

Chapter Fourteen

(14:1-35)

THE SON OF MAN DEFINING A TRUE DISCIPLE

IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. What is "dropsy" (14:2)?
2. Where is the "place of honor" at a feast (14:7)?
3. Does all this instruction about feasting apply to the twentieth century?
4. Is it wrong to invite your relatives to dine at your house (14:12)?
5. Is attending the "feast" of the kingdom of God more important than a person's marriage (14:20)?
6. How does one "bear his own cross" (14:27)?
7. Does "renounce all" that you have mean give away all earthly possessions and "renounce" one's family (14:33)?

SECTION 1

Good (14:1-6)

14 One sabbath when he went to dine at the house of a ruler who belonged to the Pharisees, they were watching him. ²And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. ³And Jesus spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath, or not?" ⁴But they were silent. Then he took him and healed him, and let him go. ⁵And he said to them, "Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well, will not immediately pull him out on a sabbath day?" ⁶And they could not reply to this.

14:1-2 Cordiality: Apparently Jesus received numerous invitations to dine in the homes of Pharisees. Earlier, in the Later Judean ministry, in the fall of A.D. 29, he was invited to a Pharisee's home for a meal (cf. Lk. 11:37ff.). That invitation was after the Feast of Tabernacles (September) and before the Feast of Dedication (December). This dinner invitation is in the Later Perea ministry, probably in January or February, A.D. 30. Jesus was cordial to all men—even to Pharisees and when invited always accepted and made the most of every situation for God.

A study of Jewish meal customs of the first century furnishes interesting background for this dinner invitation to Jesus. Plutarch, the Greek historian

(46-119 A.D.) wrote: "The Hebrews honor the Sabbath chiefly by inviting each other to drinking and intoxication." Not all Hebrews were this self-indulgent, but many of them were, especially the Pharisees who indulged themselves privately and pretended publicly to be very religious men.

Jews of the first century usually ate only twice daily. The first meal was anytime from early morning to noon, depending on the occupation of the head of the house and the social rank of the family. The evening meal came usually at sunset when the working day had ended and was the principal meal. The Hebrew diet was more varied than one might expect in light of so many dietary laws. Vegetables such as beans, cucumbers, onions, garlic, leeks, lentils (peas), carob pods, wild gourds, squash and others were served. Varieties of fruits, such as grapes, figs, olives, mulberries, pomegranates, oranges, lemons, melons, dates, almonds and walnuts were also common. Bread made from wheat, often leavened (except on Sabbath), was usually eaten warm and served with sour wine or meat gravy. *Kosher* meat for the more affluent tables might be mutton, goat, fish, beef, and sometimes wild game. Milk, cheese, butter and some eggs (fish and locust) were included in some meals.

The rich (Pharisees and others) usually reclined upon dining couches in imitation of Greek and Roman ways of dining. A *triclinium* is a long couch, large enough for three people to recline on as they ate. The "ruler of the feast" in John 2:9 is called in Greek, *architriklinos*, literally, "the ruling triclinium person." Knives, forks and spoons were not used to eat with—knives were used to prepare the meals. Contents of the meat and gravy bowl were taken either with the fingers or placed on a piece of bread (sopped or dipped) and carried to the mouth. The houses of the rich were large and it was customary for the poor and curious to come into the dining room to stand and watch the rich indulge. Pharisees enjoyed such ostentation. There was always a "pecking order" or seating arrangement at formal dinners according to "importance" or "popularity" and "places of honor" were rigidly observed.

The man who invited Jesus to dine was "a ruler who belonged to the Pharisees." Not all the Jewish "rulers" were Pharisees, and not all Pharisees were rulers. This man must have been a member of the local Sanhedrin. Each city and village had its local Sanhedrin or ruling body to settle religious and civil affairs. There was the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem (like our Supreme Court and Congress all in one body). There were other Pharisees present at this dinner where Jesus was a guest. The invitation extended to Jesus was *not* out of cordiality or hospitality. They were "watching" Him. The Greek word is *parateroumenoi*. The prepositional prefix, *para*, intensifies the participle, meaning they were "watching intently with a

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sinister motive," or "watching Him like a hawk" hoping to find something in His behavior or teaching by which they might accuse Him as a "law-breaker."

These Pharisees were watching Jesus because they saw a man there with "dropsy" and they knew Jesus' reputation for healing—even on the sabbath. This man was not one of the invited guests, but one of the on-lookers. It was a custom of those days to allow the poor and curious to enter the courtyards of the rich and be spectators at formal dinners and feasts. The Greek word *hydropikos* is translated "dropsy" and is related to the Greek word *hydor* which means, "water." Dropsy, in modern medical language called edema, is a condition in which the tissues retain too much fluid. It may be caused by heart disease, kidney disease, or other infections, and may be fatal. In those days it was incurable. The Pharisees saw to it that this afflicted man was placed right in front of Jesus (Gr. *emprosthen*) so He would be forced into some choice. Would He ignore the man? That would contradict His reputation for compassion. Would He heal the man—on the sabbath? That would add to the accusations the Pharisees already had against Him. Perhaps the Pharisees doubted that Jesus could cure the man and they would have evidence once for all that He was an imposter.

14:3-6 Compassion: All their conniving was to no avail. Jesus destroyed any possibility that they could represent Him as a "lawbreaker" or an inconsiderate pretender. He knew exactly what they intended, so He put the onus on them by asking the question, "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath, or not?" It is always "lawful" to do good on the sabbath (see comments Lk. 13:10-17). The Greek word *exestin* is an impersonal verb meaning, "it is permitted, or, it is possible." As we have pointed out in Luke 13:10-17, even their own traditions permitted care and the practice of medicine on the seriously ill on the sabbath. There is Jewish legend that Hillel (famous rabbi), before he became a rabbi, was found once half-frozen under masses of snow in the lecture room of certain teachers where he had hidden himself to profit by their great wisdom. He had to hide because he had been unable to earn the fee for entrance as a pupil. These teachers found him and rubbed and resuscitated him, even though it was the sabbath day. They are reported to have said that such a dedicated student was one for whose sake it was well worth while to break the sabbath.

His antagonists could not answer the righteousness of the question. They were silent because they knew if they denied the lawfulness of healing on the sabbath they would be exposed for the hypocrites they were and, of course, they did not want to say it was lawful to heal on the sabbath and contradict their own traditions. Jesus took hold of the man (Gr. *epilabomenos*), to demonstrate the power was from Him. After He had healed the man, Jesus dismissed him from the room (Gr. *apelusen*, "loosed him from") to

prevent the Pharisees from persecuting him as they sometimes did to those Jesus healed (cf. Jn. 9:1ff.). Then Jesus exposed their inhumanness with His reminder that when they had a son or an ox fall into a well they would go immediately, even on the sabbath, and pull him out. The ancient manuscripts are about equally divided over which is the proper wording—whether it should be “son” or “ass.” The Alexandriunus, Vaticanus, Bezae and other lesser manuscripts have the Greek *huios* or “son.” The Sinaiticus, Cyprius, Freerianus and others have the Greek *onos* or “ass.” Jesus is demanding that what ever the Pharisees permitted themselves to do on the sabbath for their own benefit, they must ethically and lawfully allow the Son of God to do for the benefit of others!

