

DOMESTIC KINDNESS

Luke 4:38-39 *Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Jesus was invited to Simon's house after the synagogue service. At that time, Simon (later to be called Peter) had not yet been called to be a disciple ([Luke 5:1-11](#)). The extended family was there including Simon's wife's mother. She may have been old but she was certainly very unwell in bed, running a high fever. In those days, without any effective medicines, fever might lead to death. So the family were concerned and asked Jesus for help. In the same way that He addressed the demons, He commanded the fever to leave her; and it did. Everybody knew a miracle had occurred because she instantly felt better, so much so that she got up and served them a meal.

Luke, as a physician, was especially interested in healing miracles. But he does not mention physical health until he established that Jesus ministry was to preach God's truth and confront Satan's lies ([Luke 4:32-35](#)). This healing was almost incidental, private and very family. But Jesus wanted to teach Simon some personal lessons. Firstly, Jesus is full of compassion. Secondly, He wants to release people from fear of death ([Hebrews 2:14-15](#)). Thirdly, He cared as much for women as for men, the old as the young. Fourthly, He had God's authority over disease and can bring people back from the brink of death ([Ps 103:2-4](#)). Fifthly, He brings renewed strength for service ([Ps 103:5](#)).

So this great act of kindness was also personalised evidence to Simon Peter that Jesus was the Messiah who could be trusted. The episode was not a recipe to make doctors unnecessary, but a validation of who Jesus was. These wonderful acts were not an end in themselves (to satisfy people's human needs), but they were signs pointing to His Divine character. His primary role was to die on the cross, to bear God's punishment for all the world's sin (see www.crosscheck.org.uk to know more).

Jesus has the same character today. He is immeasurably kind. He hears every cry, and it is right for us to ask Him to supply our needs from daily bread to physical health. Yet some pleas for healing end in death. Does that mean that either God has ignored the prayer, or the person was not worthy of healing? No! In fact every living thing will die; but those who believe in the Jesus-gospel will be raised to new life to serve the Lord for ever. Every sign of His compassion is to encourage us to keep following, and every 'no' answer is to test our hope of His eternal kingdom. The Lord tailors His response to our prayers so that we will receive His provision, but never so much that we are satisfied with earth alone and do not long for heaven. So take time today to grow in Christ as you thank Him for both the 'yes' and 'no' answers to prayer.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You that You can do all things and that You always hear my cries to You. I am truly grateful for every token of Your love; and for holding on to me when the answer is 'no'. Help me to learn to express my gratitude for Your kindness by serving You and others around me at home and work as well as in the church. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

Luke 4:36-37 *All the people were amazed and said to each other, "What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!" And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

In Jesus' day, people were used to authority; it was everywhere. The occupying Roman forces had the right to make people obey Roman law; but the soldiers would exceed their authority, demanding bribes under threat of false arrest ([Luke 3:14](#)). Religious leaders forced people to keep the Law of Moses and many extra rabbinical traditions, but they had no place for Jesus ([Luke 11:52](#)): and it was the religious 'temple guard' who arrested Jesus ([Luke 22:52](#)). Later, Saul, (who became Paul the Apostle after his conversion) had authority from the chief priests to arrest Christians and throw them into prison ([Acts 22:4-5](#)).

But Jesus came with a different authority. Instead of oppression, Jesus brought freedom; instead of imprisonment, freedom ([Luke 4:18](#)). His words brought God's law to life and whenever He spoke, people listened - because they knew He was speaking to them. But the greatest amazement came when He commanded evil spirits to leave the individuals they had been dominating. The demons listened and were compelled to obey. In the previous verses, a demon used the mouth of the man he controlled to ridicule Jesus; but at Christ's command the demon had to come out of the man. Angry at being dismissed, Satan's agent made the man collapse. But the man was unharmed. When he got up he was totally free from demonic oppression ([Luke 4:33-35](#)).

People, who do not believe that Jesus Christ has authority over Satan and his demons, make a great mistake. Those who think that the main work of the church is in changing society by doing good, have missed the point. The reason Jesus came was to destroy all the work of the Evil One ([1 John 3:8](#)) so that we can be set free to receive God's grace and worship Him with released hearts. Only Jesus has the authority to tell Satan what to do and where to go: and only those who trust the Saviour have authority to use His Name against evil ([Acts 19:13-20](#)).

Until Satan is finally eliminated, he is our greatest foe: by comparison, all the people who trouble us have no power ([Eph 6:12](#)). They are not the enemy, Satan is. But Jesus is the friend of every sinner who turns to Him (see www.crosscheck.org.uk to know more), because Jesus still has real authority over all the powers of darkness. Until He returns, those who trust in Him are protected by the power of His Name ([John 17:11](#)). So, when we are spiritually oppressed or attacked, we should not fear but claim the protection of Jesus. When we see evil around us, do not fight the people (they don't understand how they are being used), let the power of the Name of Jesus deal with the Evil One.

Prayer: *Almighty God. Thank You that Jesus has demonstrated that Satan is not all powerful, and has to submit to His authority. Forgive me when I believe that evil is winning, and when I submit to Satan's oppression. Help me to believe the truth: that full spiritual authority has been given to Jesus and that Satan fears only the Name of Jesus. Help me to live in the freedom Christ has won for me, and to explain the gospel to my friends and colleagues so that they too may be delivered from all their fears. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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DELIVER US FROM EVIL

Luke 4:33-35 *In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, "Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One of God!" "Be quiet!" Jesus said sternly. "Come out of him!" Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Jesus had already encountered the devil. After His baptism and before His ministry started, the Saviour met Satan to challenge his evil authority, and 'put him on notice' that his wicked rule over people had no legitimacy and would be crushed. That desert encounter ([Luke 4:1-13](#)) set the scene for the rest of His earthly ministry: culminating in the cross (where Satan hoped to win), and then the resurrection (where Jesus demonstrated His victory).

In today's passage, Satan uses a demon to mock Jesus in public. This demon behaved like a virus in taking over the personality of the man and speaking through his mouth. Everybody who had come to worship at the synagogue could hear as the dignified atmosphere was shattered by the shouting. Jesus (a common name in those days) was clearly identified as 'Jesus of Nazareth', and His Divine identity as 'the Holy One of God' was broadcast. But the fearful demon also knew that Jesus had the authority to destroy him.

