

Meditations on the Human Life of the Man, Jesus of Nazareth
Devotional Reflections with Harry Emerson Fosdick

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1. The Joy of Jesus

The New Testament is the most joyful book in the world. It opens with joy over the birth of Jesus. It ends with a picture of a multitude of people singing the Hallelujah chorus. Wherever we open the book, whether amid fortunate or discouraging circumstances, we hear the note of joy. We find enough tragedy in the New Testament to make it the saddest book in the world. Instead, it is full of joy.

Behind the joyful religion of Christianity is a joyful personality. A sad human being did not inspire a joyful book and a joyful religion. Have you thought of Jesus largely in terms of sorrow and self-sacrifice? Note that a sad picture of Jesus can also be support in Scripture. "He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account."¹ Many pictures of Jesus largely depend upon his cries of agony: "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say--' Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour."² However, we have no conflict between Jesus as a man of sorrows and Jesus as a man of joy. Joy and sorrow are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they come from the same capacity for feeling when we are touched by God and by the world. Deep sorrow and deep joy exist within the same people. Indeed, the impression of the joy of Jesus is greater because of his sorrow. Jesus faced agonizing struggles and pain, yet he became victorious. Then note carefully that Jesus often sits at the dinner table with his disciples and with sinners.

And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have

¹ Isaiah 53:3.

² John 12:27.

no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast."³

Jesus is plainly happy. He is with his friends. He helps people who need help.

He rejoices in his work so much that he compares it to a bridal party on a continuous honeymoon. He justifies his refusal to fast. A Pharisee fasted twice every week. Jesus says that insincere, forced abstinence is useless. How about our lives? Do we radiate good cheer and good will, bearing testimony to our friendship with Jesus?

Jesus had power to make people happy, to win influence, to make life worth living to others. This attitude of joy became infectious. Are we commending the good news to others by such an attitude? Pharisees complained because he welcomed sinners to his friendship.⁴ Yet, he tells them that the work he does is like finding lost people and bringing them back to their true life. He says that he is as glad as a shepherd who calls in his neighbors for a feast when a lost sheep is rescued. He is as full of satisfaction as a housewife who has lost a coin and found it. He is as happy as a father whose wayward son has come home. He says that this sort of experience makes the angels sing. He will not exchange this joy for all the exclusiveness of the Pharisee.

One of the central tests of any character is the nature of its pleasures. What do we call real joy? Jesus enjoyed nature and friendship and social life. So

³ Matthew 9:10-15.

⁴ Luke 15.

should we. Jesus loved good health. He spent much of his time healing the bodies of others. Jesus loved the best reading at his disposal. Note how well he knew the prophetic writings of the Scripture. All his joys were fine and noble. Let us examine our hearts, and see if we can stand the test of this question: Where do we look for our happiness?

Most of us seek joy through getting things. It takes maturity in Christian living to learn that the deepest satisfaction in life lies in serving. The reason for the joy of Jesus corresponds to a universal law that the happiest people on earth are those who do the most for others. Jesus loves his life. Take note of Jesus at his most disheartened day, when hostility assails him and friends desert him. Yet, we feel that nothing could distract him from the work of service to which God called him. Can we remember doing some real kindness for a person whom had no special reason to expect it from us? Has anything in our lives lingered in our memory as a much more deeply satisfactory experience? The joy of Jesus was at heart the satisfaction that comes from finding lost and needy people and helping them out. This source of delight is at hand for all of us everyday. How many of us let such treasures go unclaimed?

When we give up an immediate pleasure for the sake of character, we are impressed with how much we have sacrificed. Jesus was impressed with how much we have gained. He did not focus upon the sacrifice, but upon the joy of finding the spiritual treasures and getting it any price. Only in great souls do we find this joy in service. Let us consider what we have gained by any sacrifice we ever made for character. They have all increased our ability to be useful to other people. For example, we have gained the

approval of God through conscience, the satisfaction of overcoming our moral enemy, the greater power to conquer the next time, and the approbation of those who care most for us. Through such victories, we have gained more than we have sacrificed. We ought to make all such sacrifices with joy. No one has ever found any real, solid and permanent satisfaction in doing wrong.

Jesus spoke of life as “Blessed are . . .”⁵ Many look upon Jesus with pity because of his suffering. He spoke of his own life, even with its persecutions, as a blessed, happy life. Consider the exhaustless sources of the joy of Jesus. Jesus had the most joyful idea of God that the human race has ever heard. He taught his followers to use their common experience of parenthood and transfer it to God. For centuries people had enthroned in heaven their evil and their good. Jesus taught people to interpret God in terms of the spiritually best they could imagine. “Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”⁶ Jesus affirmed these things as being of God. Because God is so good, nothing is too good to be true. Jesus was confident of the victory of right over wrong. In the deepest sense, he was an optimist. He ate and drank with gladness.⁷ He loved children.⁸ He loved nature.⁹ He used spontaneous humor in this teaching. When he dealt with the sick, he often said, “Be of good cheer.” Even fasting ought to be accompanied with a joyful spirit.¹⁰ He trusted in his Father. He had boundless hope for the future. He was conscious that he had found the will of God and was doing it. He had

⁵ Matthew 5:3-12.

⁶ Philippians 4:8.

⁷ Matthew 11:19.

⁸ Mark 10:16.

⁹ Matthew 16:2-3; 28-29.

¹⁰ Matthew 6:16-18.

sense of the approval of God on his life. He had knowledge that he was doing a great and abiding service for humanity. Let each of us apply to our own lives these sources of joy. May we not make our lives profoundly blessed in all these ways? Jesus was a joyful man. He carried with him the atmosphere of good will. Even the waves sorrow swept over him, kindness and joy sprung from him like springs of fresh water.

Eventually, the circumstances of any life become adverse. Nobody totally escapes misfortune. This is the most significant fact about the joy of Jesus. The sources of his joy were not at the mercy of people or circumstances. The sources of gladness in the life of Jesus did not depend upon the good will of people. The enjoyment of the comforts of this life, the joy of teaching, the friendship of his disciples, was at the mercy of people. People closed all these doors to Jesus. The blessedness of Jesus did not vanish, even in the final months of his life. Rather, it was like a spring of water from which he could draw. He could stand anything that people or circumstances could do to him and still have resources of joy. Are all our joys at the mercy of things that may happen to us? Do we have sources of joy that no one and no misfortune can take away from us? Jesus did. Consider the sources of his joy mentioned in the previous paragraph. They are all totally independent of the hostility of any one or the adversity of circumstances. Some day every one needs such reserves of joy as Jesus had when he faced his darkest hours. Are we in possession of them?

2. The Unselfishness of Jesus

"But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."¹¹

These words are a revelation of the spirit of Jesus. Jesus was never discouraged in friendliness. The hostility of another person could not spoil his persistent good will. Jesus shows his unselfishness most impressively in the forgiveness he extended to his enemies. People have long admired a generous attitude toward unfriendly people. However, Jesus took this virtue from its place of an occasional ideal and made it the common duty of every day. In the passage quoted above, Jesus intentionally contrasted his teaching with that of the rabbis. What a wealth of generosity! What a lavish sense of good will. Read the passage again, using it as a window to look into the heart of Jesus. He lived these words. Let us have the courage to compare our own lives with the boundless unselfishness of Jesus. Consider what it means that we cannot help being ashamed of ourselves in the presence of such an unselfish spirit.

