty of holiness.

On Judas and the Betrayal Deal

Then Judas Iscariot, one of My twelve disciples, went to the

chief priests and asked them what they would give him if he betrayed Me to them. And they gave him thirty silver coins. So from that moment on, he began looking for the right opportunity to betray Me.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? In what ways have I betrayed the confidence God has in me?

The Grace Challenge: Reaffirm your loyalty to Christ by taking a bold step of obedience, even when it costs you. Be on the Lord's side!

Celebrating the Last Passover with My Disciples

Now, on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Me and asked to know where I wanted them to prepare for us to eat the Passover meal. So I sent them to a certain fellow in the city with a message that My time had come, and that I wanted to eat the Passover meal with My disciples at his house.

The disciples did as I told them and they prepared the Passover meal. When it was evening, we went there and I sat down with the twelve of them to eat. Then, as we were eating, I told them that surely one of them would betray Me.

Lord, they must have been surprised to hear that.

They were very sad; and in fact, they began to ask Me one after the other, "Lord, is it me?" And I told them what the Scripture says, that he who eats from the same

dish with Me would turn against Me. I also told them that I must die, just as the Scripture says, but woe to the person who would betray Me! It would have been better for him if he had not been born. Then Judas, who would betray Me, also asked, "Lord, is it me?" And I told him, "You have said it."

Checkpoints: Am I quick to obey the Lord, or am I procrastinating?

The Grace Challenge: Delight yourself in the Lord; relish every moment in His presence, for there is fullness of joy.

The Last Supper

While we were still at the table, I took bread, gave thanks to the Father, broke it, and gave to My disciples. Then I told them, "Take and eat it; this is My body." I also took a cup of wine, gave thanks to the Father, and gave them, saying, "All of you drink it, for this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

I told them I would not drink of that fruit of the vine again until the day I drink it anew with them in My Father's kingdom. After that, we sang a hymn together and went out to the Mount of Olives.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? Am I feeding on Christ as much as I depend on physical food?

The Grace Challenge: Create a welcoming atmosphere for the Father and the Son to come in and dine with you.

Prediction of Peter's Denial

Lord, You had known all along, and You rightly told them that they would all abandon You that very night, just as Prophet Zechariah had foretold—that when the Shepherd is struck, the flock will scatter.

And I also told them when I rise again, I would go ahead of them to Galilee, where they would meet Me. At that, Peter said he would never leave Me, even if all others did. But I told him that he would deny Me three times that night before the rooster crowed. Peter insisted he would rather die with Me than deny Me; and all the disciples also said so.

Lord, I would have said the very same thing... and truth be told, I've made similar promises to You so many times, only to fail. Thank You for forgiving me, for being patient with me, and for understanding my weakness.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? How have I denied Christ by what I've done—or what I've failed to do?

The Grace Challenge: Thank God for delivering you from temptation and for giving you the grace to overcome it.

Praying at the Garden of Gethsemane

When we got to a place called Gethsemane, I told the disciples to sit at a certain place while I went to pray; and I took Peter, James and John with Me. Then I became very sad and deeply distressed. My heart was so overwhelmed

with sorrow that I felt as though I would die. So I asked them to stay there and keep watch with Me.

Then I went a little farther, fell on My face before the Father and prayed that if it was possible, He should take that cup of suffering from Me. However, I told Him to let His will be done, not Mine.

When I went back to the disciples, I found them sleeping already. So I said to Peter, “What! could you not watch with Me for an hour?” I urged them then, and I urge you now: watch and pray, so that you may not fall into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Yes, Lord... even me. My spirit is always willing, but this flesh... this flesh! Thank You that Your grace is sufficient for me, and Your strength is made perfect in my weakness.

Then I went away a second time and prayed to the Father, that if the cup could not pass away from Me unless I drank it, then His will should be done. When I went back, I found them sleeping again, for their eyes were heavy. So I left them and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

When I went back to the disciples, I told them to sleep and rest no more, for the moment had come when I would be handed over to sinners. Then I said, “Arise, let us go. Lift up your eyes and see—the one betraying Me is here.

Checkpoints: How watchful am I? Am I on guard against the wiles of the devil?

The Grace Challenge: Watch and pray, so that you won't fall into temptation.