So here in the midst of the Lord’s last three months of evangelism, the Pharisees give Him an opportunity to display unequivocally the way to please God. Jesus exposes the graphic contrast between the hypocrisy and inhumanity of the Pharisees (who considered themselves the only people pleasing to God) and His own compassion and truthfulness. Jesus made so plain the essence of God’s will no one could contradict it. The true disciple will follow Jesus’ teaching.

SECTION 2

Gracious (14:7-14)

7 Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he marked how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, ⁸“When you are invited by any one to a marriage feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest a more eminent man than you be invited by him; ⁹and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man,’ and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. ¹⁰But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. ¹¹For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

12 He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. ¹³But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

14:7-11 Humility: Luke uses the Greek word *epechon* to describe Jesus’ observation of the men at this Pharisee’s table choosing places of honor. The Greek word means literally, “to hold upon.” The Lord’s attention

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was riveted upon the ludicrous scene. They were probably pushing, shoving, elbowing and arguing about places to recline. The Jewish Talmud says that on a couch holding three persons, the middle place is considered the place of greatest honor. The place to the left is next in honor and the place to the right last. The Talmud also records just such an instance of ridiculous behavior. At a banquet of Alexander Jannaeus (Hasmonean king of the Jews 103-76 B.C.) rabbi Simeon ben Shetach, in spite of the presence of some great Persian rulers, had thrust himself between the king and the queen at the dinner table. He was publicly rebuked and shamed. He tried to defend his behavior by quoting the Jewish apocryphal writing, Ecclesiasticus 15:5 which says, "Exalt wisdom, and she . . . shall make thee sit among princes," The audacious, arrogant man who repeatedly and presumptuously puts himself forward ("chooses the place of honor") is always in danger of public humiliation because there is inevitably always someone present more deserving of being honored. And even if the host is not forced to ask the presumptuous man to step down, the guests are almost always aware of the egotist's real position. By contrast the truly humble man, not concerned to "show-off" or greedy for attention, who takes a "lower seat," will usually be asked to "go up higher."

There is a fine line between the proper self-worth and sinful pride. The Greek words translated pride in the New Testament are *huperephania* and *alazoneiais*. *Huperephania* is literally, "hyper-showing"; it is arrogance, haughtiness, disdain of others, making oneself to be pre-eminent (cf. Mk. 7:22). *Alazoneiais* is from *alazon* (a vagabond or wanderer) and came to be used in the sense of braggadocio, boastfulness, and being "puffed up," (cf. James 4:16). Not even disciples of Jesus are immune to the temptation (cf. Lk. 9:46; Mt. 20:20-28; Lk. 22:24-27). Pride is the "snare of the devil" (I Tim. 3:6) and God hates pride (Prov. 8:13). It was the fundamental temptation the devil trapped Eve and Adam with in the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen. 3:5). There are four attitudes that clearly reveal a proud heart: (a) self-sufficiency; (b) self-justification; (c) self-righteousness; (d) self-importance. Pride is put to practice when men measure themselves by those they feel are inferior, in order to justify feelings of superiority (cf. II Cor. 10:12-14). On the other hand, acknowledging that God our Creator has accounted us worth the sacrifice of His Perfect Son, is not pride but the necessary admission that motivates us to enter into His covenant of salvation.

Humility in the scriptures is from the Greek word *tapeinophrosune* and literally means, "lowliness of mind." Humility is based upon:

a. Truth:

1. Creator-creature relationship
2. Kingship and divine Saviorhood of Jesus Christ
3. Revelational nature of the Bible

- b. Trust:
 1. In the Fatherhood of God
 2. In the Substitutionary-atonement of Christ
- c. Obedience:
 1. Service to others
 2. Carrying out God's will

The only sure cure for pride is to compare oneself with God and with His Perfect Son, Jesus Christ, and then to acknowledge the scriptural truth that the kingdom of God is not a society in which there is competition for "position" but a fellowship where "each counts others better than self" (Rom. 12:3, 10), and where everyone has the "mind of Christ" (Phil. 2:5ff.). Real humility is always spontaneous and attractive. It is false humility when we pretend we do not have a capacity that we do have. If you can do something well humility does not require you to pretend that you cannot; it only requires you to remember that you did not create the talents you have yourself, and that therefore, gratitude fits better than pride. Real humility walks the fine line between self-criticism and self-acceptance.

These Pharisees, expositors of God's word, scholars and religious guides, were giving the distinct impression that they considered the end of learning to be self-exaltation. They were showing they believed the purpose of wisdom was to make them superior to all other men. The purpose of learning and scholarship is for service to others. It is in serving others that valuable character is formed—not in self-exaltation. It is in humble service that the true dignity of the human being is manifested. It is in giving of self to the edification of others that a person reflects the glory of God and His Son (cf. Jn. 13:1ff.). When a person humbles himself, God's image is reflected in him and he is exalted. When a person exalts himself, the image of the devil is reflected and he is abased in the evaluation of good and honest men.

Is it possible that such grabbing at false honor could go on among modern-day rabbis and clergymen? When was the last time you heard sermons from the scriptures warning the followers of Jesus about such immodest behavior? How many conventions for preachers and church workers ever seriously consider this? A great deal is preached about sexual sin and about doctrinal error, but Jesus focused His most scathing denunciation on the egotism of the religious leaders of His day!

14:12-14 Hospitality: But Jesus wasn't through with His host. He had another lesson to teach all present at the dinner—the lesson of true hospitality. The true disciple of Jesus does not entertain or feed anyone with a motive that expects repayment. The good man of God is hospitable and charitable without any thought of getting anything out of it. He does his good because someone needs help—because he loves.

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The Greek word for hospitality is *philoxenia*, literally, "love of strangers or aliens." Jesus taught hospitality (cf. Lk. 10:30-37; Mt. 10:11-15; Lk. 10:5-12; Lk. 7:36-50). The N.T. writers exhort Christians to be hospitable (cf. I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8; I Pet. 4:9; Heb. 13:2). Philemon and John's epistles enjoin and exhibit hospitality. Jesus said, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends . . . lest . . ." "Lest" emphasizes *danger*! There is danger in always giving dinners for friends and relatives! The danger is in asking to your feast someone who can (and will) repay you! The Lord's teaching here is revolutionary in light of modern-day practice! Obviously, Jesus is dealing mainly with motives. One's *motive* for inviting people to dinner is of supreme importance. This teaching of Jesus strikes hard at all of us. Which of us has ever had a banquet for the poor, maimed, lame and blind? What are our motives for giving dinners—pride? prestige? publicity? manipulation?

Clearly, there is nothing wrong with inviting your relatives or even your rich neighbors to dinner if your motives are pure. Matthew invited his fellow-publicans to dinner (Mt. 9:9-10). But, there are so many people who could use help, if we really followed this teaching we would have little time for feeding those who can take care of themselves. Hospitality and helping the needy will be a crucial issue at the judgment of mankind (cf. Mt. 25:35ff.; Mt. 10:40; Jn. 13:20).