¹¹ Luke 6:27-38.

Jesus speaks of an unforgiving, grudge-bearing spirit.

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt.¹²

Because of Jesus, we cannot imagine any ideal character without this forgiving quality of Jesus. We need to reflect upon all that other people have had to endure about us. Remember the patience and forgiveness of parents. Remember the way our friends overlooked our blunders and bad nature. Consider how our hope of any chance to retrieve past mistakes in our moral life rests on the mercy of God and willingness to pardon. Then reflect upon how small-minded we are when we cherish grudges against those who wrong us. Let us face squarely all our nourished bitterness against anyone and see how contemptible it is. Such character is all the more remarkable in that when we hold an exalted opinion of our work, and ourselves, we naturally resent with corresponding bitterness any disregard of our rights or interference with our plans.

Jesus did not allow a cherished grudge to disturb the peace of his own spirit or interrupt his communion with God. As soon as we let the unfriendliness

¹² Matthew 18:21-30.

of other people arouse in us an unfriendly response, we have allowed our enemies harm us in center of our lives. Jesus never surrendered his heart to his foes. He never dirtied his own spirit by the desire to get even. In particular, unforgiving people could live in fellowship with a forgiving God, as the passage quoted above shows. To be generous toward his enemies was the way Jesus protected his own soul. Jesus held his own life in its inward friendliness and fellowship with God above the reach of the hostility of humanity. Often in prayer, our cherished bitterness against an unfriendly person makes real praying impossible. We need to pray for those we dislike the most. Whenever people did wrong to Jesus, he looked upon the wrong as a sure sign of a deep need in the life of the person. An insult or a blow seemed to him a signal of moral need flung out from the heart of his enemy. Jesus thought first, not of the wrong done to him, but of the pitiable need of the one so ignorant and perverted as to do it. Our desire for that person needs to be for the deepest good. Our prayer needs to be in such a way that, if we had the chance, we would help the person any way we could. We are bound to forgive when the opportunity comes. We need to let no bitterness interrupt our fellowship with God. Jesus himself knew the brutality and unfriendliness of people. People called him a liar, a servant of the devil, insane, and a seeker of a worldly crown. Yet, he loved his enemies, did good to them, blessed them, and prayed for them. The generosity of Jesus was one part of his self-forgetful love for all sorts of people. People express their need for help in many ways. When people are bitter, unfriendly, or ungrateful, they show an even deeper need. We must think of their need and not of how they did wrong to us.

Religion can degenerate into mere observance of external formality or attendance at services. For Jesus, true religion involves a real, inward sense of humanity. Nothing externally religious that people perform means anything without that concern for humanity. We express our concern for humanity through active, practical service. For example, in the criminal justice system, we seek a balance between punishment and reform of the person. Far less common is the ability to bear injuries without being vengeful; to be wronged instead of “getting even” to help the offender. This is a true concern for humanity in a most noble and difficult form. Are we religious people in this sense?

When we speak of unselfishness, we generally mean a generous spirit of service that is willing to sacrifice. However, other people also act upon us. Selfishness in receiving the actions of other people is more common than refusal to serve them. There are many forms which selfishness takes, such as, touchiness, petulance, hypersensitive, readiness to have our pride hurt and to be insulted, and keeping a chip on our shoulder.

It is tempting to narrow our good will and sense of humanitarianism to a special group. Yet, Jesus was ready to accept as friends all sorts and conditions of people. The Jewish people of the days of Jesus were exclusive. They had to be in order to preserve their national existence through obedience to the Law. Yet, the good will of Jesus knew no boundaries, no matter how noble the reason for drawing them. His inclusiveness of all humanity included tax collectors, Samaritans, gentiles, or women. Wherever humanity was in need, no matter what the creed or race or character, the good of Jesus sought an opportunity to serve.

Such is the unselfishness of Jesus. Do we draw lines within which we are generous? Is this behavior Christian? Can anyone be a genuine disciple of Jesus who consciously indulges in such social exclusiveness?

Whole-hearted good will is a characteristic quality of a true disciple of Jesus. Such a person is the best argument for Christianity that we have on earth. Such a way of life is a far greater argument than any philosophical discussion ever constructed. Is anyone likely to think of our lives as the great reason they for believing in Christ?

Jesus had a joy that no circumstances could quench. He overflowed with generosity that no injuries could embitter and no antipathies could narrow.

3. The Anger of Jesus

At first, we may think that anger is the opposite of the boundless good will of Jesus. Yet, the anger Jesus expresses throughout his life came at crucial times in his ministry. In general, we conclude that all great virtues are the result of two moral forces pulling in opposite directions. For example, toleration without conviction becomes weak. Conviction without compassion creates the narrow-minded person. Compassion without conviction creates the artificial person. Yet, conviction and compassion together creates the truly mature person. In the same way, love degenerates into a vague, kindly feeling unless we balance it by the capacity for righteous anger. Without the abhorrence of evil, kindness becomes weak. Without kindness, the abhorrence of evil becomes bitter and hateful. Together, they make for people of true good will, loving the people as well as hating evil. A mature Christian is a person capable of anger in the presence of evil and sin.

The anger of the mature Christian is a direct inheritance from Jesus. Pictures of Jesus with a sickly, sad face, and sermons emphasizing his meekness and humility, have left the impression that quiet peacefulness was the dominant quality of Jesus. The anger of Jesus is the negative electricity at one end of his life. The positive electricity of his love is at the other end of his life. A love like this is tough love. It will look with compassion upon the victim of evil, and then look with anger upon the cause of the evil. Consider the following story of Jesus. He could be angry when confronted with the proper occasion. Is not anger an important quality of any saint?

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they

were silent. He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.¹³

We do well when we praise the love of Jesus. We also do well when we remember that we stand before one capable of the anger that this love creates. Let us think of the times when we have been angry. Does our anger have the same quality as that of Jesus?

Why are we so often ashamed of our outbursts of anger? I suspect the reason is that our anger involves personal resentment because of some private wrong. Our anger is selfish. Consider the possibility that Jesus never expressed anger when people mistreated him. Rather, he expressed his anger only over the abuse of others. People spit upon him, mocked him, whipped him, and crucified him. Yet, he did not express anger at this public humiliation at the close of his life. This freedom from personal resentment surpasses ordinary human nature. However, when people harm others, the Jesus arouses his own anger. We need to turn the other cheek when people do evil to us. We need to rise in anger when people suffer the evil word or deed of others.

When Jesus spoke the following words, he was angry.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may become clean. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.¹⁴

¹³ Mark 3:1-6.

¹⁴ Matthew 23:23-28.

Suppose Jesus came to our community. Is there anything in the social life at which he would express his anger? Think of the vices, the meanness, the dishonesty, the hypocrisies, in our social life. Where do we stand with reference to them? Are we guilty? If not, are we complacent in their presence? When the opportunity arises, do we speak or act against them? Do we lead such lives that make our words and deeds of anger effective?

Consider the following story, in which Jesus is angry with a wealthy man.

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side.¹⁵

What excuse did the rich man have for himself? Perhaps because he had not caused the poverty of Lazarus, he was not responsible for it. Is that a good excuse for his failure to act? If someone sees a fire, and does not give the alarm, is that person not also a partner with the one who set the fire? Can we evade responsibility because we did not cause an evil?