It was a challenge. What would Jesus do? In a simple sentence, Jesus commanded the voice to be silent, and the demon to come out of the man. The demon was powerless against Jesus; there was no physical activity from the Master, just the word of command. Satan's agent had to obey but, like a wild youth, sought to do some damage as he left. Even that was ineffective for although the man fell to the ground, he was totally unharmed.

So many people misunderstand the purpose of Jesus' earthly life. They think He came to set a good example ... to show people how to love each other ... to provide a template for good citizenship in the Sermon on the Mount. There is some truth in those ideas but they are not the reason He came. He had come to deal with evil: as [Heb 2:14-15](#) says, "*Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil - and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*"

If you are trusting in Jesus, you have accepted the voice of the One who dethrones the authority of Satan. God's Word has power to unmask the lies of the devil; and the Name of Jesus is authority enough for the tempter to be dismissed. There is no longer any need to be terrorised by the 'oppressor of souls'. You do not have to live under his curse and there is no need to fear the grave because all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus. Our responsibility is to live in confidence that Satan does not have ultimate power over us; and to announce that Jesus is the only one who can release people from the grip of evil.

Prayer: *Sovereign Lord. Thank You that Jesus has demonstrated His full authority over Satan. Forgive me when I accept the devil's lies and live without trusting in Jesus. Please cleanse me from all my sin: I reject Satan's words and works in my life. Help me to live in the power of the Holy Spirit, and help me to announce the freedom which Jesus won through His death and resurrection. In His Name. Amen.*

W@WLuke57

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AUTHORITY TO LOVE OR HATE

Luke 4:31-32 *Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people. They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Jesus had just survived a violent attack. Townspeople from Nazareth had just tried to kill Him for declaring Himself as God's Messiah who had come to save those with faith. And He said that if Jews would not believe, salvation was open to the Gentiles. His authority was so powerful that they could not ignore His words: but they hated Him for it. So they hustled Him out of the synagogue and tried to throw Him off a nearby cliff ([Luke 4:16-30](#)). In His home town, Jesus had needed to be quite pointed: He was the boss, and could never accept the patronage of those who wanted to make Him their dependant celebrity.

A week had passed, and Jesus had travelled 20 miles to teach in Capernaum's synagogue alongside Lake Galilee. The crowds wanted to be taught; they were eager to hear Jesus explain God's Word. There was no doubt in their minds that His words 'rang true' ... they had the inner impact of being authentic. While totally agreeing with the Scriptures, Jesus made their Bible come to life. They knew that He was speaking the truth, and had the right to say it. And the people liked what they heard.

Someone who is good and transparently authoritative will naturally attract supporters and admirers. The larger, more cosmopolitan fishing and trading port of Capernaum was different from the smaller, more rural, Nazareth. Along the lakeside, it was easier to get lost in the crowd, to be an admirer without being a disciple: it was easier to hear the truth and yet think no action was required. His authority was recognised but they were not going to let Him get close enough to change their lives.

That is how many people think about Jesus today. He seems good from a distance, and His words sound wise. But many people are reluctant to get too involved, perhaps secretly fearing that if Jesus is right He will command their attention and call them to follow Him. Today, the words and life of Jesus are admired by many, who even dignify Him with titles such as 'teacher' or 'prophet'. His words can be added comfortably into many religious soups; but when people realise He has the authority of being God the Son ... they either have to give their lives to Him, or they try to get Him out of their lives. Real authority is never neutral. Authority demands obedience. Therefore rejecting the authority of Jesus invites His judgement. That is why it is important to declare that Jesus is Lord and invite others to submit to His authority.

Prayer: *God of truth and power. Thank You for Jesus who has been given all authority in heaven and earth. Help me to live each day under the command of my Master, and help me to be clear as I explain His authority to my friends and colleagues. May I never agree that Jesus is one amongst many teachers, for I know that His authority is supreme over all others. Help me to live humbly as His servant so that others will see that accepting His authority brings love, peace and true freedom to be the people He designed them to be. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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SHOWING TRUE COLOURS

Luke 4:28-30 *All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

The congregation welcomed Jesus back to His home synagogue. They admired His eloquence and graciousness ([Luke 4:20-22](#)); but, by the end of the service, they hated Him so much that they wanted to kill Him. What a bizarre ending to Jesus' first sermon in His home town of Nazareth! What had He done to precipitate such a violent response? The order of events is significant. First He read from Isaiah's prophecy, and then He said Isaiah was speaking about Him. Then He reminded His townspeople that God blessed people with faith, and that if there were none in Israel, God would bless Gentiles.

That last idea infuriated them. They may have been able to accept Jesus was the Messiah (particularly if they could claim some credit that He was their 'local boy come good'). But they would not forgive the insult that some Gentiles had more faith than Israelites - or that God would disregard their piety and favour people who did not know the Law of Moses, let alone try to obey it.

What was their problem? They were proud, arrogant and righteous in their own eyes. They had faith in their own ability to please God through religious observance (even though none of them could perfectly keep the law); but not in God's mercy to Gentile sinners. What made them angry was the thought that God would bless Gentiles; especially after all their fastidious observance of the law. They might have said something like, "Who does He think He is?" The answer is that He knew He was God the Son with all power and authority. The moment they picked up that thought, they rushed at Him, pursuing Jesus out of the town and up the nearby hill. But instead of them throwing Him off the cliff, His authority made a protected way through the crowd and back to safety.

Whenever people are angry at Jesus today, it is for the same proud reasons. They do not want to accept His authority. Having worked out their own way to please God (or so they think), they are greatly insulted when they are told that unless they repent and trust in the mercy of Jesus, they will be lost. Violence is an extreme reaction. Paradoxically, persecution of Christians proves how powerfully true Jesus is, if His opponents want to remove His people. But Jesus still knows how to guard His own reputation and is not put off by opposition. So if you trust Him, expect that some of those who hear your witness will react strongly. But some will hear and be saved ... it is worth all the struggle. Most people who resist the gospel do not have genuine intellectual reasons for disbelief. But they merely use such reasons to defend their unbelief, pride and arrogance. So be gentle with them, but be clear about the truth too; Jesus was!