God cares about the poor. He enjoins us to care about them (Ex. 22:25-27; 23:11; Lev. 19:9-15; 25:6-30; 25:39-42; 39:47-54; Deut. 14:28-29; 15:12-13; 16:11-14; 24:10-22; 26:12-13; Ruth 2:1-7; Neh. 8:10; Psa. 9:18; 12:5). The prophets championed the poor because rich people exploited them (Isa. 1:23; 10:1-2; Ezek. 34; Amos 2:6; 5:7; 8:6; Micah 2:1-2; Hab. 3:14; Mal. 3:5). Jesus always helped the poor when He had the opportunity to do so. The early church was made up of mostly poor people and slaves (cf. I Cor. 1:26-29; II Cor. 8:2-15; James 1:9-11; 2:1-13; 5:1-6). Paul and Barnabas were asked to remember the poor (Gal. 2:10). Opportunities are never lacking to give aid to the poor for they are always in the world (cf. Deut. 15:4-11; Jn. 12:8). The question is, shall those who have plenty avail themselves of these opportunities to help. Helping the poor will hardly ever be rewarded in this life. Jesus promises, however, that in the resurrection of the just, those who have shown compassion and mercy will be rewarded by the One who is able to give infinite compassion and mercy. It sounds illogical, and it is contrary to the world's values, but it is true that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). It is only by faith that the follower of Jesus can put these admonitions into practice in his daily life. The world will say, if you want to get ahead, entertain the rich and powerful. And it even appears, in this life, those who do so "get ahead." But the follower of Jesus has his hope in the next world.

SECTION 3

Grateful (14:15-24)

15 When one of those who sat at table with him heard this, he said to him, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!"¹⁶ But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet, and invited many; ¹⁷and at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for all is now ready.' ¹⁸But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it; I pray you, have me excused.' ¹⁹And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them; I pray you, have me excused.' ²⁰And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' ²¹So the servant came and reported this to his master. Then the householder in anger said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame.' ²²And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' ²³And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. ²⁴For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'"

14:15-20 Indifference: Jesus had spoken about the ideal banquet situation where goodness, helpfulness, humility and hospitality are sincere. It was apparent that Jesus was talking about the messianic age. Describing the kingdom of God as a "banquet" was a favorite expression of the Old Testament prophets (cf. Isa. 25:6-12; 65:13-16, etc.). Jewish apocryphal writings also picture the messianic age in this manner. One of the dinner guests was moved to exclaim, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!"

The guest had the right subject. Jesus was indeed talking about the kingdom of God—the messianic age. Nothing short of the rule of God in the hearts of men could produce such an ideal society. The guest at the Pharisee's table was excited about the beauty of such an ideal. Jesus pictured a social order where there was no self-serving pride; a society where humility was sincere and there was no competition or exploitation of one another for positions of honor. He talked about true hospitality where love and care is given to the needy with no thought of payment or reward. Such a society is the kingdom of God—the church (cf. Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-37; 6:1-6, etc.).

At first glance it would appear that Jesus tried to stifle the enthusiasm of the excited guest. Jesus told His parable of the indifferent guests directly to the man who had expressed such anticipation of the kingdom of God. The man who gave the great banquet in the parable is God the Father and

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Christ the Son. The servant sent to invite guests is probably John the Baptist. The guests are the Jews. This parable had primary reference to the Jewish rejection of the Messiah and His kingdom. Its principle is relevant for all ages.

By this parable Jesus says, in effect, "Yes, you all admire the ideal but you are not prepared to act upon it. You think it is grand but you are too occupied with yourselves to take it seriously." The parable illustrates:

- a. the kingdom of God is a kingdom of grace—the banquet table is provided by Him.
- b. the privilege to participate is by answering the invitation of the king in the precise manner he has chosen to extend it.
- c. exclusion is due to a freely chosen refusal to answer the invitation—not to the king's discrimination.
- d. men choose to refuse because they value their own interests more precious than the king's banquet.

The guests of the parable were "one" (Gr. *mias*) in excusing themselves from the man's feast. The inference is that there was a united conspiracy to refuse to attend. The Greek word *paraitesthai* means literally, "beg off." They had no valid reasons they could not attend, they simply tried to find some "excuse" by which they might justify themselves for refusing to attend.

The first guest's excuse was that he had just bought a field and must go see it. What business man would buy a field *before* seeing it? This man was either a liar or a fool! Furthermore, how could it be more important to go and look at a piece of ground than it could be to attend a great man's banquet? It was a deliberate choice of interest in possessions over gratitude to one's benefactor. The rich young ruler (Lk. 18:18ff.) refused the invitation of King Jesus because he had much riches. The second guest begged-off saying he had just purchased five yoke (teams) of oxen and he had to test (Gr. *dokimasai*, "examine") them. Imagine a man buying oxen he has not tested or examined! Another man who was either a fool or a liar. The first man said, "I must go . . ." the second man said, "I am going . . ." There is the element of insolence in the second man's reply to the invitation. Work was more important to the second man than the feast. Many today consider the work they do more important than feasting on the Bread of Life. The third guest sent his reply back, "I have married a wife, and I cannot come." Someone has noted that this excuse has the least validity of all because wives like to go to social affairs! Surely the householder would have known of the recent marriage and have graciously invited the wife also. It is certainly true that the kingdom of God demands first loyalty over domestic ties (cf. Mt. 10:34-39).

Excuses, not reasons, are what these guests gave. Possessions, vocations and domestic ties are not valid reasons for refusing the invitation to participate in joyous feast of the Lord. In fact, there is no valid reason at all for refusing the invitation of God.

"Yes," Jesus said to the excited man, "you admire the ideal society I have been preaching and inviting you to, but you won't answer the invitation and your excuses are foolish, impertinent, rude and unacceptable."

14:21-24 Innovation: When the servant reported to his master the three refusals the master was very angry (Gr. *orgistheis*, the word from which we have the English word, *orgasm*). The host had gone to great expense to provide this feast (God gave His priceless Son). Those first invited (the Jewish rulers and rich men) scorned the invitation and sold their birthright for a "mess of pottage." The host sent his servant out to the highways and hedges (uttermost parts of the world) to "compel" the poor, maimed, blind and lame (spiritually) to come (probably the Gentiles). This host wants to be a benefactor to all who will allow him to do so.

The Greek word *anagkason* is from a root word which means "necessity." It most often means "to constrain by persuasion," (cf. Mt. 14:22; Mk. 6:45; Acts 28:19). Plummer insists the word could only mean "persuasion" in this instance since "A single servant could not use force." Those who were first invited and refused were not dragged in which would have been the case had the host meant to compel attendance by force. Christ authorizes no use of force or deceit in inviting people to His feast. Persuasion (II Cor. 5:11), the compelling power of truth, is the only valid means of inviting people to God's great spiritual feast. The Christian life is a spiritual "feast" (cf. Rom. 14:17; I Cor. 5:6-8; 10:1-5; Heb. 12:22-23; Mt. 5:6; etc.). The invitation to this spiritual feast may be accepted by anyone who is thirsty and hungry for what God has to offer. It may also be rejected. Those who refuse will never taste (experience) what God has prepared (peace, joy, holiness, forgiveness, life).

Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 13:44-52), gives the theological amplification of this parable in his great epistle to the Romans (chapters 9, 10 and 11). There he explains that the rejection of the gospel invitation by the Jews brought about the innovation of the Gentiles into God's covenant. Paul warns the Gentiles (in Romans), to whom God turned with His invitation, they must not become scornful of it or they too will be excluded.

Jesus told another parable, in the last week of His ministry, similar to this one (cf. Mt. 22:1-14). That one He concluded by saying, "For many are called but few are chosen." Many are invited, but few accept. Few are chosen because only a few are really hungry for spiritual food and are grateful enough to make the effort necessary to accept the invitation.

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SECTION 4

Grounded (14:25-35)

25 Now great multitudes accompanied him; and he turned and said to them, ²⁶“If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple. ²⁸For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰saying, ‘This man began to build, and was not able to finish.’ ³¹Or what king, going to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³²And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an embassy and asks terms of peace. ³³So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

34 “Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? ³⁵It is fit neither for the land nor for the dunghill; men throw it away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

14:25-33 Farsighted: True discipleship to Jesus must be based upon or grounded in reasoned commitment, not on superficial emotionalism. The “Jesus movement” was gaining a superficial momentum toward that “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem some three months hence. As He preached throughout Perea, Christ saw through the facade of popularity and gave this stern, uncompromising lecture, illustrating that there is no place for unreasoning, sentimental enthusiasm in His followers. This admonition of the Lord is doubly pertinent for today’s would-be follower of Jesus! There is a vast difference between today’s religious sentimentality and the real discipleship outlined in the New Testament.

The verb *strapheis* (2nd aorist participle) indicates Jesus turned *suddenly*, and threw into their ears the gauntlet of total commitment. Looking out over that sea of faces, Jesus could find very few whose minds and lives were committed to Him. It was an impulsive crowd spread around Him—they were following on feelings. He wanted thinking, intelligent, logical followers; He wanted farsighted, judicious, sober soldiers in His army, so He used clear, candid language to “sift” the multitudes and blow the “chaff” away.

No earthly love must ever come into competition with love for Christ. Entire self-renunciation is the cost of real discipleship. The Greek word *misei* (“hate”) carries the idea of *choice* or *priority*. A man must choose

Christ *over* father, mother, wife, children, brethren and self. If Christ is not absolutely *first* in a person's life, he is no disciple (cf. Mt. 10:34-39). To the worldly mentality, these are shocking and severe words. To be a disciple of Jesus men must prepare themselves to choose Him over every one of life's dearest relationships! The world does not think like this. When a choice must be made between the church and one's family, most people choose family. The Bible strongly advocates love of family so the fact that Christ insists He must have first priority emphasizes the seriousness of this injunction. The terms of Christian discipleship are awesome. There can be no higher loyalty than that which Jesus requires. This statement of Jesus strikes at the very core of the excuse of the man who said, "I have married a wife . . ." If ever there is a conflict between the highest and dearest earthly love then we must deny that and follow Him.

Jesus associated discipleship with cross-bearing. The cross was the repulsive, terrifying, certain instrument of execution in the Roman world. When a person was given a cross to bear, it was certain he was on his way to death—excruciatingly painful death. Christian discipleship means certain death to ego-centricity. It means emptying one's life of everything that is selfish. It means choosing death to self and desiring Christ's life over ours (cf. Gal. 2:20-21; II Cor. 5:14-21; Phil. 3:4-11). Taking up the cross means total commitment. It is not easy to be a Christian—Jesus never promised it would be. It involves pain, struggle, surrender and death to self-rule. It is not *just* suffering—many people suffer and glorify themselves in it. Bearing the cross is not *just* giving up bad habits—it is sacrifice of self, surrender of all supposed rights to determine what one shall think and do. This was exemplified ultimately by Jesus (Phil. 2:5-11; Jn. 12:20-33).

If Christian discipleship involves the ultimate cost (death to self) then it is imperative that it not be entered into unadvisedly, hastily or flippantly. Christian discipleship involves decisions for eternity and demands, therefore, reasonableness, honesty, humility and faith. Jesus illustrates this with two short parables. He is requiring would-be disciples to count the cost by illustrating the momentous calling of discipleship. He is building an eternal temple (the church) and fighting a life-and-death battle against the strongest of foes. Christian discipleship is no place for the half-hearted. In recruiting, Jesus seeks the few good men. He is far too wise to pride Himself in mere numbers of converts. He is more concerned with quality than quantity. He always loathed the counterfeit, the double-minded and the superficial. Jesus always accentuated the severity and sacrifice of discipleship:

- a. "Foxes have holes . . . but the Son of man has nowhere . . ." (Mt. 8:20; Lk. 9:58)
- b. "Are you able to drink the cup . . .?" (Mt. 20:22)

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- c. "Go sell all that you have . . ." (Mt. 19:16-22; Mk. 10:17-22; Lk. 18:18-23).

Some tend to cover up the severity of discipleship to Christ. They make out like the Christian life is easy. They try to play down everything unpleasant about it. They do deceitful and indulgent things to lure prospects. Jesus, on the other hand, went out of His way to *sift* disciples! He was brutally frank and searching in challenging would-be followers. Is it not self-defeating to continually emphasize the difficulties of following the Lord? Should we simply say nothing about the "strait and narrow" way so we may reach more? Would it not be better to get as many enlisted as possible without worrying about their commitment? Not if we are to take Jesus as our guide. It is better never to enlist a single disciple than to enlist a half-hearted one! Jesus will not have reckless, carefree, spur-of-the-moment enlistments. Christ *discouraged* half-hearted kingdom enlistments. He was *negative* about superficiality. Lukewarmness makes Christ vomit! (Rev. 3:16).

The illustration of the man desiring to build a tower would be a familiar figure for that day. The Herod family was noted for its penchant for erecting magnificent public and private buildings. Many men probably tried to imitate them and found they did not have the will nor the funds to finish. There were probably scores of unfinished "towers" scattered throughout the land. These unfinished buildings served only as monuments to the hasty, near-sighted, half-hearted efforts of foolish and emotional men.

The picture of the wise king who takes counsel of his strength before he goes to battle is also taken from the history of the times. Herod Antipas' illicit relations with Herodias caused his first wife, the daughter of Aretas, to divorce him. Aretas, a powerful Arabian king, declared war on Herod and the result was disaster for Herod. Josephus declares that Herod's entry into this war was the commencement of all his subsequent misfortunes. Any commander of troops would be the laughingstock of all his contemporaries if he entered into a battle carelessly, flippantly and expecting to retreat.