Consider the anger of Jesus at a great public evil. It was a system of legalized corruption at the temple.

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making

¹⁵ Luke 16:19-23.

my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."¹⁶

What would be his attitude today toward the corruption of our city, state, and national government? Is not every sincere work for civic purity true devotion the work of God in the world? It is possible that God is calling us to look anew at our lives. God may call us to express anger at the evils that are ruining people. God may equip us to be among those who can help abolish such evils. Can we not be involved in such activity no matter what our profession may be?

However, I can hear some express the legitimate concern that we not become a judgmental people. Most of us remember what Jesus said:

Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.¹⁷

Consider how easy it is to condemn other people. We can be tempted to let righteous anger get away with us. We fail to understand the full meaning of the anger of Jesus only when we contrast that anger with his appreciation of any good he discovered in people. Condemnation is negative. It accomplishes nothing when it stands alone. This is clearly so in personal relationships. Other people may know better than us that they failed. They may be able to pick up where we left off and add areas of failure that we could not see in their lives. Condemnation alone is unjust and hurtful. It often merely confirms the discouraging opinion that people often possess of themselves. The anger of Jesus is impressive. Why? Because he loved people, and tried to see all the good he could

¹⁶ John 2:13-17.

¹⁷ Matthew 7:1-5.

discover in them, before he condemned their evil. In fact, without such appreciation, Jesus would be the most discouraging person in history. He is perfect in his practice, so full of high ideals, so just in his condemnation of insincerity, selfishness and pride, that he might discourage us. Instead, he is our great encourager. He appreciates even the slightest beginning of right thought and behavior in any of us. He sees the possibilities of new life where others see no hope. He does not judge people based on what they possess or do or have become today, but on what they may become. He endeavors to bring out the best in people by appreciating it. He longs to say to all of us at the end of our lives, "Well done!" Consider the possibility that our anger will never do any good unless other people sense that we judge ourselves as severely as we do them, and that we appreciate their good as well as hate their evil. We need to appreciate the flowers in the lives of people before we rise in judgment of the weeds. The anger of Jesus at evil is certain. Yet, one senses that at the first sign of repentance, the anger of Jesus would melt into tenderness and the desire to help. The good will of Jesus is meaningful because he could arouse his anger. His anger is more meaningful because it came from a friendly and appreciative heart.

Jesus did not take a mild attitude toward evil suggestions that arose to tempt him. He hated them. He hated evil.

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.¹⁸

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes,

¹⁸ Matthew 4:8-11.

and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."¹⁹

None of us is safe until we learn to repel temptation immediately and instinctively. We need to consider the places in our lives where we are severely tempted. These are places where our character is tested. Are we accustomed to repel such temptations with anger?

¹⁹ Mark 8:31-33.

4. The Loyalty of Jesus to his Cause

To discuss theories about Jesus and to face Jesus himself are very different experiences. One is intellectual while the other is practical. One involves ingenious thinking, the other prompt action. We sense the contrast when we move through all the theological discussions about Jesus until we face Jesus himself in the gospels. We find him impatient with those who hold even the highest opinion of him, unless they stand for the things he represents. He did welcome verbal praise unless people accompanied it with loyalty to his cause.

Jesus himself was loyal to the cause of the kingdom of God. Jesus called others into the same devotion to his cause. Such a view can help us avoid certain extreme positions concerning the personality of Jesus. Jesus was not an ascetic. “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.”²⁰ “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.”²¹ “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”²² Such verses may sound like asceticism. However, a review of the section on the joy of Jesus should refute such a claim. However, the real answer is that such statements reflect the loyalty Jesus expected from himself and from those who follow him. Of course, others claim Jesus was an urbane, liberal thinker and teacher of his day. Such persons do not

²⁰ Luke 14:26.

²¹ Matthew 5:29-30.

²² Matthew 19:21.

typically lead people to turn the world upside down. Some images of Jesus portray him as so nice that we wonder how anyone could have crucified him.

Note the continual thought of God that Jesus teaches. Jesus places the will of God at the center of his teaching. God has a purpose, a plan, a will for the whole world and for every life in it. There can be no will of God for the whole world unless there is also a will of God for our lives. The will of God is full of love and wisdom. He believed that he was the representative of the eternal purpose of God. Such a vision of the future of the world is not typical of the religions of the world or of secular thought. Wherever we find Christianity practicing any resemblance of itself, it proclaims the glad tidings of the kingdom. The world is going somewhere. The conflict between good and evil will not last forever. Such opposites cannot exist in the universe forever. The world is a story with plot with progress and a climax. This is the soul of the preaching of Jesus. The purpose of God is to bring in the kingdom. We do not know all the plans of God. We can place our trust in God. We shall not do the ultimate winning of this battle. God is the one who can conclude this battle.

Jesus seeks the will of God for his own life. We must be willing to do whatever God wills for us. We must be loyal to as much of God's will, as we know. We must continually ask, "What will you have me to do?" we must test all our choices by the principles of Jesus. We must tune our conscience by prayer until God can speak through it.

Consider Jesus as the leader of a great cause. This sort of loyalty is an element of all noble persons. Consider how Jesus lived for his cause, prayed for his cause, suffered

for his cause, and died for his cause. Are loyal to the cause of Jesus? Can he rely on you at all costs to be loyal?

Note the following passage of scripture:

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.²³

Jesus says his disciples are more than individuals. They represent the cause of Jesus, they stand for him in the world. The honor, reputation, and success of Jesus are in the hands of the disciples. Consider how true it is that all of us have a power to represent something more than ourselves. We always stand for a type of character or a special human interest in the minds of our acquaintances. We cannot think of Beethoven without thinking of music. We cannot think of Jesus without thinking of the righteousness of God. What do people think about when they see us? What do we stand for in the minds of others?

Consider the following scripture:

No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.²⁴ Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.²⁵
But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.²⁶

We need to face the fact that we always stand for the cause of God or the opposite. No one succeeds in standing for both. When we sin, we become a

²³ Matthew 5:13-16.

²⁴ Matthew 6:24.

²⁵ Matthew 12:30.

²⁶ Matthew 6:33.

representative or ambassador of the forces that destroy human life. Reflect upon any of the vices of humanity. Those who practice them become representatives of that cause. Sin is treachery to the cause of human welfare. Sin is going over to the side of the enemy of the human race. Righteousness is loyalty to the cause of salvation of the world. We cannot be on both sides. Which side are we on?

Loyalty always costs. It costs far more to be loyal to the cause of evil. It sometimes costs heavily to be loyal to the will of God. Are we willing to pay the price of loyalty to God? If not, is there any real meaning in calling Jesus our Lord and Savior? We need to face honestly the places where we have dodged the sacrifice that being true to the will of God required us to make.

5. The Patient Endurance of Jesus

Human life does not ask simply, "How much can you do?" Life also asks us, "How much can you endure, and still be a noble person?" It is difficult to win the victory, to become successful in a particular task. It is more difficult to experience defeat and yet be undiscouraged and remain in good spirits. We have not been truly tested until we have suffered. It is more pleasant to use our talents well. It is more difficult to use our troubles well. It is more pleasant to achieve when we are prosperous. It is more difficult to be patient when we are in adversity.