The Arrest

While I was still speaking, Judas Iscariot came with a great multitude that was sent by the chief priests and the elders of the Jews. They were armed with swords and clubs.

Before then, he had already told them how they would recognize Me—that the Person he would kiss was the One they were looking for. So he walked right up to Me, greeted Me, then kissed Me; and I asked him, “My friend, why have you come?”

Lord, You still called him a friend? Wow... that's something! Another lesson from You. Please Lord, help me to respond with grace, even when I'm hurt.

Then they arrested Me; and as they led Me away, all of a sudden, Peter drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. But I told him to put his sword back in its sheath, for everyone who kills by the sword would die by the sword. I also told him if I wish, I would seek help from My Father, and right away He would provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels.

Lord, as You said, if that had happened, then the Scriptures wouldn't have been fulfilled. But You chose to suffer and to die, so that I could enjoy the blessings of Your kingdom. Thank You so much, my Lord. Please keep giving me the grace to

also suffer silently for You whenever that's Your will for me.

At that time, I asked the multitudes why they came with swords and clubs to arrest Me, as if I was a criminal. I used to sit with them daily, teaching in the temple, yet they did not arrest Me. You see, all that had to happen to fulfill that which the prophets had written in the Scriptures. Then all the disciples left Me and fled, just as I had told them earlier.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? Am I Christ's faithful disciple or a fair-weather friend?

The Grace Challenge: Pray for the grace to endure suffering for Christ with joy, knowing that yours is the kingdom of heaven.

Facing the Sanhedrin

Those who arrested Me took Me to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had gathered. Meanwhile, Peter kept following from a distance till we got to the high priest's house, then he went into the courtyard and sat with the temple guards to see how the whole thing would end.

The chief priests and the entire Jewish Council, the Sanhedrin, sought false testimony against Me so that they could condemn Me to death, but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last, two false witnesses came forward and testified that I had said I could destroy the temple of God, and build it in

three days.

When the high priest heard that, he stood up and asked Me to respond, but I held My peace. So he said, “I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.”

Lord, whether he meant it or not, he still acknowledged who You truly are—the the Christ, the Son of the living God. What a lesson! Thank You, Lord, for reminding me that Your truth remains true, even when it's spoken by those who don't fully believe it.

I told him he had spoken rightly. Then I declared that from that time on they would see Me seated at the right hand of the Almighty and coming on the clouds of heaven.

To You alone, Oh Lord my God, be all the glory and power and majesty forever and ever!

But what I said infuriated Caiaphas. He tore his clothes out of anger, and said I had spoken blasphemy and they had heard with their own ears; so they did not need any more witnesses. He then sought the opinion of others, and they said I deserved to die. Thereafter, some of them spat in My face and beat Me; and others slapped Me, saying, “Prophecy to us, Christ! Who struck You?”

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about Christ? Am I calm and steadfast under pressure, or do I fret and lose heart?

The Grace Challenge: Let every word you speak reveal the glory of the Lord.

Peter's Denial and Remorse

All this while Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, warming himself. Then one of the servant girls saw him, went over to him, and said that he too had been with Me. But Peter denied it before everyone there, claiming he did not know or even understand what the servant was talking about. Then he went out to the entrance way of the courtyard.

There, a servant girl saw him again and told those standing by that he had been with Me. But he denied again, and swore that he did not know Me. After a little while, those who stood by came and said to Peter, "Surely you are also one of them, for your speech makes you known." Then Peter began to swear and even invoked curses on himself, insisting that he did not know Me.

Lord he must have felt terrified... just trying to save himself. I've done the same so many times—denying You in one way or another. Thank You for not giving up on me, but forgiving me instead.

Immediately the rooster crowed, and Peter remembered what I had told him—that before the rooster crowed, he would deny Me thrice. So he went outside and wept bitterly.

My Lord, I connect with this. It must have been so devastating for him! That's how I feel whenever I've offended You and Your Spirit convicts me. But thank You for Your mercy that endures forever. You never fail to forgive and restore me

whenever I come back to You. Please, Lord, let Your grace keep me from grieving You.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? Again, how do I react when I'm under pressure?

The Grace Challenge: Pray for the grace to stand firm under pressure for the sake of God and His righteousness.