Christ wants no shallow, half-hearted builders in His kingdom leaving "unfinished towers" for the world to mock. No one has any business in His army without the will to fight and finish. The Lord's terms for discipleship are severe:

1. He is engaged in building and fighting.
2. He wants followers who will stand by Him until He is done.
3. He wants quality more than quantity.
4. Discipleship must not be undertaken in a moment of emotional sentimentality or rashly. If it is, there will be disaster.
5. No would-be follower of Jesus should "put his hand to the plow" if he is planning to look back (cf. Lk. 9:62; II Pet. 2:21-22).
6. The Christian must fight, but not as "one that beateth the air . . ." (I Cor. 9:26).

7. The Christian must “run with perseverance the race that is set before him . . .” (Heb. 12:1).

Jesus said, “So, therefore, whoever of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” One ancient Christian wrote, “We must live in this world as though the soul was already in heaven and the body mouldering in the grave” (St. Francis de Sales). To renounce what we have does not mean to indiscriminately throw away those things over which God has placed us as stewards. It means that not one of those things or all those things put together are to have first priority in our lives. These “things” include families and friends as well as properties. Any person not willing to pay that price cannot be Christ’s disciple.

14:34-35 Functional: The true disciple of Jesus is not merely a follower—he is a functioning follower. Salt that does not function is worthless. Salt is absolutely essential to life. Medical science knows that a patient continually given liquids without salt-content soon has all the salt flushed out of his body and is in danger of death by water-poisoning! Salt seasons and preserves. Disciples who have no “tang” and no “bite” and who give the world no preserving functions are worthless. What good is a mountain of granules if they are saltless? What good is a mountain of disciples if they do not function? No wonder Jesus sought quality rather than quantity. True evangelism sifts out the chaff from the wheat! It is the very nature of the gospel to sift, so do not be discouraged when few decide to enlist. You must have willing ears to hear this.

STUDY STIMULATORS:

1. Jesus accepted an invitation to dine in a Pharisee’s house—would you be sociable to a hypocrite? What if one tried to trap you into a religious mistake?
2. If it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath, is it all right to work on Sunday if your job demands it?
3. If there is an opportunity to help a neighbor who is in true need could one miss church services to help?
4. Do you see any room for growth in the area of humility among Christian leaders today? Can you name some leaders who are humble?
5. Is pride really dangerous?
6. When was the last time you gave a dinner and invited the poor, lame, blind and maimed?
7. Have you ever heard excuses similar to those of the guests invited to the great feast? What were your answers to the excuses?
8. If many are invited to the feast of God, why are only a few chosen?
9. Do you know any “builders” who have left “unfinished towers”?
10. Why doesn’t the church spend more time emphasizing the cost of discipleship?

CONDUCT WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL (Philippians 1:27-30)

By Paul T. Butler — OBC Chapel, 10-23-80

INTRODUCTION

I. THE PHILIPPIAN CHRISTIANS

A. Lived in a city that had an illustrious history and a great heritage of citizenship—first in the Greek empire and later in the Roman empire.

1. About 100 years previous to Paul's letter, Mark Antony and Octavian (Augustus) fought for control of the Rome empire there.
2. Philippi had been given Roman citizenship and was proud of it.
3. Roman colonies were little bits of Rome planted throughout the world. In Roman colonies the Roman citizens never forgot that they were Romans. They spoke the Latin language, wore the Latin dress, called their magistrates by the Latin names, insisted on being stubbornly Roman, however for they might be from Rome. . . . Barclay
4. Tenney states that many retired Roman army officers lived in Philippi.
5. There was a school of medicine there. Many think Luke was a native of Philippi. There seems to be a touch of native pride when Luke calls Philippi "a city of Macedonia, the first of the district" (Acts 16:12).
6. They knew about the idea of pride in citizenship.

B. Were members of the *first* European church Paul had founded

1. This church had to endure persecution from the very beginning.
2. Paul and the Christians there were accused of subversive actions.
3. They were attacked by a mob, ordered to be beaten with many blows after which they were imprisoned and placed in stocks.
4. It was here Paul insisted on his rights as a Roman citizen and made the magistrates who imprisoned him illegally come and release him and apologize.
5. There was a very intimate relationship built up between Paul and this congregation of believers.
They supported his work financially and in prayer, often.

II. LET YOUR MANNER OF LIFE. . . .

A. The Greek word translated "conduct" or "manner of life" or "conversation" is *polietuesthe*.

1. It is a unique use of the word for Paul. He usually exhorts Christians to "walk" worthily and uses the Greek word *peripatein* which means "to walk about."
2. *Polietuesthe* is the same word from which we get the English words, politics, politicize, metropolis. It means "to be a citizen."

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3. This terminology would ring a bell with the Philippians.
 4. Paul wants them and us to understand that Christians are citizens of a heavenly kingdom—the kingdom of God.
 5. Sometimes Christians get the feeling of being disfranchised. They cannot feel at home in this world—everything they think is opposed to it, nothing in it satisfies them, they know it is going to be destroyed. BUT THEY MUST REMEMBER THEY ARE "CITIZENS" THEY DO HAVE A CITIZENSHIP . . . THEY DO HAVE A KING.
- B. The Greek verb is in the imperative—it is a command from Paul.
1. Conduct yourself!
 2. It will not happen automatically. It takes determination, decision, and action.
 3. It is something the Christian has to consciously do.
 4. It ought to be passionate, like patriotism. Patriotism is not automatic. It is not something one just talks about—it is something demonstrated—something done.

III. BE WORTHY. . . .

- A. The Greek word is *axios*.
- B. It is the word from which we get the English word, *axiom*, *axiology*.
- C. It means literally, "value, acceptable, a standard of values."
- D. That which the Christian, the citizen of the kingdom of God, is to walk worthy of is THE GOSPEL.
1. The gospel is a heritage. It is not a religion—it is not something we attach to our worldly lives.
 2. The gospel is a life—it is a citizenship. We *belong* to it.
 3. The Pioneer of our faith, Jesus, came to earth as the Perfect Man and struggled, fought the enemy, gave Himself up to humiliation and death, but victoriously won for us the New Beulah Land. THIS IS OUR HERITAGE . . . struggle, fight, self-sacrifice and victory.
- E. Being worthy means being loyal; it means being a person of integrity, a person of conviction. It means one's conduct measures up to this heritage of the gospel.

The classic illustration of this for me is the military service. There is a great pride (or was, anyway) among America's military men in their calling. This is true of both officers and enlisted men. The oldest of the military academies, West Point and Annapolis, have tried and true traditions and codes of honor by which all cadets conduct themselves.

Those codes of honor have their power, however, in the great heritage of the academies which have produced men who have struggled, fought, died and won victories for the principles of human freedom and dignity.

I'll never forget the pride that swelled up in me as I put on my first set of dress blues in the Navy and marched to some of the stirring John Philip

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Sousa's marches. I thought about the Yorktown, the Enterprise, Halsey, Nimitz. I was willing to give my life in that uniform, for that flag.

I challenge you this morning, that we must have an even more intense and passionate patriotism for the heritage of the Gospel. Let loyalty to your Christian citizenship swell up in you here and now and regret that you have but one life to give to Christ. Remember John the Baptist, Peter the fisherman, Paul the tentmaker; remember Gethsemane, remember Calvary, remember the empty tomb; remember Jesus!