Let us reflect upon the meaning of this saying: "the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."²⁷

If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.²⁸

Peter marvels at the patient endurance of Jesus in the midst of suffering. We need this quality in our lives as well. All of us are handicapped somewhat. We do not have enough. We have poor health. We have grief over the loss of a loved one or over the loss of a relationship. Something in our heredity or environment may become a challenge to us. If we live up to our ideals, we will often pay the price of hostility from the customs of our day. All of us lead our

²⁷ Mark 8:31.

²⁸ I Peter 2:20-24.

lives in situations that are less than ideal. Therefore, we need patience, courage, persistent faith, and fortitude to deal with life.

Think of the amazing strength Jesus showed in launching his great plan under discouraging circumstances. Jesus faced a difficult situation in which to carry out his ministry. He faced a Jewish and Roman society in Palestine that rejected his message.²⁹ Jesus undoubtedly became discouraged. He faced a less than ideal reception to his ministry. He taught the truth, yet people willingly distorted his teaching in order to assert their power over him. He had an open fellowship, including people in his circle of friends undesirable elements of society. Yet, his offer of friendship also brought slander and abuse. He held the spirit to be more important than the body. Yet, his opponents called him a drunkard. He had an intimate friendship with God. Yet, his opponents accused him of blasphemy. Consider the temptation we face in such situations to become bitter, wishing that we were in some other situation. Jesus made the best out of one of least ideal situations that ever faced a great person. He did not demand a different place to carry out his ministry. He went to work in the field of labor given to him. The results of that ministry have fed the world ever since. His life is a call to each of us to become courageous. We need to stop whining and stop pitying ourselves. We need to see what we can do, by the help of God, with the less than ideal situation in which we find ourselves. God would not give us these situations without some fine possibilities in them.

Jesus showed patient endurance with his disciples. They seemed to misunderstand him and displayed selfishness in many ways. The record of the

²⁹ See Matthew 12:41-42, 13:13-15.

gospel story is clear. They were inadequate human instruments with whom Jesus worked. Yet, Jesus used these disciples to begin the Christian mission in the world.

Jesus had to suffer the necessary loneliness of his life. Greatness is often misunderstood. That seemed to be the case with the disciples. The situation at Gethsemane is typical of his life. The world is alien and hostile. A few of his disciples are with him, sympathetic, while not fully comprehending what Jesus is going through.

Unavoidable trouble comes to everyone. The result in our lives will be in two directions. First, it can make us bitter, leaving us resentful, discouraged, and cynical. Second, it can make us more noble, leaving us more humble, more kind, and with a deeper spiritual insight and a more firm trust in God. The difference reveals what is within us.

The storm of adverse circumstances falls on all of us, whether we are good or bad. Adversity tests our character. One house may look as well as another, on a nice day. Only the storm will reveal the kind of foundation underneath the house. When financial trouble comes, when plans fail, when death strikes the family, our response reveals the moral foundations of our lives. We need to have the assurance that God cares most of all for our spiritual success. Therefore, God can make the best of the most adverse situations. If we are faithless, we fail, no matter what external success we may enjoy. If we are faithful, we succeed, no matter what the external failure we may suffer. We need to be so deeply

grounded in the same faith as that of Jesus that we can stand unshaken in the day of the storm.

The cross is the greatest example of the patient endurance of Jesus. The cross did more than anything else to win the world to him. Nothing is as powerful as love that is willing to suffer. In this consuming devotion that identifies us with a cause, and makes us ready to give up everything selfish for whom he loves, lies the consummate perfection of character. Consider the life of Jesus in the light of this truth. Then, let us compare our own lives with his sacrificial love.

Given all that Jesus faced in his life, we might expect him to become gloomy and morose. We might expect him to become anxious over the possibility that his ministry would fail. He might become cynical and discouraged. His trials could have shaken his faith in God. Yet, recall what we said earlier about the joy of Jesus. He maintained this joy in the midst of troubles. When all is well, we may easily have joy and confidence in God. Trouble strips us of any faith we have borrowed from others and brings us to the foundation of our own lives. The patience endurance of Jesus both with situations that were less than ideal and with suffering, came from his absolute trust in the good purpose of God. His task was to do the will of God. The consequences were in the hands of God. God would not fail to bring about a fruitful conclusion to all faithful work. For this reason, Jesus suffered patiently, endured courageously, sacrificed freely, and ministered hopefully. He was sure that God was for him. Ultimately, no one could prevail against him. His death was part of the plan of God. Without reliance upon God,

we may be a cynic or a stoic. We cannot be one who endures and sacrifices with glad confidence that all things work together for good.

6. The Integrity of Jesus

Jesus endured much suffering for the sake of his cause, as shown above.

The patience endurance of Jesus throughout his life is enough evidence of the integrity of Jesus concerning his devotion to his cause. Hardship tests the genuineness of loyalty, especially when there is little chance of winning, at least from a human perspective. Yet, integrity in the life of Jesus shows itself throughout his life.

If we do not have our integrity, we lose everything. A lie is the fundamental sin. We can never truly see another. We are all invisible personalities. We signal to each other by our words, looks, and actions. We lie when we deliberately give people the wrong signal. When we lie, we destroy the system of mutual dependableness and confidence upon which we base human society. When we become people of the lie, we make it impossible for any virtue to imbed itself in us. John makes this clear as well: "You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies."³⁰

We need to have some insight into the nature of integrity and hypocrisy as they show themselves in this generation. The gospel materials condemn the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. That is too easy for us today. We will need to search our own souls in order to give up our contentment with the approval of other people. In general, they will see only that portion of us that we allow them

³⁰ John 8:44.

to see. What we need is to be inwardly such persons as God approves, for God looks upon the heart.

What Jesus did not like about the hypocrite is that they do not care for genuine goodness. They are content with what is respectable, that they maintain the right image. They want to appear well without paying the price that being right with God may cost. They desire the approval of other people. They find they can meet the standards of others, for a while, at least. Do we cover the truth with an outward show? Maybe we desired the approval of family or friends and co-workers. We gain much in maturity and nobility if we are in our hearts whom we put forth ourselves to be in public.

We can see how important integrity was to Jesus when we see him in circumstances in which most of us might be tempted to lie. For example, we need to think of Jesus before Pilate. We might offer many excuses that would justify a lie to save our lives. He did not lie, even when to do so would have spared him the cross. The passion narrative makes the integrity of Jesus stand out even more clearly as the disciples run away and Peter denies he even knew Jesus. A further example is how Jesus treated the religious leaders of his day. We might be tempted to word ourselves in such a way as to gain their support, or at least neutrality. We might justify this by telling ourselves how many more people we might reach. However, Jesus spoke the plain truth, no matter whom he alienated. He insisted that their religion was only outward show, that their ideas of the Sabbath were too strict, and that they loved money and their friendship with the rich far too much. No one could buy Jesus or frighten him into a lie. A third

example: Jesus wanted followers, yet was not afraid to turn potential followers away. He told them the truth about the dangers of discipleship.³¹

Jesus expected our speech to have integrity. Note in this passage concerning oaths:

Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.' But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one.³²

Have we grown lax about speech that has no integrity? Do we hate a lie as Jesus did, so that others can depend upon what we say?