CHAPTER

27

The Handing Over to Pontius Pilate; Judas Commits Suicide

Early the next morning, all the chief priests and the elders perfected their plans to put Me to death. So they bound Me, led Me off, and delivered Me to Pontius Pilate, who was the governor of Judea. When Judas saw that I had been condemned, he felt remorse, and took the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders, saying he had sinned by betraying an innocent Man to death.

But they didn't care, Lord! They were hell-bent on achieving their wicked plan.

They told him, "That is your concern, not ours." So Judas threw the money down on the floor of the the temple and left; then he went off and hanged himself. The chief priests later picked the money but said it was against the law to put it back in the temple's treasury, since it was blood money. So they agreed and used it to buy the potter's field, which was used as cemetery for foreigners. That is why that field is called the Field of Blood even till this day.

My Lord, unknown to them, they were fulfilling what Prophet Jeremiah had said: "They took the thirty silver coins, the

amount which the children of Israel had agreed to pay for Him, and used the money to buy the potter's field. This is as the Lord has commanded me to do."

Checkpoints: What new lesson have I learnt from Judas? Is my conscience still sensitive to God's conviction when I err, or has it been seared as with hot iron?

The Grace Challenge: Thank God for forgiving all your sins and restoring your fellowship with Him.

Facing Pilate

Then they took Me to face Pontius Pilate. He asked Me if I was the King of the Jews. And I told him it was just as he said. Meanwhile, the chief priests and the elders kept accusing Me before him, but I answered nothing. So Pilate asked if I had heard all the accusations they brought against Me? But I still said nothing, and Pilate was very surprised at My silence.

Lord, my instinct is always to defend myself, especially when I'm right or innocent. Please grant me the wisdom of speaking at the right time and staying quiet when the silence honours You.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt about Christ? What does it reveal about my life?

The Grace Challenge: Pray for the wisdom to know when to speak and when to remain silent.

As the Substitute

Lord, I learnt that each year during the Passover feast, it was a custom for the governor to release one prisoner whom the crowd asked for.

Yes. At that time they had a notorious prisoner whose name was Barabbas. So when the multitudes had gathered together, Pilate asked them whom they wanted him to set free; whether they wanted Me or Barabbas. He knew the Jewish leaders handed Me over to him because of envy.

While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him a message: "Have nothing to do with that righteous Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him."

Meanwhile, the chief priests and the elders stirred up the multitudes to ask for Barabbas and demand that I be crucified. So when Pilate asked them whom they wanted him to set free, they said they wanted Barabbas! Then he asked them, "What then should I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" And they all shouted, "Crucify Him!"

Lord, it's possible that some of them were among the thousands You had healed and blessed. Man...! Yet when Pilate asked, "Why, what evil has He done?" they only cried out all the more that You should be crucified.

My Lord, You took the place of a sinner—not just Barabbas' place, but mine too. Thank You for dying the death I deserved and giving me Your life.

When Pilate saw that he could not change their mind, but rather a riot was beginning, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitudes, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this righteous Man. You see to it.”

Lord, it breaks my heart whenever I think about what the people said—that Your blood should be on them and on their children. Thank You for Your abundant mercy! Thank You for forgiving us, 'cos sometimes we really don't know what we're saying.

So Pilate released Barabbas to them, had Me scourged, and then handed Me over to be crucified.

My Lord, I can't begin to imagine what was going through Your mind after You'd been sentenced to die. Every step after that led You closer to the cross. Yet You kept going—for me. Thank You for enduring it all to give me eternal life.

Please Lord, let me never forget that this is the life You've called me to as well, for I live in constant danger of death for Your sake. Grant me the grace to reflect You in everything I do, even now.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt in this section? Do I truly understand why Christ had to die so that I could be saved?

The Grace Challenge: Show selfless love to someone today in a way that reflects Christ's love for you.

Mocked by the Soldiers

After that, the soldiers took Me into the governor's compound. They gathered the whole battalion around Me,

stripped off My clothes, put a scarlet robe on Me, and then wove a crown of thorns and placed it on My head. They put a staff in My right hand, then they knelt down before Me and mocked Me, saying, "Hello, King of the Jews!"