Our text will tell us how to conduct ourselves worthy of the gospel because patriotism is something *you* do, something *I* do.

DISCUSSION

I. STAND FIRM

- A. The Greek word is *stekete*. It is present and imperative. It means to be immovable.
- B. Christians will not be moved from their citizenship in the Kingdom of God by anything, nor anyone.
 - 1. They will not be moved by circumstances.
 - 2. They will not be moved by fads or fashions or social pressures.
 - 3. They will not be moved by feelings or fleshly urges and desires.
 - 4. They will not be swayed by expediency, ease or comfort.
 - 5. They will not be moved by persecution, ridicule or slander.
- C. This does *not* mean the Christian will not grow, that he stays on one level of spiritual development all his life.
 - 1. It means he takes an immovable, unflinching, absolute stand *for* truth and goodness.
 - 2. Wherever he finds truth and goodness he appropriates it and makes it his—he stands for it.
 - 3. Wherever he finds evil, falsehood and wrong, he stands against it.

The early 1940's were the darkest days the citizens of England would ever know. Hitler controlled all of Europe from the borders of Russia to the coast of France. He was sending his V2 rockets (buzz-bombs) indiscriminately into English cities, killing hundreds. Britain's army had suffered the decimating defeat at Dunkirk. There was rumor that the powerful and ruthless German armies were poised to invade England.

Winston Churchill rallied his people: "We shall go on to the end . . . we shall defend our Island whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender. . . ."

Long dark months of trials and tribulations lie before us. Not only great dangers, but many more misfortunes, many shortcomings, many mistakes, many disappointments will surely be our lot. Death and sorrow will be the companions of our journey; hardship our garment; constancy and valor

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our only shield. We must be united, we must be *undaunted*, we must be *inflexible*. . . .”

D. The trouble with many of you—and you—I’m talking about you here, in this building, on this campus—IS THAT YOU HAVE NEVER TAKEN A STAND, INFLEXIBLY, FOR THE GOSPEL.

1. You look around you and it looks like everybody else is indulging themselves in worldliness and you don’t have the grit and courage to swim against the stream—to brace yourselves against the winds of fad and fashion.
2. It is easier, more comfortable, more popular to vacillate . . . to drift with the majority.

E. Why would you let someone you care for very much talk you into taking liberties with your body when you know it is wrong?

Why would you let a “buddy” or “friend” talk you into destroying school property (really God’s property) by senseless pranks, when you know it is wrong?

Why would you skip the chapel worship service or sleep in on Sunday morning, or waste money on trivialities and not pay your school debt?

WHY? BECAUSE YOU HAVE NOT TAKEN AN INFLEXIBLE, UNBENDING, UNYIELDING STAND FOR THE TRUTH . . . FOR WHAT IS RIGHT . . . FOR THE GOSPEL!

F. And why haven’t we taken an unyielding stand for what is right? BECAUSE WE VALUE POPULARITY OR OUR OWN COMFORT MORE WORTHY THAN OUR SPIRITUAL HERITAGE . . . OUR HEAVENLY CITIZENSHIP.

Some of you have been lulled into complacency thinking that because you came from a Christian family and are now in Bible College your being a Christian is inevitable. DON’T BELIEVE IT!

YOU MUST TAKE A STAND ALL BY YOURSELF. IT IS YOUR FIGHT, YOUR STRUGGLE, YOUR PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY.

Being a Christian doesn’t just happen to you.

Albert Barnes (of Barnes Commentaries) wrote: “A man who has been redeemed by the Blood of the Son of God should be pure. He who is attended by celestial beings, and is soon—he knows not how soon—to be translated into Heaven, should be holy. Are angels my attendants? Then I should walk worthy of my companions. Am I soon to go and dwell with angels? Then I should be pure. Are these feet soon to tread the courts of Heaven? Is my tongue soon to unite with holy beings in praising God? Are these eyes soon to look on the throne of eternal glory, and the ascended Redeemer? Then these feet and eyes and lips should be pure and holy, and I should be dead to the world and live for Heaven.”

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It is said that when Napoleon's army was invading Russia his soldiers came to a village from which all the inhabitants had fled except one man. He was a Russian peasant, a woodsman, and still carried his ax in his leather belt. When the French captain saw him he ordered that he be shot immediately. The French soldiers leveled their guns at his head but he did not flinch. The captain was frustrated by this old man's courage.

Telling his soldiers to lower their guns, he said, "We will spare his life, but we will put a mark on him—we will brand him." So his soldiers brought a branding iron, got it red hot, and placed it on his hand. The man saw and felt his own flesh burn, but still he did not flinch. When the branding iron was removed the peasant saw the letter 'N' branded on his palm. "What is that?" he asked. "This is the letter 'N' and it stands for Napoleon; you belong to Napoleon now," replied the captain.

For a moment the old man did not know what to do or say. His pain was intense, but his loyalty and patriotism was even more passionate, so he placed his burned hand on something solid, and as the soldiers were laughing and jeering at him, he took his ax from his belt with his other hand and brought it swiftly and forcefully down and severed his branded hand at the wrist.

"There," he said to the soldiers, "the hand may belong to Napoleon, but I am a Russian." "If I must die, I will die a Russian."

NOW THAT IS PRETTY SEVERE, YOU SAY. THAT'S A GOOD ILLUSTRATION, BUT WOULD JESUS ASK US TO DO ANYTHING LIKE THAT?

"If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away. . . . And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell" (Mt. 5:29-30). WHO DO YOU THINK SAID THAT? TO WHOM DID HE SAY IT?

JESUS IS SERIOUS ABOUT THIS MATTER OF TAKING A STAND . . . INFLEXIBLE, UNYIELDING STAND.

Paul wrote to the Christians at Colossae that they were reconciled to God by Christ's death, "provided they continued in the faith, *stable* and *steadfast*, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which they had heard . . ." (Col. 1:22-23).

STAND . . . STAND FOR THE GOSPEL . . . DON'T BEND, DON'T YIELD, DON'T BE MOVED. DO IT TODAY! DO IT EVERY DAY! IT MUST BE DONE EVERY DAY. THERE ARE NO VACATIONS FROM STANDING . . . NO "R & R" . . . IT DOESN'T GET EASIER AS YOU GET OLDER! NOW IS THE TIME TO SAY, "I AM DETERMINED, I'VE MADE UP MY MIND. . . ." EVERY TIME YOU HEDGE, EVERY TIME YOU COMPROMISE, EVERY TIME YOU BEND IT BECOMES EASIER TO DO SO! STABILITY AND STEADFASTNESS ARE THE MARKS OF TRUE SPIRITUALITY!

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II. STRIVING SIDE BY SIDE

- A. The Greek word is *sunathlountes*. From it we get the English word, *athletics*, *athlete*. It was used of those who contended in the Greek olympic games.
- B. Striving in athletic contests demands:
1. Self discipline, forcing oneself to give up any hindrance to the contest.
 2. Training, practice, repetition, until excellence is achieved (which is never).
 3. Expending energy, working, sweating.
 4. Concentration of the mind, thinking, alertness.
 5. The will to win.
- C. You all know that. We don't really have trouble around here getting people to play games—to strive in contests of physical prowess; they run, jump, kick, tackle, throw things, hit things, shoot things, yell, shout and scream.