Jesus was content in this area of his life only with being right in the sight of God. When we are alone before God, no amount of outward appearance can save us. The subtlest version of a lack of integrity does not come when we substitute outward forms for a genuine, inner life. Rather, we must insist on being persons of integrity. We ought to read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 as a vision of integrity. This collection of the sayings of Jesus is the most characteristic speech of Jesus that we have. It reveals that the central passion of Jesus was integrity. What he teaches by words in this sermon he lived by his actions. Jesus does not attempt to lay upon his followers a new code of law. We learn that Jesus wants to positively love others, not simply refuse to hate them. We learn that Jesus wants us to be people of purity, not simply refrain from doing impure things. We learn that Jesus wants our speech to reflect truthful character, and not simply an occasional act. We learn that Jesus wants our giving to be from a genuine caring for

³¹ Luke 14:26, 27, 18:22-24, Matthew 8:19,20.

³² Matthew 5:33-37.

others, and not for show. We learn that Jesus wants prayer to spring from communion with God, not for a show of spirituality. We learn that Jesus wants all our religious practices to come from a genuine communion with God, and not simply to convince others of our spirituality.

We need to have clean hearts and a spirit that is right with God. A selfish person can do a good deed occasionally. However, Jesus says that our words or deeds are good only if they spring out of a nature or heart that is genuinely good. We are chiefly aware of the opinions of others. Jesus was concerned about the opinion of God. The relationship Jesus had with God never became a cause of shame. Note the following passage:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.³³

Only when we bring all our thoughts, ambitions, motives, and heart attitudes to God can we be people of integrity. We can be like a rock in the woods. It can be attractive on the outside. However, if we pick it up and all kinds of crawling things go for the dark holes from which they came. God knows our hearts. That we live on good terms with our neighbors may not be a test of integrity at all. That we live on honorable terms with ourselves is a far deeper standard. That we live on right terms with God means complete integrity of our lives. Are we endeavoring to put our lives to that test?

³³ Matthew 7:15-21.

We want others to respect us, and we are often content with that. Much of our goodness consists in being as bad as we dare to be. However, Jesus wants us to be such persons in our inward life that we can respect ourselves. We may be able to bluff our way through a particular test in life. However, the only way to respect ourselves is to lead a life of integrity. We need to test ourselves by this standard. Too often, we live in such a way as to escape the condemnation of others. We want to gain their approval. Though this concern for what others think aids our moral life, we run the risk of lacking integrity. We need to live such lives that we are not ashamed of what we think and are and do in the dark.

The integrity of Jesus at least the following elements. Jesus would deceive no one, even if it meant to save himself, to soften hostility against him, or to win followers. He was content only with an inward life of integrity, so that he never needed to be ashamed of himself or to be ashamed before God. Since Jesus was a man of integrity, we can have confidence in him. When he says that he has a unique relationship with God, we can trust him. When he says that he knows the truth about God, and can communicate that truth to us, we can trust him.

7. The Dignity of Jesus

Self-discipline involves the way we say "No" to some things in order to say "Yes" to greater things. This involves a sense of self-control, self-constraint and self-restraint that few people attain. It involves self-mastery in every way, so that our lives reflect our hopes and dreams. It involves an awareness of our dignity as people to whom God has given a vision and a task.

These reflections upon the character of Jesus, intended to be helpful, may lead us toward discouragement. He may become remote from our own experience, making the command to be like him impossible. This impression of perfection that we have in our gospel material makes Jesus unique in the spiritual history of humanity. No one has ever made such a claim. He had an undisturbed sense of communion with God. He held the most demanding idea of goodness, while at the same time expecting his own life to match what he preached. Here was a man of incomparable spirituality, a heart sensitive to sin, expecting more from himself than he did from others, yet without moral shame attached to his thoughts, words, or deeds.

If the life of Jesus is to inspire us rather than discourage us, we must ask if the price of such character was a severe moral struggle. If it did not, then he was never truly tempted. Was Jesus truly tempted? Did he have the capacity for sin? Did he feel the enticement of evil and have inward battles to fight before he could know and do the will of God? We will examine the scripture to discover the answer to this question.

We cannot imagine joy as a virtue except for the temptation to become discouraged. We cannot imagine generosity as a virtue except for the temptation to become stingy. We cannot imagine loyalty to a cause as a virtue except for the temptation to desert one's cause. Jesus experienced temptation. The character of Jesus

grew and deepened as he struggled with temptation, and overcame it. As the writer to the Hebrews states so well:

Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.³⁴ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.³⁵

If the character of Jesus is to have significance for us, then his character must be the result of moral struggle. We can neither understand nor imitate a character that is not tempted. If Jesus did experience temptation, he would be outside our moral world.

The disciples present Jesus as a real person. They set the background of his life in a world of poverty and bigotry and power. He is not mildly carrying out the orders of heaven. He faces temptations, from his first struggle in the desert to the struggle in Gethsemane. In each case, he surrendered to the will of his God. The total impression of his life in the gospels is one of amazing confidence and peace. Yet, this is not the peace of an unruffled pond where no wind blows. It is a peace for which he had to fight a deep inner victory.

Our experience suggests that power is always accompanied by the temptation to misuse it. The more power we have, the more self-restraint it requires to use it in a right way. If we look at ourselves honestly, we notice that our greatest temptations come in areas of greatest talent and power. We are tempted to abuse the gifts God has given us.

³⁴ Hebrews 2:17-18.

³⁵ Hebrews 4:15-16.

The temptation in the desert may reflect the inner struggle of Jesus for victory over temptation. The account dramatizes, in the language of the Hebrew Scriptures, an intense, inward, spiritual struggle. This account may be the typical temptations Jesus had to face. Let us consider the temptation narrative.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time. Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country.³⁶

In common with all three temptations is the temptation to misuse his unusual power. He had just been baptized. It was one of the high moments of his life. His acceptance of his Messiahship, his new consciousness of his mission, made it a profound and stirring moment. After this spiritual experience, Jesus the Holy Spirit drives him into the desert for these temptations. All his temptations were struggles over the use of his unique power as the Son of God. They were matters of self-discipline and self-restraint. For example, the first temptation concerns the use of his power in a selfish way. The wonder of the life of Jesus lies not only in what he did, but in what he refrained from doing. His

³⁶ Luke 4:1-14.

reserved use of his personal power is a testimony to his character. The second temptation concerns the demand that God suspends the laws of nature to protect him from suffering. To dedicate oneself to God's vision and mission, to dedicate oneself to righteousness, is like casting oneself down from the heights. Yet, he did not expect God to protect him from the consequences of his obedience. Jesus paid the price of being the savior of the world. He accepted the ingratitude and persecution. He went to the cross with calm assurance and courage. In Gethsemane he is tempted to ask God to exempt him from the cross. Why should the Son of God endure that shame? The third temptation concerns the substitution of a kingdom of this world for the spiritual kingdom that God counted on him to establish. He surrendered all thought of establishing an earthly empire.