Prayer: *Almighty God. Thank You that Jesus was unafraid to speak the truth from Your Word. Help me to do the same, knowing that what You think about me matters more than any other opinion. Forgive me when I have been afraid and more concerned to preserve my reputation than Yours. Please open my friends' eyes to see who Jesus is, and have the courage to lay down their pride, and accept Him as Saviour. In His Name. Amen.*

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HOME AND AWAY

Luke 4:23-27 Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your home town what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'" "I tell you the truth," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his home town. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed--only Naaman the Syrian." (NIV)

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Jesus was teaching in the synagogue in Nazareth. It was going well and the local people were impressed by the local carpenter, the son of Joseph or so they thought ([Luke 4:22](#)). But Jesus knew there was another side to them. In the same way He exposed Satan's evil intentions during the confrontation in the desert, Jesus now exposes the shallow vanity of the congregation. He knew that they really wanted to see Him do some miracles; and to get Him to fix their problems; after all, He was their local man and surely He owed it to His home town to help them. Perhaps they also wanted the reflected glory of saying that He was 'their' Jesus.

Whatever illusions they may have had, Jesus deliberately shattered them. After telling them what they were thinking (a trade mark of His ministry ... and still is today), He reminded them how God selected Gentiles to receive blessing and not Israelites. The widow in Zerephath (a Mediterranean coastal village eight miles south of modern Sidon) was a poor single mother who received miraculous food provision and healing for her son under Elijah's ministry ([1 Kings 17:8-16](#)) - she was a Gentile. So too was Naaman, the Syrian army commander who was healed under the ministry of Elisha ([2 Kings 5:1-19](#)). Jesus then shocked them by saying that no Israelites had comparable treatment. As we shall see tomorrow, they were furious.

In some cultures it is normal to demand help from relatives, friends and local folk. However Jesus' mission was not to play tribal games and please the crowd, but to teach the truth. At the outset of His ministry He effectively said that He had no special obligation to Nazareth but He would go wherever Father God sent Him ... ultimately that was to the cross. His mission was to the whole world, including the Gentiles. The widow and the soldier had one thing in common - they believed God's Word; while others in Israel had become faithless. That point exposed the synagogue congregation as their approving smiles turned to lip-curling anger: as we shall see tomorrow.

Let us make no mistake. Jesus cannot be sweet-talked into playing our games. He is the Lord, and not us. He does not dance to our tune; we are to march to His command. Where our agenda and His are different, He ignores ours. But when we willingly cooperate with His mission, we will get blown out of our comfort-zone and into His adventure for the world. Being a Christian is not about getting Him to submit to us but willingly serving Him. The sooner we learn that, the simpler life becomes!

Prayer: *Gracious God. Thank You for being bigger than me in every way. Please forgive me when I try to pull You down to my level and think Your primary purpose is to arrange for my comfort and success. Help me to see the world-wide heaven-high nature of the work of Jesus, and give me a desire to see Your kingdom come and Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

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CENTRE OF ATTENTION

Luke 4:20-22 *Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Jesus had started His ministry in Nazareth by reading two verses from Isaiah: *"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favour (Isaiah 61:1-2a)*. Rabbis stood to read the Scriptures as a mark of honour, but sat to explain it (as a sign that their comments were inferior to those of God's).

However, when Jesus sat down, His opening words - that He was the person Isaiah was writing about - riveted their attention. For those who merely think of Jesus as a good teacher, His statement is either true and Jesus was the Messiah; or else He was wickedly self-promoting, or foolishly deluded. The one thing He could not be is 'just a good teacher'. But as the rest of Luke's Gospel proves: He was indeed God the Son, who Isaiah had prophesied.

What surprised the synagogue congregation was that a mere carpenter could speak so that everybody knew He loved them: God's grace flowed out of His mouth into their hearts. That is still the case. Whenever people are willing to receive God's Word as from Jesus, they are amazed how powerfully it touches their hearts. Scripture is not just yesterday's literature; it is today's message from Jesus. Indeed the whole Bible is centred on Jesus, who is God's Saviour for a broken world (see www.crosscheck.org.uk). When Jesus becomes the true centre of your life, the Bible comes alive; and when your friends read the Bible with an open heart, they will start to understand what a wonderful person Jesus is.

For those who are seeking, the Bible has the answers, because it enables people to find Jesus. When you talk to friends and colleagues about Jesus, show them what the Bible says, and let the conversation be anchored in the gracious words of God. Then your testimony will have an objective context: it is not only what you say about your own experience, but they will start to understand why Jesus has become the centre of your attention. Workplace Bible groups are not only for believers, because receiving God's Word is the route to becoming a believer. So let God speak for Himself as you share the Scriptures wherever you live and work.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You for helping me to understand more about Jesus through reading the Scriptures. Please forgive me when I ignore Your Word, or think that my testimony alone is sufficient to bring others to Christ. Help me to have the courage to read the Bible with my friends, so that Jesus will speak to them in His wonderfully gracious way, and they can discover how much You love them. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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DEJA VU

Luke 4:17-19 *The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Many people have had déjà vu experiences, in which they think that they had already witnessed what they are currently experiencing. Usually this is a little trick the mind plays on us. But when Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah, He was really reading about Himself, even though it had been written 700 years previously. During that time, God was preparing His people to look out for this healer/releaser/leader/teacher who would be filled with the Holy Spirit.

For the people in the synagogue that Sabbath it was probably just another bit of religious routine. But they knew that a local carpenter had started preaching and that the crowds had been amazed ([Luke 4:14](#)). He had already stood up to read, but it was the chazan (synagogue attendant) who authorised Him to read by handing Him the scroll. As the parchment had no chapters or page numbers, it took Jesus a little while to unroll the scroll to nearly the end where He found, what we know as, [Isaiah 61:1-2a](#).