THEY DO IT IN AN ORGANIZED WAY, UNORGANIZED WAYS AND AND UNGODLY WAYS.

THEY DO IT FOR CLOTH LETTERS, METAL TROPHIES, AND THE UNGODLY ATHLETICS OR ANTICS ARE ENGAGED IN FOR THE FALSE JOY OF SELF-INDULGENCE AND REBELLION.

- D. Paul wanted the Christians at Philippi to strive together for their spiritual prize, their spiritual heritage with the same intensity athletes strive for the glory of their country in the Olympics, or for the glory of their college alma mater.
1. That is what Christ wants for you here too.
 2. When you are assigned a research paper, do you strive or sluff-off? Do you force yourselves to do hours of research in the library, to write and rewrite until excellence is achieved, concentrate, sweat, think, work?
WHY NOT? YOU DO WHEN YOU PLAY BALL, WHEN YOU ROUGH-HOUSE WHERE YOU SHOULDN'T!
 3. When someone asks you to help at missions emphasis, or ambassadors or survey calling or rest-home visiting, do you force yourself, give up comforts, work, run, jump, yell and shout?
WHY NOT?
JUST HOW MUCH IS THE GOSPEL WORTH TO YOU? HOW MUCH DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO STRIVE FOR YOUR HEAVENLY COUNTRY. . . . TO WIN FOR YOUR KING?
- E. Paul probably meant striving to face the enemies of the Philippians who were without.
1. But the enemy (the devil) without has a willing tool that is within us, SELF.

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2. We've got to strive with the enemy within us mightily—SELF MUST BE FOUGHT, SELF MUST BE BROUGHT UNDER THE SOVEREIGNTY OF CHRIST'S SPIRIT.
3. Have you ever been to boot-camp in the Marines or the Navy? A lot of you need it! Talk about striving, side by side. Reville at 5:30 a.m.; each person has 5 minutes to shower shave and get dressed; march in formation to breakfast; return to the barracks in formation; 5 minutes to get inside, get your pack and piece and fall out in formation; then it is close-order drill, rifle range, obstacle course, close-order drill, etc., etc. until you fall exhausted in your bunk and lights out at 10.

Why such agony, such torture, such striving? Because SELF must be whipped, self-control is an absolute must. Because when a marine is on the front lines, facing the enemy without, there is no way he can win if he has not striven with and conquered the enemy within!

F. The Christian life and the Christian ministry is no pleasure cruise. We are not here sailing along on the Love Boat—this is not Fantasy Island.

1. There is no place in the Christian struggle for the flippant and the blase!
2. There was nothing blase about Paul's struggle!
3. Listen to this:
 - a. 5 times 40 lashes
 - b. 3 times beaten with rods
 - c. once stoned
 - d. 3 times shipwrecked; a night and a day adrift at sea
 - e. danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from his own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren
 - f. in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night
 - g. in hunger and thirst, often without food
 - h. in cold and exposure
 - i. daily pressure and anxiety for all the churches

PAUL HAD NO OCCASION TO BE BLASE . . . HE WAS CONSTANTLY STRIVING WITH THE ENEMY WITHIN . . . He fought and fought, conquered, and then strained more, Phil. 3:7-16.

- G. What is your citizenship in the kingdom of God worth? Have you any sense of honor about being called into the army of Christ?
1. Is it worth striving against the profane, irreligious and immoral worldliness of a brother?
 2. Is it worth going against a father when he is wrong?
 3. Is it worth having to flee from your home?
 4. Is it worth suffering exploitation and injustice and ridicule?

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5. Is it worth working hard and honestly for?
6. Is it worth being a "pilgrim" in this world?
7. Is it worth going to a foreign country and dying there?

THAT IS WHAT IT WAS WORTH TO JACOB. God said: "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel (prince of God) for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed" (Gen. 32:28).

WE HAVE TOO MANY DON QUIXOTES IN THE KINGDOM, PLAY-PRE-TENDING, JOUSTING WITH WINDMILLS. They never get down to the hard realities of everyday striving with the real battles of lust, dishonesty, laziness, rebelliousness, greed, envy. They're out knocking down the imaginary enemies.

- H. Who are we to think we can enter into that rest without striving when it was our Master who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, who with loud crying and tears experienced obedience through the things He suffered. Nothing blase about Gethsemane!

This same Paul, in prison later (after this), facing the end of his race, wrote to his young Timothy, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved his appearing . . ." (II Tim. 4:6ff.).

SO I SAY TO YOU THIS MORNING, STRIVE, STRIVE WITH YOURSELF AND BRING SELF INTO SUBJECTION TO THE SPIRIT AND WORD OF CHRIST . . . STRIVE SIDE BY SIDE AGAINST THE ENEMY, THE DEVIL AND HIS TOOLS . . . AND WHEN YOUR RACE IS OVER, YOU TOO WILL RECEIVE YOUR CROWN!

III. NOT FRIGHTENED IN ANYTHING BY YOUR OPPONENTS

- A. The enemy cannot shame you or enslave you, or make you less than you are.

1. You are the citizen of an unshakable kingdom.

Babylon fell, the glory of Greece is gone, Rome remains only in legend and crumbling ruins. Someday the glory that is America will disappear.

BUT NOT SO WITH YOUR KINGDOM, YOUR CITIZENSHIP . . . IT IS FOREVER YOUR KING CONQUERED DEATH, HERE, IN HISTORY, TO PROVE IT!

2. You are exalted to joint-heirship with Christ. You are royalty. No matter that now you must wear the tatters and rags of finite flesh—some day you shall wear the star-studded, celestial robes fitted for you from the heavenly closets!
3. One of the great temptations that has caused so much desertion among the ranks of God's soldiers (ministers of the gospel) today is male mid-life crisis.

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- a. There is an interesting parallel to this in a story I once read in *Readers Digest*, August 1978, "Portrait of a Traitor."
 - b. Brig. Gen. Jean-Louis Jeanmaire, a man who had outwardly personified the honor of Switzerland and the devotion of its citizen army, was arrested and discovered to be the worst traitor in the history of Switzerland.
 - c. His treason is traced in the article mainly to the fact that in his later years he had been transferred from the infantry to the civil-defense forces. His self-image suffered. He always envisioned himself as a combat officer who would lead his men against invading hordes. Now he felt that his career was floundering and the possibility of fulfilling his boyhood dreams was fading.
4. Your opponents, the devil and his ambassadors, will try to ridicule, slander, and deceive you and destroy your Christian honor.
- a. This is what the Viet Cong tried to do to our POWs. Read again that Book Section of *Reader's Digest*, June 1976, on the POW.
The way the POWs survived was to hold fast to their belief in who they were and the truth of what they had been fighting for.
 - b. The devil attacked Adam and Eve at this vulnerable point—self-image. If you will take the forbidden fruit you will be gods for as a believer you are less than you can be! A LIE!
 - c. The devil attacked Jesus at this point—self-image, If you are the Son of God. . . .
5. Remember who you are. You are royalty. You are beautiful in God's eyes. You are eternally young and alive in God's eyes. WHY DO YOU HAVE TO LISTEN TO THE DEVIL AND HIS HENCHMEN SEDUCING YOU INTO BELIEVING YOU HAVE TO SIN TO RETAIN YOUR BEAUTY OR YOUR LIFE! AS A BELIEVER YOU ARE EVERYTHING GOD MADE YOU TO BE!
- B. The enemy cannot rob you of your heavenly inheritance.
1. Moth and rust cannot consume it.
 2. Thieves cannot break through and steal it.
 3. You have an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept for you in heaven. . . . and you are guarded through faith until you receive it (I Pet. 1:4).
 4. Think of the tragic compromises some have made because they have let the enemy frighten them into thinking the only riches, or the only pleasures, or the only fame is IN THIS WORLD!
 5. Esau despised the spiritual birthright which was unseen, for a bowl of bean soup which he could have right then.