This account of the temptation Jesus reveals the moral struggle of Jesus. Powerful temptations harassed Jesus. Great souls become engaged in such battles. He did not use his power as the Son of God selfishly. He accepted the mission God gave him and accepted the consequences of that obedience, without the expectation that God would suspend the rules for him. In order to establish the kingdom of God, he put any hopes for a kingdom of this world far away from his life and thought. He was tempted in all points like us human beings. However, no human being was tempted like Jesus. Temptation is not a disgrace. It is an important part of our drive toward wholeness and maturity. Jesus was the most tempted of all because he had the greatest powers to control. In particular, note the final verse. Through this temptation, Jesus received new power to fight a larger battle. He made temptation a glorious experience. True nobility of character would be impossible if our goodness remained untried innocence instead of victorious virtue. The moral struggle is an important part of our development. Using

temptation as an opportunity for conquest and growth is the ideal with which Jesus presents us.

The scriptures invite us to pray, "lead us not into temptation," while at the same time, James offers this advice:

My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.³⁷

The Greek work here means trial, test, and temptation. Some people deliberately seek situations where they know they will be tempted. To do so is to play with fire. Most likely, the motivation is for new sensations. We are to avoid temptation, trials, the test, whenever we can do so with honor. When in the course of fulfilling our Christian discipleship we fall into temptation, we are to go at the task of conquering joyfully.

Jesus resisted temptation because of his positive devotion to his mission. He had no room in his soul where evil could find a home. His life of positive goodness and joy conquered sin by surpassing it. Do we have such a saving positive quality in our lives?

Jesus embodies the counsel he gave in the following passage:

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his castle, his property is safe. But when one stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his plunder. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it wanders through waterless regions looking for a resting place, but not finding any, it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' When it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and live there; and the last state of that person is worse than the first."³⁸

³⁷ James 1:2-4.

³⁸ Luke 11:21-26.

The truth taught here is reasonably clear. Stronger passions expel evil passions. Spiritual demons will occupy a soul unoccupied with positive devotion.

The only way to stop sin from the beginning is to resist its attempt to gain entrance into our thoughts. The place where we must meet temptation and conquer it is the realm of secret thinking. Evil deeds are simply the shadows of our thoughts. The real war is inward, while the outer action is but the echo. This is clear from the following passage.

It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.³⁹

Character is transformed by the influence of those with whom we have fellowship. Find a friend, and believe and love that person. We see a great cause and give ourselves to its work. Feel the power of a book, and we saturate ourselves with its spirit. We find a fellowship of persons and join them in their spiritual journey. In the process, we do not need to think much about our character development. Character is a by-product of such relationships. We can choose Jesus as our most intimate friend, the kingdom of God as our cause, the bible for our source of faith and life, and the church as the fellowship of persons to whom we are accountable. In subtle ways, such influences will transform our lives.

8. The Courage of Jesus

When we follow our ideals, we often behave differently than the established customs of the time. The ordinary standards of our time can drag us down from the living in accordance with what we know to be the best. In democratic societies, we believe the

³⁹ Mark 7:20-23.

decisions of the majority in our political life are the best. However, if we carry that view into moral life, we have a problem. The majority may desire that which is beneath the best. The world pulls us down from what is best. The world wants us to become the same as everyone else. Too many of us take for granted the social, economic, and moral values of our tie. We rarely ask how long the conditions existed, or whether they are right, or how long they ought to stay.

Jesus lived by his ideals in a world that was far from ideal. A clash was inevitable. Jesus never took for granted the existing situation. He believed in something better yet to come. He committed himself to that brighter future. He believed in the kingdom of God and the shaping of our lives by that ideal. Jesus had confidence that God would bring about the great victory of what is best. God will defeat evil. We need such a vision to sustain us in the midst of the daily struggle with sin and the social forces of evil.

Jesus insisted that our relationship God depended upon spiritual conditions rather than ritual. The moral and ethical basis of that relationship had priority. One example of this courage in the life of Jesus was his position on the observance of the Sabbath. Though the religious leaders of his day took such observance with great seriousness, Jesus focused upon the human need that the Sabbath intended to address. Another example was the position Jesus took on the observance of ritual cleanliness. The religious leaders took these rules for external cleanliness with great seriousness. Jesus focused upon the internal cleanliness and purity that such laws intended to symbolize. A third example is that Jesus did not follow the traditional pattern fasting. Jesus also confronted the power of the religious leaders of his day. He stood against their narrow, exclusive, welcoming Samaritans, Gentiles, women, and sinners into his fellowship.

Though the Pharisees were popular religious leaders and teachers, Jesus confronted them with the ways in which they had fallen short of what God intended.

The religious leaders in the days of Jesus devoted themselves to a sincere protection of the law, both the written law and their oral traditions. The law expressed the will of God, and therefore everyone needed to treat it with great seriousness. Imagine how dangerous Jesus was in their view. He could say, “You have heard that it was said . . . but, I say to you.” The strong opposition Jesus received from religious leaders shows how they considered him an innovator. He suggested new concepts of God, when the old views had stood the test of time and had become the spiritual home for millions. The ideas of Jesus could not simply be added to what they already knew. His ideas demanded a readjustment of the whole system. Such realities meant that conflict between Jesus and the custodians of religious tradition became inevitable.

Hear these words of Jesus:

“I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!”⁴⁰

These words reveal the struggles Jesus faced in his life. His words and deeds outraged the religious leaders of his day. He kept his soul free from fear of what people could do to him. Without this commitment, he could not have continued his mission. The people of his day considered his teaching something new and contrary to what their religious leaders taught them. He had a disturbing presence among the people and among the religious leaders. Though he did not have any official training, he re-interpreted the law and the prophets in new and surprising

⁴⁰ Luke 12:4-5.

ways. Rather than honoring religious tradition, according to his contemporaries, he was an innovator of new religious ideas.

Yet, Jesus viewed himself as fulfilling, not destroying, the revelations of the God of Israel. His critique involved calling the people to re-discover the true meaning of their written traditions and a de-valuing of the oral tradition. He summed up the law as love toward God and people, consistent with at least one school of thought among the rabbis. He respected the truth that the prophets proclaimed, as in quoting Hosea 6:6 to show that mercy was more important than the ritual demands of the law. He quoted Isaiah 29:13 to show the hypocrisy of people who say one thing, while behaving the opposite. The originality of Jesus was rooted in an appreciation of the past. He drew from the spiritual tradition of Israel in order to offer new directions for a reformation of Judaism. If he had a revolutionary impact, it came not from valuing the past less, but from valuing it more. His contemporaries remembered the letter of the law and the prophets, but they forgot to partake of their spirit. This sensitivity of Jesus to his own time is a further witness to his desire to fulfill his mission with the spirit of peace. Yet, when he needed courage to stay true to his ideals, Jesus was not afraid to stand against the leaders of his day.

Do we live our lives with a sense of being average, doing what everyone else does and drifting along with the crowds? Alternatively, are we willing to live enough by our ideals that we clash with some of the unworthy habits of this age? Do we take for granted the values and practices of our society? Do we have the courage to put ourselves totally into the hands of God and be used anywhere as God wills, regardless of the cost?

If we achieve excellence in character, we must have the power and the courage to stand out against the prevailing customs of our time.

At the same time, the manner in which we abide by our values and ideals is also important. To live by our ideals with a kindly insistence that we follow what is best, and not simply what is average, is a powerful witness. Even if we lose friends and lose some respect within society. We need to respond without condescension, but rather with uncompromising good will.