It was common news that Jesus had been preaching in the poor rural villages ([Luke 4:14](#)) so the first sentence must have caused them to sit up and think that He was talking about Himself. Prisoners, blind and oppressed people were low on the religious priority list. But Jesus emphasised that they mattered to God, and to Himself. He stopped at [Isaiah 61:2a](#) announcing the year of the Lord's favour. This was the Old Testament year of Jubilee; when all the debts were cleared and slaves received their freedom. He did not go on the next part of the verse which announced the day of judgement; because the mission of His first coming was to rescue people from Satan's clutches; so that they would not be condemned in the judgement when He comes again.

The Lord's Jubilee is described in [Leviticus 25:8-55](#). It was the time for restoration and rest, forgiveness and freedom. Today is still Jubilee-time when Jesus takes the poor into His own family, opens blind eyes to see the truth of the gospel, and cuts free those under Satan's domination; so that forgiveness is given instead of judgement, and restoration instead of destruction. This is the real work of the real Jesus. It has been seen already in prophecy and the gospel accounts - let Him work in your heart today (see www.crosscheck.org.uk to know more). And when you have received His grace, you must advertise the real Jesus to your friends and colleagues. Without Him they have no hope of God's favour.

Prayer: *Gracious Lord. Thank you for sending Jesus to release me from the past and restore me for the future. Forgive me when I have acknowledged Jesus but failed to see Him as the One who will change my life as I allow Him to work in me. Please do a full work in my heart and meet my deepest needs I pray; restore the years the locusts have eaten and bring me out into the sunshine of Your love. And help me to love my friends and work colleagues by not hiding from them what a wonderful Saviour Jesus is. In His Name. Amen.*

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STRONG IN THE WORD

Luke 4:16 *He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Why go to church? Some say it is mainly to worship and fellowship, others feel it helps family bonding and still others say it is to learn from the Bible. These are all reasons to join a congregation. But it is helpful to see what 'church' meant for Jesus. Every day, the Jewish family would get together, recite a part of God's law to remind the adults, and teach the children, who they belonged to. Every Sabbath they would attend the Synagogue to hear the scriptures explained, and to pray. On feast days they would go to the temple to sacrifice and worship. That was normal life for Jesus' family. These were not optional activities; they were part of the DNA of being a Jew.

Those practices became a template for the New Testament church but with some very important differences, because the Old Testament was looking forward to Jesus - who would become the centre-point of worship. The temple worship, which focussed on access to God through sacrifice, was redundant when Jesus became the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. So, the church grew out of the synagogue model - with its emphasis on hearing God's Word explained. In addition, prayers and songs of worship became part of relational fellowship; as did the 'breaking of bread' (the reminder of Jesus' sacrifice). 'Church' was not so much what they did but an expression of who they were.

Although today's church has many culturally appropriate forms, the [Acts 2:42](#) agenda of teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers is still essential for church to be church. None of these elements can be disregarded without compromising our identity in Christ: and receiving God's Word through teaching is foundational. Without it, the church will become a self-centred, sentimental, power grasping club, assuming that it exists for us and not for Christ.

Jesus had none of those delusions, although many religious leaders did! He simply explained that God's Word pointed to Himself, and validated His authority. Perhaps that is why so many people starve themselves of the Word; because it upsets their personal image. They become spiritually anorexic while enjoying a lighter diet of inspiring company and a personalised feel-good factor. Of course, that is the route to spiritual illness. I trust that your commitment to receive Word@Work will be matched by a daily eagerness to let God feed your soul, so that you will be strong against temptation and full of godly wisdom as you go to work each day.

Prayer: *Father God. Thank you for wanting to instruct and inspire us. Forgive me when I think that I can manage well enough without joining with others around Your Word, to strengthen my faith and fellowship. May I take fresh delight in regularly meeting with the church, and may I always remember that the church is for Your glory and not my convenience. Help me to find a special identity at work with others who love Jesus, making time to study the Bible together and to pray. Please help me to value Biblical fellowship wherever I can find it, especially if my work involves travelling. Please help me to choose to build this into my identity as a Believer in the Lord Jesus. In His Name. Amen.*

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STRONG IN SPIRIT

Luke 4:14-15 *Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Even Jesus did not go about His ministry alone. Luke is clear that Jesus was working together with the spiritual power of the Holy Spirit. Within the early chapters of Luke we learn that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, anointed by the Holy Spirit, was full of the Holy Spirit and led by the Spirit to encounter and defeat the lies of Satan. In today's passage, Jesus re-enters His home territory in the Holy Spirit's power.

He had left a carpenter but returned a preacher, and more was to come. In the same way that Jesus relied on the authority of the Father, He also relied on the power of the Spirit. That was to be His ministry style. And it was very important that He was not left reliant on human support (the disciples were often a disappointment), nor on the fickle applause of the crowds (although they praised Him in [v15](#), they wanted to kill Him in [v28-30](#)).

We all need other people, if we are to function properly. But we need the right people. Jesus refused to do a deal with Satan, but willingly accepted the Holy Spirit's companionship. Most Christians in any sort of ministry know the joy of true fellowship, the pain of false brothers and the unpredictability of those who blow hot and cold. I once heard, in a minister's fraternal, a good answer to the question, "Brother are you encouraged?" "If I look to the ministry for my encouragement I will also find my discouragement in the same place: the Holy Spirit alone encourages me consistently"!

Wherever you serve the Lord today, in the factory, hospital, office or transport system; you need a friend. You also need the ability to resist temptation and power to speak of Christ. Christian fellowship should be a great help but the Holy Spirit is essential. He is not only there to comfort the weak but to give boldness to the timid; and to stand with you when all are against you. Like Jesus, we need to be saturated by the Holy Spirit if we are to win through against Satan's opposition, and win souls for Christ.