They spat on Me, then took the staff and struck Me on the head. When they had finished making a mockery of Me, they took off the scarlet robe and put My own clothes back on Me. Then they led Me out to be crucified.

Checkpoints: Have I ever been humiliated for the sake of Christ? How did I respond?

The Grace Challenge: Put off your old self and put on Christ, even if it means suffering dishonour for His name's sake.

The Crucifixion

As we went out, we came across a Cyrenian named Simon, who was passing by; and the Roman soldiers forced him to carry My cross.

Lord, by then You must have been really exhausted...! I learnt that he was the father of Alexander and Rufus. Please keep giving me the grace to carry the cross You've entrusted to me; and to carry it willingly, regardless of the cost.

When we got to a place called Golgotha, which means "Place of a Skull," they offered Me wine mixed with gall. But after tasting it, I refused to drink it. Then the soldiers nailed Me to the cross and divided My clothes

among themselves by casting lots.

My Lord, that fulfilled what You had spoken through Your servant David in the Psalms: "They divided My clothes among themselves and cast lots for them."

As I hung on the cross, the soldiers sat nearby and kept watch over Me. And there was a notice fastened above My head, stating the charge against Me. It read: "THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS."

Oh yes, Lord! They were proclaiming You too, though for the wrong reasons—just as the Apostle Paul would later say. Even on the cross, they couldn't help but declare You as the King. Yes, You're my King—the King of the universe. I worship You.

The soldiers also crucified two robbers near Me, one on My right and the other on My left; as I hung there, those who passed by blasphemed Me, shaking their heads in contempt.

Lord, they couldn't imagine that the Son of God would willingly remain on the cross.

Yes. They said since I had claimed I could destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, I should save Myself; and I should come down from the cross, if I am the Son of God.

Thank You, my Lord, for showing me this example. I, too, must suffer for You before glory comes. They didn't understand it, neither did they know that the temple You had spoken about was Your own body.

Lord, where were the Jewish leaders then?

The chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders joined in mocking Me, saying I saved others, yet I could not save Myself. They said if I were the King of Israel, I should come down from the cross, and they would believe Me. They also mocked Me, saying, “He trusts in God. Let God deliver Him now, if He delights in Him, for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

Lord, the grand plan—the big picture—was already in the very Scriptures they read, taught, and claimed to know, yet they didn’t understand it. Please keep opening my eyes to Your mysteries, and grant me more of this grace of long-suffering. Help me to endure with patience, love and faith as I follow You.

And Lord, I learnt even the robbers joined in insulting You.

Checkpoints: Has the world actually been crucified to me, and I to the world, through the cross of Christ? What does Christ’s crucifixion truly mean to me?

The Grace Challenge: Just take your place at the foot of Christ’s cross, and behold the depth of His love for you.

It is Finished

Then from noon till about 3 pm, there was darkness over the whole land. And at about that time, I cried out, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?”—that is, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” But some of those who stood by misunderstood and said I was calling for Elijah!

Lord, it actually sounds close.

Immediately, one of them ran, took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave Me to drink. But others told him to let Me be; let them see whether Elijah would come and save Me. Then I shouted again and yielded up My Spirit.

Father, that's when You tore the temple curtain in two—the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. Yes! That's when You opened the life-gate into Your presence, so that all may come in. You made a way for me to meet with You anytime. Glory be to You, Lord!

And there was earthquake, rocks split apart, graves broke open, and many of My faithful people who had died came back to life. They came out of their tombs after My resurrection, went into the holy city, and appeared to many people.

Meanwhile, the centurion and the soldiers were still keeping watch over Me. But when they saw the earthquake and everything that happened, they were terrified, and they said, “Truly, He was the Son of God.”

Many women who had followed Me from Galilee and had been ministering to Me were also there, watching everything from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons—James and John.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? What

does it mean to my life?

The Grace Challenge: Count as finished everything Christ finished on the cross because He declared, "It is finished." Glorify His name for the victory.

The Burial

That evening, a wealthy man named Joseph from Arimathea, who was one of My disciples, went to Pilate and asked for My body. Pilate then ordered the soldiers to release My body to him. So Joseph took My body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in a new tomb he had recently carved out of the rock. He had made it for his own burial.

Lord, thank You, for I know, and my heart rejoices, that though You didn't remain in the grave for long, You'll always dwell in this new me. Glory be to You forever!