9. The Friendship of Jesus

Consider the difficult combination in the character of Jesus that we have discussed. He had heroic and revolutionary fearlessness. He had a capacity for anger. Yet, he also had the capacity for deep friendly, tenderness. Great people are always gentle people. We have emphasized the first qualities because we too often portray Jesus as tender, soft, charming, gentle, meek, and full of love. Those qualities are part of the personality of Jesus. Now is the time to focus on the personal friendship Jesus extended to people. We have studied the extensive, worldwide aspects the mission of Jesus. We now look toward those intimate, personal relationships in which he revealed the peculiar beauty of his friendliness.

The teaching of Jesus focused upon the family. One social group considers each individual of boundless value, no matter how many individuals there are. That group is the true family. Note the following story about Jesus:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in

me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.⁴¹

Jesus carries this family idea to the whole human race. He views humanity as a family with one parent. Each individual is of infinite value. The methods of Jesus are those of the home. His ideal for all humanity is a family ideal. His dominant thought of God is neither as a King nor as a Judge, but as a Father. He couches his controlling thought of humanity in terms of brotherhood and sisterhood. He expressed genuine affection toward the children. We need to consider ourselves as part of such a human family. Are our lives a worthy response to the love of our divine parent? Are we living as though we are of infinite value in the sight of God? Are we living as though all other persons of the same infinite value? We need to think of persons who are neglected, ostracized, and without friends. We need to treat such people as though they were of infinite value to us.

In only one social group, a true family, do relationships become indissoluble. A bad son is still a son. An unfaithful brother is still a brother. Jesus applied this principle to all life. The Pharisees denied this connection with all humanity, including gentiles and sinners. What a marvelous change could happen in humanity if everyone recognized this family bond with other human beings. This connection deepens the motive for missions and social service. Think of the change that might come if our personal attitude toward particular people would adopt this perspective. The elder son who stayed home tried to

⁴¹ Matthew 18:1-6.

disown his younger brother. The father rejected the notion. Let us see such an attitude in a well-known parable of Jesus:

Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe--the best one--and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate. "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"⁴²

This attitude Jesus carries out to all humanity and teaches alike the exhaustless grace of God for humanity. When we seek in a single phrase to summarize the

⁴² Luke 15:11-32.

ideal of Jesus for humanity, there is none better than to call it “the creation of a world family.” One Father, all people are brothers and sisters, and every relationship tuned to the spiritual meaning of that family bond. Out of what tenderness of heart, as well as greatness of faith and hope, did these terms, methods, and ideals of Jesus spring.

The apostle Paul penned some words that we praise more often than we practice. As we read them, we may see that this description of love is a portrait of Jesus.

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

10. The Scale of Values of Jesus

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.⁴³

We often desire two mutually exclusive things. We want evil pleasures, and we want a clear conscience. We want to indulge ourselves, and we want good health. We want to be lazy, and we want to be a success. We want a life focused upon this world, and we want a consciousness of God. We try to possess two things that exclude each other. We always fail. We must choose one or the other. The central lesson of life is that we must choose. We cannot choose to be an easy-going drifter, and at the same time to be a success in a career. Between a covetous, self-indulging, superficial worldliness and a devout, unselfish service of God and the cause of the kingdom of God, there can be no satisfactory compromise. We cannot do both. The treasure of our hearts will be in one place or the other. We must choose.

Only one thing can be first in our scale of values. Of course, there are different ranges and grades of interest in our lives. We have need for physical welfare, recreation, pleasure, relationships, etc. Only one thing can be first. "But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."⁴⁴ This life of devotion to the kingdom of God does not exclude the good things of this life. Devotion to the kingdom of God glorifies health, comfort, recreation, money, family

⁴³ Matthew 6:19-24.

⁴⁴ Matthew 6:33.

love, etc. However, even when it costs, we must place the kingdom of God first in our lives.

We often preoccupy ourselves with lesser things. We crowd out the greater things. The time and energy we have in life are limited. If we focus upon little things, we lose the great things. Do we emphasize those things in life that are excellent? Many of the most tragic failures in life is excessive busyness, not necessarily with unworthy things, but with less worthy things. In such times, our relationship with God and the spiritual quality of life is choked out of us. Life is like a painting. We can tell the great artists by what they leave out, as well as by what they include. The artist does not crowd everything into the picture. The artist chooses the central and dominant features to emphasize. Are we living our lives with a true sense of proportion? We do not have time or strength for everything. Are we willing to put first things first? In particular, we need to apply this truth to the cultural values of materialism, wealth, pleasure, self-indulgence, immediate satisfaction of our needs, conformity to the values of this society. We need to compare such values to those of Jesus, who would form us into persons after his own heart. In particular, we need to take our wealth, and make it serve the greater cause of the kingdom of God. Society tempts us to place the acquiring of personal wealth as first in our lives. The only way to conquer this value of society is to make our wealth serve the greater cause of the kingdom. Jesus knew that the spiritual lives of people were far greater than the comforts of this life. He sacrificed money, comfort, pleasure, his own earthly life, in order to bring salvation. He surrendered everything, he paid the ultimate sacrifice, if it would help to save people. For Jesus, spiritual life is holy ground.

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half

dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"⁴⁵

What did the priest and Levite do that stirred the disapproval of Jesus? They did nothing.

That was the sole fault with them. They endeavored to be neutral when a specific situation presented itself where they needed to choose sides. Neutrality always fails in the critical choices of life. Many authors have rightly coupled the priest and Levite with the robbers. They supported what was wrong in the world. A great war is on between good and evil, between Christ and anti-Christ. The battlefield is within us and around us. Our thoughts and deeds inevitably take up sides. Have we settled the matter once for all as to which side we will be on? Have we deliberately put God and the cause of the kingdom first?

The church teaches that belief in the Lord Jesus is the means of entrance into the Christian life. We live in a time when people profess an interest in Jesus, without the depth of experience that Christians have shared through the centuries. People appreciate Jesus. Many people today miss the central effect Jesus had upon his followers. He demanded a revolution in their standards of value. He took things commonly put first and subordinated them. He took things long neglected and counted them of great worth. He found people anxiously consuming all their energies in accumulating the externals of life. He tried to re-focus their lives upon what is more valuable. When people accepted

⁴⁵ Luke 10:30-37.

this revolution of values, we find their lives changed in dramatic ways. What do we consider of such great worth that we are willing to subordinate everything to it? The supreme value of Jesus was personality. He died for human beings because he believed that people were worth dying for.

The great enemy Jesus faced was wealth.

The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God." He said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you-
-you of little faith!⁴⁶

For Jesus, true riches were not money but character. No sacrifice could be too great, if it was necessary to maintain the supremacy of the spirit and to achieve the subordination of all secondary things.

Side by side with this emphasis upon personality is a focus upon the kingdom of God. He died for the kingdom because he thought that the kingdom was worth dying for.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of

⁴⁶ Luke 12:16-30.

fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.⁴⁷

The greed of people for wealth often kept them from the kingdom. In the end, one of his disciples betrayed him for money.

Jesus made personality and the kingdom his supreme values of his life. He sacrificed everything for them.

⁴⁷ Matthew 13:44-46.

11. The Spirit of Jesus

The deepest levels of the character of Jesus are not touched when we take the virtues one by one and study them. Jesus had an intimate communion with God that radiated through everything he did. The more intimate our sense of communion with God, the more meekness and lowliness of heart will result. The real test of humility comes when we make a great success. We are tempted to forget that God has entrusted this power to us. How will we respond to this temptation? This poem summarizes the attitude we need to have:

And every virtue we possess,
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness
Are His alone.