Prayer: *Dear Lord God. Thank you for not leaving me by myself; You have come to me. Thank You that the Holy Spirit is the seal inside everyone who confesses Jesus as Lord. But I ask your forgiveness when I have grieved the Spirit by my sinful behaviour, or quenched His power by asserting my own. When I feel all alone, thank You that I am not! The Spirit is with me. Please fill me again with Your Holy Spirit so that I may have Your power to do whatever You have commanded me. And even when my friends or even other believers let me down, thank You for promising to lift me up, so that I can serve You. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

VALIDATING IDENTITY

Luke 4:9-13 *The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written: " 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' " When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Satan's temptations have common themes. So they should be easily recognisable. He loves to induce uncertainty and then propose an evil solution to resolve it. The first temptation, of Adam and Eve, caused them to doubt God's command, His authority and His kindness in providing all that was good for them ([Genesis 3:1-7](#)). Satan tempted Jesus to doubt His identity - despite the recent affirmation of Father God and the Holy Spirit ([Luke 3:21-22](#)). Interestingly, Satan often tempts people after a 'spiritual high' while bathing in the knowledge of God's love, but when our guard may be down. Not so with Jesus; He was full of the Holy Spirit and ready for the tempter.

"If you are the Son of God ...". Satan taunted Him; and then commanded that He did something to prove it. But Jesus had no need to prove His greatness. He was confident in His Divine identity. The religious leaders even copied the temptation when they demanded he should perform miracles ([Mark 8:11-12](#)). Both they and their evil master tried to make Jesus their puppet; but He would have none of it. On this occasion, Satan even quoted Scripture, supposedly, to validate his wicked plan. But Jesus refused, giving the sternest of rebukes from the highest authority: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test". In that sentence, Jesus rejected the wrong use of God's Word, and the temptation, by making clear that He was God Himself and that Satan was well out of order. Jesus has made His mark of truth and the lying devil slunk off defeated.

Most temptations we face include doubt, including anxious doubt (worry) about the uncertainty of the future or our ability to handle it; also doubt about whether God can accept us because of our sin, despite our identity as children of the Most High God. These tests of spiritual loyalty can come as easily when we have received blessing as when we feel deprived of it. They can sometimes come with warped understanding of Scripture as well as its absence; and they can come to those who are considered holy and spiritual, as well as to those who have poor reputations. The good thing is that Jesus understands. Also His example of resisting the devil should be our regular experience; and the right use of Scripture will protect us more than we might imagine. Above all, if you are a child of God, you have the ultimate identity, but don't let Satan fool you into using that special privilege to make yourself look big - we are intended to bring glory to the Lord, not to ourselves.

Prayer: *God of truth and love. Thank you for sending Jesus to confront Satan in the wilderness and on the cross. It is a great comfort to know that evil is not always going to win, and that the devil's power is limited and his days are numbered. Please forgive me when I so easily fall into the temptation of doubting Your love and care, and even my own identity in Christ. Forgive me too when I misuse the privilege of being Your child to glorify myself. Thank You that I can grow in confidence even today as I meditate on these truths. Help me to be a good witness to Jesus in my workplace as well as my home. For Your glory's sake. Amen.*

DELEGATED AUTHORITY

Luke 4:5-8 *The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendour, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.' "* (NIV)

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Jesus had been led by the Holy Spirit towards an intentional encounter with Satan. Now Satan was allowed to take the lead. Of course, he had no right to lead Jesus, any more than he had a right to say that all authority had been given to him, or that he had the right to delegate that authority to anyone. Reading this passage may provoke the question, "Who does the devil think he is"? The answer is that he is presuming to take the place of God.

Satan is still demanding honour and worship for what does not belong to him. Here, he exposed himself as a fraud, a confidence trickster, a liar and a blasphemer. Worse still, Satan even believed that he could fool Jesus Christ, and get God the Son to treat him as God. Were he a human being we would say he was deluded, mad or pathologically obsessed with himself, a danger to the world - and he is!

Satan thought he could trap Jesus. But in fact, Jesus trapped the devil into confessing his real intentions - to rob God of His authority and glory and get everybody to worship him. In an instant, the temptation of Jesus had turned into the trial of Satan who showed his true hatred of God. He declares that he is guilty of the worst sin. He makes his own downfall inevitable (that started at Calvary and will be completed when Jesus returns). But at this stage, Jesus simply rebuked him with the command to repent and show repentance by worshipping God alone and serving Him. Satan's refusal to obey in the presence of his future judge sealed his eventual fate.

Until his final destruction, Satan furiously tries to stop people worshipping and serving God ([Revelation 12:12](#)). Although Satan rarely exposes the full depth of his evil character, his temptations are all plausible alternatives to giving God first place in our lives. Of course, most of the time he works through the lusts of our sinful nature, or the deluded suggestions of people who have accepted lies as being true. But whatever ideas may come to our minds, the key question is, "Is this the way in which God has commanded me to worship and serve Him?" If the answer is "No", then you have identified a satanic temptation. Reject it immediately, and replace the evil suggestion by some act of positive obedience to the Lord. No Christian is ever immune from these tests of faith. They can come at home, at work or even in the church; so be alert to resist the devil, and he will flee from you ([James 4:7](#)).

Prayer: *Holy Lord. Thank You for reminding me that I must only worship You. Please forgive me when I have accepted Satan's lies and have given in to temptation. Help me to see how desperate he is to pull me away from You, and help me learn to resist whatever I know is leading me astray. Thank You that Satan's downfall is assured because Jesus came to deal with him, in order to rescue me. Thank You that one day everything evil will be banished to hell, and that Your people will be safe for ever with You. Help me to live today in the confidence that Satan can and must be resisted. Because Jesus resisted, so can I with the help of Your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Luke 4:2b-4 *He [Jesus] ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Jesus was fully human. He needed food as much as we do. However, His time of fasting was not an endurance exercise; it was dedicated to communication with His Father in preparation for His first big spiritual battle. As always, Satan thinks he can find an easy path with those who are physically weak. Jesus was really hungry and empty; but on the other hand He had been hungry to see God's righteousness and so His spirit was full ([Matthew 5:6](#)).

Satan's temptation appeared to come at a physical level: the need for hunger to be satisfied. But the real test was to get Jesus to exploit His divinity for His human needs. Of course, Christ could have produced bread from stones, but He refused. His needs would be met by His Father; Satan had no right to interfere. Nor did Jesus need to prove who He was, either to Himself or to Satan: He knew that He was God the Son with a mission to defeat Satan.