After that, a large stone was rolled across the entrance of the tomb to shut it, then he left. But Mary Magdalene and the other Mary sat there facing the tomb.

Checkpoints: What hope has this section given me? How much room have I truly given Christ in my life?

The Grace Challenge: Sow, even in tears, so that you will reap with songs of joy.

Guarding the Tomb

On the next day...

Lord, that was Saturday.

Yes, the Sabbath! The chief priests and the Pharisees met with Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember that while He was still alive, that deceiver said that after three days he would rise again."

My Lord, they called You a deceiver!

Yes. So they urged him to order that the tomb be made secure until the third day. They said if not, My disciples could go during the night, steal My body, and then go around telling people that I had risen from the dead. According to them, "That would make the last deception even worse than the first."

Imagine!

Pilate agreed and gave them a group of soldiers. He told them to go and make the tomb as secure as they could. So they went, secured the tomb by sealing the stone that covered its entrance, and stationed the guards there.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section about the boundless power of God?

The Grace Challenge: Shout for joy! For when there is a casting down, the Lord will be lifting you up.

CHAPTER

28

The Resurrection

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb. At that moment, there was a great earthquake; an angel had descended from heaven, rolled away the stone from the entrance of the tomb, and sat on it.

Glory!

His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes as white as snow.

And the guards? Lord, I would have loved to see the look on their faces then!

They were so overcome with fear that they were trembling; they could not move.

Like corpses, Lord? Scared stiff!

Then the angel told the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; He is risen, as He said. Come and see where they had laid the Lord." And he said they should hurry and tell My

disciples that I had risen from the dead, and that I was going ahead of them to Galilee, where they would see Me.

Lord, the way the angel announced the message, he must have been thrilled to proclaim such a wonderful news—another glad tidings of great joy, just like the annunciation of Your birth. This Good News... what a joy! By Your grace, I'll keep proclaiming it for all eternity!

So the women hurried off from the tomb, frightened but very happy. And they ran to go and tell My disciples what the angel had said. As they were going, I met them and greeted them, and they came and held My feet and worshipped Me.

I worship You too, my King and my risen Lord!

Then I told them not to be afraid, and to go and tell My disciples to go to Galilee, for that was where they would see Me.

Checkpoints: What other lessons have I learnt about the omnipotent power of God?

The Grace Challenge: Give all glory, honour, and praise to the risen Lord.

Bribing the Soldiers

While the women were on their way, some of the soldiers who guarded the tomb went into the city and told the chief priests everything that had happened. So when the chief

priests and the Jewish leaders gathered, they hatched a plan. They paid the soldiers a large sum of money and convinced them to spread a false story—that My disciples came during the night and stole My body while they were asleep.

And Lord, didn't they care that it could get the soldiers into trouble?

They assured the soldiers that if Pilate heard about it, they would persuade him and keep them out of trouble. So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed.

Lord, even till now, some Jews still believe that story—that You didn't rise from the dead, but that Your disciples stole Your body.

Checkpoints: What is my attitude towards false doctrine? How have I intentionally compromised God's standards and then justified my actions?

The Grace Challenge: Be determined to uphold the truth of the gospel, for you can do nothing against the truth but only for the truth. Be an apologist for Christ!

The Great Commission

After the women had delivered the message, the eleven disciples went to the mountain in Galilee where I had directed them to go. When they saw Me, they worshiped Me, although some of them still had doubts.

Then I went over to them and told them, just as I am telling you and all My disciples: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you...”

Everything! Yes Lord... You've taught me so much, and I'm very grateful. Please help me to obey all that I've learnt from You.

And surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Amen. My Lord, I don't just believe it—I know it.

Lord, listening to You as You shared Your life and Your experiences with me has been quite a wonderful adventure. Yes! Chatting with You will remain one of the most memorable experiences of my life, and I trust that, by Your grace, it will have an enduring impact on me. Thank You, Lord. I love You.

Checkpoints: What have I learnt from this section? How does it align with God's purpose for my life?

The Grace Challenge: Feel compassion for unrepentant souls. Align your purpose on earth with the Great Commission, live it faithfully, and experience the deep fulfillment that comes from fulfilling God's purpose.