Hear this parable of Jesus:

When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place,' and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."⁴⁸

We instinctively approve the spirit of humility. People who feel their humility will do the best work. Such people are teachable and aspiring. They compare themselves with the loftiest ideals and know they have not attained their highest and best. The power they have to do their best work is not created by them, but rather is given to them. All the best in us is God in us. Great persons always have this sense of dependence on God. John

⁴⁸ Luke 14:7-11.

describes the spirit of Jesus when Jesus says: “I can do nothing on my own.”⁴⁹ Paul said: “For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.”⁵⁰

The spirit of Jesus also comes through in the place of prayer in his life. We may wonder why we should pray. After all, God already knows our needs. However, the true issue of prayer is for us to become more open to what God wants to give us. Prayer is the best receptive work we can do as we receive into our hearts God’s desires for us. A teacher cannot do much for a student who does not study, but can do much with the student whom cooperates. God can do in and through people who pray what God cannot do in and through people who do not pray. Prayer is one form of cooperation with God, by which we give God the opportunity of doing in us what God has wanted to do. Prayer was the spontaneous expression of his fellowship with God. His power was not in him, but through him. We may compare the self-sufficiency of our own lives with the dependence that Jesus shows toward his God. Let us learn from these passages of scripture:

Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God.⁵¹

That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.⁵²

Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray.⁵³

⁴⁹ John 5:30.

⁵⁰ Philippians 1:21.

⁵¹ Luke 6:12.

⁵² Mark 1:32-35.

⁵³ Mark 6:45-46.

Prayer is not primarily asking God to do special things for us. Prayer is never expecting God to alter plans to suit our whim. Prayer at its deepest must always be the way that we open the way for God to do God's will. We desire to enter God's purpose, so that the arm that moves the world can move us. If there were ever a time when Jesus might have desired God to change, it would have been at Gethsemane. However, learn from these words of Mark:

They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want."⁵⁴

We feel the virtues of life more easily than we can define them. They are not details of duty. They are a spiritual radiance that illumines all special deeds and puts quality into them. What wins the world to Jesus is not just what he did. Who he was that shines through all he did that wins the world to him. The value of any deed lies in the quality of the one who does it. The great need of the world is for spiritual quality in people, for depth and altitude of soul, for wealth of inward life, out of which special deeds shall come like a brook from the mountains, with power. This is the secret of the influence of Jesus. The sources lie far back in the life of prayer and fellowship with God that Jesus enjoyed. Do we neglect this inward spring of spiritual wealth and strength?

⁵⁴ Mark 14:32-36.

12. The Measure of the Stature of the Fullness of Christ

We will comment upon the impression that Jesus made upon very different kinds of people.

Jesus made an impression upon the Roman centurion in Luke 7:6-9. Here was a career military person who responded positively to the healing power of Jesus.

Jesus made an impression upon the children in Mark 10:13-16. This suggests a childlike quality within Jesus to which the children responded. In church tradition, his birthday became a festival for children. The heightened role and place of children in society has its source in Jesus. Consider the qualities in him that must have made children love him. We need to reflect upon the ways in which Jesus appeals to us through our childlike qualities of sincerity, simplicity, humility, and gentleness.

Note the calling of the disciples, Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Levi (Matthew) in Luke 5:27-32, and Matthew 4:18-22. They were prosperous in their businesses. We need to consider the qualities in Jesus that made it possible for him to present his mission to them in such a way that they counted it a privilege to devote their lives to him and to his work. He persuaded them to harness their ability and money into the work of the kingdom. A Christianity that does not impel us to save our fellow human beings has little that is in the spirit of Christ. Have you let Jesus take possession of our practical ability?

Note the appeal of Jesus to women. The proverbial differences between men and women do not seem to matter. Jesus appealed to both. See Luke 8:1-3, 10:38-42, Matthew 27:55-56.

In Luke 7:40-48, we have a sinful woman who came to Jesus. The good women who typically followed him despised her. What was it in Jesus that brought her,

ashamed, penitent, aspiring, grateful, to his feet? The goodness of Jesus is outgoing, sacrificial, saving goodness that encouraged the outcast with a new hope and made prodigals believe anew in spiritual possibilities for their own lives. The number of men and women who have been drawn by Jesus into a new life, that before had seemed beyond their reach! Consider his appeal to us in any sin that has marred our lives and perhaps discouraged us. We cannot imagine Jesus rejecting anyone whom was truly repentant.

We cannot forget that Jesus also caused opposition. Think of the scribes and Pharisees, think of Judas, and one remembers that the impact Jesus had upon people was not always positive. The gospels record many charges of the enemies of Jesus, as well as the positive remarks of those who followed him.

In these meditations, we have noticed that Jesus held together opposing virtues. Jesus had self-confidence in his cause. Yet, he also had humility. He held to high moral standards. Yet, at the most faint desire for repentance, he responded with openness. He knew sorrow and joy. He invested himself in the cause of the kingdom of God, while at the same time caring for individuals. He possessed great gentleness, while at the same time great anger. Jesus broke down artificial barriers of race and class, while at the same time maintaining high standards of righteousness. The character of Jesus has gathered up and included the various divisions of human life.

No two ideals are more difficult to hold in balance than self-culture and self-denial. Jesus recognized the necessity of both. Jesus shows the virtues of culture, refinement, and self-realization. At the same time, he shows the virtues of self-abnegation, self-effacement, and self-sacrifice. He lived a balanced life, not for himself,

but for the sake of others. He knew his followers, and the world, needed him at his best. That meant self-realization and service were two sides of the same coin. Jesus overcame temptation, steadied himself in prayer, and refreshed his soul from every spiritual reservoir within his reach. He did this, not for his own sake, but for the sake of those who followed him. He sought a rich spiritual life for the sake of others. When he felt most close to God, he knew he needed to lose himself in service to others. Therefore, self-realization and self-denial were two aspects of the same attitude toward humanity. He held them in a perfect unity.

The devotion of Jesus to the cause of the kingdom is difficult to hold together with patience and freedom from anxiety. We can easily be patient with the apparent failure of a cause over which we have little investment. However, when we invest everything into a cause, patience is much harder to achieve when the road becomes hard; failure becomes a distinct possibility. He expected passionate devotion to the cause of the kingdom. For this truth, see Luke 9:59-62, 14:26. Yet, he had great patience with the process of making that kingdom a reality. See Mark 4:28-29, Matthew 13:31-32. He did not become discouraged when he confronted opposition, as in Matthew 5:12-14. He was confident that God would bring the victory.

We ought not to imitate Jesus in the strictest sense of that term. However, people in every generation and culture have discovered an attraction to this man from Nazareth. He had trust in God, he was loyal to the kingdom of God, he had love for individuals, he had boundless hope, and the Spirit of God pervaded everything he did and said. Jesus became the unsurpassable ideal for many. Every generation, every culture can find something in Jesus that attracts them to him.

“You call me Teacher and Lord--and you are right, for that is what I am.”⁵⁵ I trust that is what Jesus has been for us as we have read these meditations upon the human life of the man, Jesus of Nazareth.

⁵⁵ John 13:13.