Satan's temptations come as lies, or good reasons why we should offend God. Jesus used true words to put Satan in his place. He quoted from [Deut. 8:3](#), "He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." In other words, it is God who says when and how your needs will be met: not yourself, anybody else and certainly not Satan.

Jesus' stomach may have been empty, but His heart was full of God's Word and satisfied with His relationship with the Father. That is the right condition in which to resist the devil's temptations. Jesus quoted Scripture because the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit ([Ephesians 6:17](#)), and is the only weapon with which we can attack Satan and unmask his lies. Unless we practise communication with God, and develop a hunger to know His Word, we are easy prey for the tempter. But when we desire the Lord's Will more than anything else, and rely on His Word to inform our decisions, then we will be able to see through the temptations and not be fooled into agreeing with Satan's lies. It is God's Word alone which is definitive truth and we should use it to disarm the tempter's power.

Prayer: *Dear Lord God. Thank You that Jesus has successfully dealt with Satan's temptations. Please forgive me for not devoting myself to spending time with You, and for my weakness of spirit in failing to see Satan's lies for what they are. Please help me to trust Your Word to set my mind on what is true, so that I can resist what is false. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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APPOINTMENT WITH EVIL

Luke 4:1-2a *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

At first sight, this seems rather strange. Why should the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son of God start with a direct encounter with Satan. It is even more strange that the Holy Spirit is in the lead, escorting Jesus to His appointment with the Prince of Darkness. Mark puts it even more starkly, "*At once, the Spirit sent Him out into the desert*" ([Mark 1:12](#)). The word 'sent out' is also used in the gospels when Jesus 'cast out' demons! So we know that this encounter with evil is a deliberate, Spirit authorised, essential start to Christ's ministry.

Many people think that Jesus' purpose was to 'do good' and show God's love. However, that is only part of the story. Of course, Jesus loved people and did good things because He was God and God is loving, kind and does good things. But Christ's major commission was not just to show a superior morality. On the cross, Jesus would deal a fatal blow to the tyranny of evil, and to release its captives from the grip of sin and Satan's lies. So the desert encounter gave Satan 'notice to quit'; it was the first sign that He would be overthrown.

Some Christians seem oblivious to Satan. They do not realise how His lies affect what they believe. Other believers are all too aware of the ways in which the devil tries to attack them and disturb gospel ministry, and some of them are scared by the prospect of opposition. Jesus was different. He had a realistic assessment of His enemy and was confident in the final outcome of His mission when Satan would be defeated. He dared to invade the darkness because He was the Light of the World, and confronted Satan on his home territory.

In the same way, the church has been at its best when preaching the gospel to those who have had all hope drained out of them. Those who stand for truth and righteousness have God's approval. And the gates of hell cannot resist the progress of God's people ([Matthew 16:18](#)). But this is not a call to arms, nor an incitement to military action. It is a call to resist the devil and his lies, with truth from God's Word ([1 Peter 5:8-9](#)). Then we can encourage other believers and tell our friends and enemies how God saves people from the dark ways of wickedness, by trusting in Jesus. Of course, this arouses Satan's hatred, and the anger of his agents. However, Jesus was not afraid - it was all a part of His mission and the Holy Spirit was there to strengthen him. In the same way so we should have fresh courage, because He is with us. He has provided spiritual protection for His people ([Ephesians 6:10-18](#)) and the same Holy Spirit is leading us too.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You that Jesus did not just come to teach us how to be good, but to take away the power of Satan and the bad effects of his lies. Forgive me for being frightened, when I should be trusting in You. Please help me to walk out into the spiritual darkness each day, as one of Your lights in the world. Help me to recognise Satan's tricks and to resist him with the truth of Your Word. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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FAMILY RESTORED

Luke 3:23-38 Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli ... the son of David ... the son of Adam, the son of God. (NIV)

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Who was Jesus? Luke has already written that the angel Gabriel said He would be 'the Son of the Most High' ([Luke 1:32](#)) and 'Son of God' ([Luke 1:35](#)). Elizabeth prophesied that Jesus would be 'Lord' ([Luke 1:43](#)) and the shepherds heard the angel naming Him 'Christ the Lord' ([Luke 2:11](#)). Then, at age twelve, Jesus identified God, and not Joseph, as His Father ([Luke 2:48-49](#)). So, Luke is clear that Jesus is God the Son. Yet before Luke started to unfold the story of Jesus' ministry, he paused to write a long list of 77 ancestors. This is the human genealogy from which Jesus was descended (the list is too long to be copied here, so do look it up in the Bible or follow the hyperlink).

Luke wanted his readers to understand that Jesus is not only fully God in a human body, but that He is also a man under God's law ([Galatians 4:4](#)). As a descendent of King David, He also has the right and responsibility to rule His people. In fact, there are two lines of descent from David to Jesus (see [Matthew 1:1-17](#)): a double witness as required under Jewish law for a serious matter to be established. For more information about the two genealogies click <http://tinyurl.com/2geneal>.

But why does Luke's genealogy go back to Adam and then God? In addition to Jesus being God, and a man; and God's anointed King, Jesus is also the 'last Adam' ([1 Cor 15:45](#)). He was different from the first Adam. He was the only human being who lived a perfect life and completely fulfilled Father God's law. He lived among all the corruption of the world, but was not corrupted; He was tempted by the devil but never seduced into sin. Therefore He understands us and can represent us in the court of heaven ([Hebrews 4:14-16](#)). He is uniquely qualified to be the Son of God who was all that Adam failed to be: therefore He is the only possible redeemer of sinful humanity and restorer of God's family.

So, before writing a historical account of Christ's ministry, Luke explained who Jesus is: God and man; King and subject; Master of the world but not mastered by it. Today people desperately need this information; even believers need to refresh their view of how great Jesus is. When He is popularly downgraded to a 'good teacher', 'prophet' or 'one religious leader among many', Christians need to have a new confidence in the unique person of Christ. If we share our faith, without explaining who Jesus is, we rob the gospel of its power. Then how can our friends believe in Him if they are confused about His identity?