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6. This slight momentary affliction of having to stand and strive and be courageous is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison . . . (II Cor. 4:17).

THINK OF THAT . . . BEYOND ALL COMPARISON. THERE IS NOTHING IN THIS WORLD OF RICHES, ROYALTY, PLEASURE, HONOR, SATISFACTION WITH WHICH TO COMPARE YOUR INHERITANCE!

Don't let the enemy scare you into believing there is!

7. The enemy says, "If God has such great things for you, why doesn't He give them to you now . . . because He doesn't have them for you. . . . You'd better get what you can of riches, pleasure and power now. . . ." You only go around once!
8. But God, if He did not spare His own Son for you, will certainly come through on the promise of your inheritance (Rom. 8:31ff.).
9. God has already given you a down payment on your inheritance in the Holy Spirit dwelling in your heart, guiding you into the joys of spirituality through His Word, the Bible.

C. The enemy cannot destroy you.

1. In II Kings 6:11ff. the king of Syria sent his army to surround the city where Elisha was and take the prophet captive. When the Syrian army surrounded the city the servant of the prophet arose early in the morning and began to be afraid.

Elisha said, "Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And the Lord opened the servant's eyes and he saw the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha from the Lord.

2. In Revelation 13 people of the Roman empire worshiped the "beast" (Roman emperor), saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?" THE BEAST IS INVINCIBLE, THEY SAID.

But John wrote, ". . . the beast . . . is human . . . its number is 666." THE BEAST IS NOT INVINCIBLE. ROME FELL, AND THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST LIVED ON!

3. The enemy, using the fear of death, kept most of the world of mankind in slavish bondage to sin, but Jesus came and destroyed that power.

The enemy tried to destroy Jesus, but Jesus rose victorious, having defeated the worst the enemy could do.

4. The enemy has tried to obliterate the written word of God and cannot even do that, because it is in the hearts of believers generation after generation and will always be.

The enemy has tried to kill the church but he cannot do that. It has survived every stratagem, persecution, false doctrine, materialism.

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

5. John's vision in Revelation saw the church Rome tried to destroy as an innumerable multitude of individuals out of every tribe and tongue and nation, alive, worshipping God around His throne.

The great Admiral Nelson of the long-ago British Fleet was about to engage the enemy at the battle of Trafalgar. He dressed himself in his full uniform and placed all the medals and orders that he had won upon his breast.

His officers remonstrated with him, saying he should take off his decorations, or at least cover them with a handkerchief, as otherwise he would become a prime target for the enemy's musketry.

But the gallant Admiral would have none of their advice: "I won these distinctions in the face of the enemy," he said, "and I shall wear them in the face of the enemy."

YOU HAVE PUT ON CHRIST, YOU ARE A PRIME TARGET OF THE ENEMY. BUT DO NOT BE FRIGHTENED IN ANYTHING BY HIM AND HIS MINIONS. . . . SO LONG AS YOU WEAR THE CHRISTIAN ARMOR, HE CANNOT HARM YOU, MAKE YOU LESS THAN YOU ARE, ROB YOU OR DESTROY YOU!

CONCLUSION

I would like to discuss the rest of this text in this sermon, but time does not permit.

I close with this story: May 12, 1962, a great old American soldier is speaking some of the last words he will say to an Academy filled with young men preparing to become officers and future leaders of the Army of the USA:

"Duty—Honor—Country. Those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be. . . . The unbelievers will say they are but words, but a slogan, but a flamboyant phrase. . . . But these are some of the things they do. They build your basic character; . . . they make you strong enough to know when you are weak, and brave enough to face yourself when you are afraid. They teach you to be proud and unbending in honest failure, but humble and gentle in success, not to substitute words for actions, not to seek the path of comfort, but to face the stress and spur of difficulty and challenge; to learn to stand up in the storm but to have compassion on those who fail; to master yourself before you seek to master others; to have a heart that is clean, a goal that is high; to learn to laugh yet never forget how to weep; to reach into the future yet never neglect the past; to be serious yet never to take yourself too seriously; to be modest so that you will remember the simplicity of true greatness, the open mind of true wisdom, the meekness of true strength.

CONDUCT WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL

The shadows are lengthening for me. The twilight is here. My days of old have vanished tone and tint; they have gone glimmering through the dreams of things that were. Their memory is one of wondrous beauty, watered by tears, and coaxed and caressed by the smiles of yesterday. . . . But in the evening of my memory, always I come back to West Point. Always there echoes and re-echoes in my ears—Duty—Honor—Country. . . .”

Douglas MacArthur, at his last roll call at the Point. He died two years later.

If we filled the stage this morning with old soldiers of the gospel, they would say to you:

Down through the years of your ministry may your memory always come back to God's Word and may this truth echo and re-echo in your heart. . . . Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. . . . **STAND FIRM. . . . STRIVE SIDE BY SIDE. . . . AND DO NOT BE FRIGHTENED IN ANYTHING BY YOUR OPPONENTS. . . .**

Chapter Fifteen (15:1-32)

THE SON OF MAN SEEKING THE LOST

IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. If Jesus received sinners, should the church (15:1-2)?
2. How can heaven rejoice over one sinner more than over ninety-nine who need no repentance (15:7)?
3. Why do angels, who have never known what it is to be lost, rejoice over saved sinners (15:10)?
4. How could a man "come to himself" (15:17)?
5. Why did the father say his prodigal son was "dead" (15:24)?
6. Why would the elder son refuse to go in and enjoy the return of his brother (15:28)?
7. Had the elder son *never* disobeyed the father's commands (15:29)?

SECTION 1

Lost Sheep (15:1-7)

15 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

³ So he told them this parable: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? ⁵And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.' ⁷Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

15:1-4 Rescue: Jesus had left the home of the Pharisees where He had been a guest at dinner (Lk. 14:1-24) and journeyed on through Perea. Great multitudes accompanied him (Lk. 14:25). Many publicans and "sinners" joined the crowds to hear Him teach about the kingdom of God. His words were so different from those of most religious teachers of that day. He