Prayer: Almighty God. Thank You that Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man; able to satisfy You and able to save me. What a wonderful Saviour He is! Please forgive me for failing to appreciate Him as I should, and failing to make Him known as He really is. Please refresh my view of Jesus, stir me to worship and help me to see that my friends and colleagues really do need to know who Jesus is; so that they might put their trust in Him. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

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OVERWHELMED

Luke 3:21-22 *When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

The start of Jesus' ministry was remarkable. Instead of a demonstration of wisdom by preaching or power by healing, He allowed Himself to be baptised (the Greek word for baptise means to dip, immerse, submerge and overwhelm). John's baptism was the confession of sin and pledge of repentance. But Jesus was God in a human body: He had no sin in Him; so why did He need to submit to baptism in which the water would 'overwhelm' His body?

A good way to look at this is to ask another question, "Why did Jesus die on a cross?" Well, we know it was to take the sin of the world upon Himself, to be punished for it so that we might be redeemed from its lethal grip. In other words, Jesus so closely identified with the sinful human condition that, as [2 Corinthians 5:21](#) puts it, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

So, the baptism of Jesus, three years earlier, marked His identification with the sin which would later overwhelm Him with sorrow ([Mark 14:44](#)). And, prophetically, [Psalm 42:6-7](#) associated His baptism with the anticipation of His death. For Jesus, death as a sacrifice for sin would not take Him by surprise; it was His mission; that was why He shared the 'dirty bathwater' of sinful people being baptised. But He also shared His heart with Father God in prayer, and as He did so He saw heaven opened to release the anointing of the Holy Spirit, seen as a dove. God the Father spoke in audible words to affirm His Son as being in the centre of God's love and purpose.

Christian baptism is not only a sign of our repentance, but also our personal identification with our Saviour's death, burial and resurrection ([Romans 6:3-4](#)). Our baptism looks back to the cross; His looked forward to it. It is as important for us to be baptised for His sake, as it was essential for Him to be baptised for our sake ([Matthew 3:15](#)). It is a special way for us to declare that we are bonded with Jesus; and know that we are united in His love and gospel purpose every day. Rejoice as you remember your baptism, that you are no longer under the tyranny of sin, and pledged to share with Jesus in the work of the gospel; or if you are not yet baptised, move towards it with joy as a significant early step as a disciple of the Son of God.

Prayer: *Father God. Thank You for this record that You publicly anointed and affirmed the Lord Jesus Christ, to be the sin-bearer for all the world - including me. Thank You for the bond of baptism: His willingness to identify with my sin, and my pledge to identify with His gospel purpose. Despite all the busyness, excitements and problems of everyday life, help me to remember what it means to be a baptised believer in the Lord Jesus Christ - with a gospel commission for every day. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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SALVATION'S ADVERSARY

Luke 3:19-20 *But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

John the Baptist, like all true evangelists, called people to repent of their sins before God's Saviour came. John preached about repentance to religious people, civil servants and the military police ([Luke 3:7-14](#)). And he was not afraid of rebuking the king, so that he too would repent and receive the Saviour. But Herod Antipas, the governor of Galilee, was living in an adulterous relationship with Herodias, his half-brother Philip's wife. It was wrong. God's kindness led John to urge the great man to repent ([Romans 2:4](#)).

But instead of tender-hearted contrition, John was met by hard-hearted, fearful arrogance. That is what happens when people sear their consciences. Although they cease to feel shame, they live in fear which boils over into anger when challenged. So John's rebuke stirred up fear in Herod's heart, and rather than submitting to the message, the messenger was thrown into prison. In all, John's ministry lasted three years: one year preaching and baptising, and two years in prison before his execution. (Luke is just giving a summary here, but you can read the full story of how anger turned into murder in [Mark 6:14-29](#).)

John's message of the need for repentance is still essential if people are to enjoy a relationship with Jesus Christ. Christianity without repentance is a religious game, a sham: the gospel has not been properly understood. But a vibrant love of Christ will excite opposition from somebody, somewhere. Although darkness can never put out light, Satan resists the light of truth wherever he can, and uses all sorts of people to try to silence it. Therefore, there will be times when truth-bearers will be opposed, just for telling the truth. It is normal and to be expected ([2 Timothy 3:12-13](#)).

Even today, more people are suffering because of their faith than at any other time in history (there are more followers of Jesus now than ever before). We must pray for our brothers and sisters who suffer for the sake of Christ ([Hebrews 13:3](#)) and, where we are able, send them messages of love and practical support. And when darkness comes to your door, take courage because the Light of the World is living within you. Do not be ashamed of Christ or His gospel because it is God's tool to let the light loose in the darkness ([Romans 1:16](#)). So be refreshed and encouraged today as you step out into the darkness, because you are 'light in the Lord' ([Ephesians 3:8](#))!

Prayer: *Dear Lord God. I am saddened to think that some of my brothers and sisters around the world are suffering today because they have lived courageously and spoken the truth about Jesus. Thank You that Jesus is still the Light of the world and will never be defeated, found to be defective or compromised by evil. So I pray that You will sustain believers whose pathway is painful, that they may be both comforted and strengthened. Grant them Your joy even in their suffering. And please help me not to be afraid, when threats or other opposition try to silence my witness; knowing that You will honour those who honour You. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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SALVATION'S ANNOUNCEMENT

Luke 3:15-18 *The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. John answered them all, "I baptise you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

If evangelists advertise their own abilities, and get people to submit to them, something is wrong. They are supposed to announce the Lord Jesus Christ and explain how to submit to His grace. John the Baptist wanted people to pay attention to his message, and not himself. He was not trying to get people to like him or make him famous, and he was not afraid of talking directly - commanding people to repent of their sin.

In today's passage, he describes the Lord Jesus in seven word-pictures. Firstly, Jesus is more powerful than the appointed prophet: secondly, He is awesomely holy: thirdly, He is qualified to give the Holy Spirit in overwhelming power: fourthly, He will clean out impurity by a thorough refinement: fifthly, He will come as judge to separate those who love Him from those who resist Him: sixthly, He will safeguard for ever those who He saves: seventhly, He will personally punish those who refuse to be saved. That is an accurate job description of the purpose for which Jesus came to earth.

True evangelism continues to proclaim the real Jesus. To advertise Him is to bring glory to Him as His kingdom grows. Without power, He is no stronger than us: without holiness He is no better than us: without the life giving Spirit, He is no more empowering than us: without the ability to cleanse, He is no more than a moral teacher: without judgement, He is no more than an advisor: without being able to keep those who love Him, He is not a saviour: without the ability to punish He has no ultimate authority. So why do so many want to water down the real Jesus, allow Him to be one of many ways to God and accept His moral teaching without the power to put it into practice? The answer is found in sinful human nature, which wants to use God rather than obey Him, to have Him under our control instead of the other way around.

John the Baptist would have none of that, and neither should we. The real Jesus validates the real gospel which results in real heaven and hell. Do not let anyone drag you away from the prize of knowing that Jesus, and submitting to Him. [2 Timothy 1:12](#) reminds us that when we know Him, we have confidence for every day because we know that our Saviour will certainly keep us safe. So do not be afraid or ashamed to advertise the real Jesus. You have been placed uniquely to make Christ known to your friends and colleagues. When they understand who Jesus really is, they will be amazed. You are not John the Baptist, but you have the same Jesus to announce. Embrace the challenge, for Christ's sake!

Prayer: *Almighty God. Thank You that Jesus has been uniquely equipped to be my Saviour. There is nobody like Him in power, majesty, authority and glory. It is such a privilege to be loved by Him, and I worship Him. Help me to value the privilege of knowing the Lord of creation and the Lord of Glory. Help me to accept the responsibility of letting others know who Jesus really is, and to take every opportunity to speak of my Saviour and advertise Him to others. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

SALVATION'S CONTENTMENT

Luke 3:12-14 *Tax collectors also came to be baptised. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely--be content with your pay." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Salvation does not depend on what we do - it depends on accepting what Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross. However, if salvation is real, the new relationship with Jesus should result in a new desire to do what pleases the Lord. John the Baptist was preparing people to meet Jesus, and was scathing towards those who thought of baptism as a formula to get right with God, when their hearts did not want to be right - and their behaviour was unchanged.

Authority brings the temptation of exploitation. In those days, tax collectors were not the regulated civil servants of democratic governments; they had little accountability. They demanded more money than the tax required and kept the difference for themselves. They were rich but socially despised Jews who served both their Roman masters and their own greedy hearts. If they were to confess their sins in the waters of baptism, their work-style had to change. The Roman soldiers were disciplined when under command, but were far from home in a culture which restricted their pagan worship and practices. They felt under-paid, and probably were. So, they resorted to getting their perks from false arrests, and demanding bribes. John was quite clear - don't do it!

Both groups had the same problem. They thought they would be content if they had more money and more power. It is still a common illusion among officials today, and not just them. It is a frequent expression of the sin of greed which entangles many in a personal web of self deceit: it is frequently seen in commerce, academia, learned and caring professions as well as being an ambition of students and home-workers. What is the solution? In one word, "Jesus"!

When His gospel is embraced, His sacrifice is respected and His love received, a new contentment comes to quieten the restless agitation of greed. Christ brings a contentment which argues against the agonising fears which predict disaster if we do not have more than we have been given. [1 Timothy 6:6-10](#) says, *"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."* Practise the life of Christ to day. It will start a revolution of blessing wherever you work.

Prayer: *Gracious God. You have given me my physical life and the promise of eternal life. You have forgiven my sins and promised to provide all I need. Please forgive me for grumbling and even exploiting others to ensure my own satisfaction. Please reveal to me how much these attitudes offend You, and give me the confidence to resist these temptations as I trust in You. Please teach me the freedom of contentment and give me a fresh joy in allowing You to be in control of my life. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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SALVATION'S OTHER SIDE

Luke 3:9-11 *The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." "What should we do then?" the crowd asked. John answered, "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same." (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and many other languages

Those who think that God will always be benign to everybody do not understand the gospel. Salvation is only necessary because of God's wrath against sin. His wrath will consume us all unless we repent of sin and shelter under the Saviour (see www.crosscheck.org.uk). John's comment about the axe being already at the root of the trees refers to judgement, because the Saviour is also the Judge. If there was no coming judgement, we would not need a Saviour: and if there is a Saviour, it is because we need to be saved from that judgement. So salvation and judgement are the opposite sides of the same coin.

As people teemed towards John for baptism, he had to teach them the meaning of repentance and the signs of a real change of heart. Faith is good but without evidence of lifestyle change, it is worthless ([James 2:17](#)). So the crowds ask John for practical examples. The first is about selfishness, which is close to the root of sin; the personal obsession to get ones own way and keep possessions for self. John said that if you have two of anything and another person does not have even the bare necessities of life, it is right to share.

Some have interpreted this as allowing believers the right to demand what they want from other people. That was not what John intended. He wanted repentance to include freewill giving, not to impoverish the giver but to enrich the poor. Such giving reflects the grace of God in giving Himself for the life of the world. It is a physical demonstration of denying self, taking up our cross and following Jesus ([Luke 9:23](#)).

Interestingly, many new Christians, when asked what attracted them to Jesus, will point to believers who lived authentic lives which matched the way they spoke, spontaneously giving what was needed to help the unbeliever. Of course, this is not to say that the Gospel is preached by good deeds (they are the simple living parables of a Christ-transformed heart). Without a clear explanation of the sacrifice of Christ, sacrificial giving by believers will only reinforce the religion myth that says, "You have to be good to get to heaven". The truth is much more wonderful: if you receive salvation through repentance to faith, then you are sure of going to heaven ... and so you can freely give in the Name of your Saviour. Try living like that today, and see the difference it makes at work!

Prayer: *Loving Lord. Thank You for all Your blessings to me, especially the grace through which I have received Your salvation. May I put my theology into practice today as I seek to identify those with whom I can share what You have given to me. May I keep looking to You so that I may be confident of receiving what I need too. Help me to practise this, so that those around me on earth may know that there is a God in heaven who freely gives to people who do not deserve His favour, as an expression of His love. May this style of living become a normal part of my work, witness and worship. For Jesus' sake and in His Name. Amen.*

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