



# NEW TESTAMENT TIMES

The World of Jesus



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# Welcome to the World of Jesus

In the fullness of time God sent forth his son .... (Gal. 4:4). Two thousand years ago the infinite, timeless creator of all stepped out of an eternal dimension into an economy of time. The world he found when he entered was no random accident or surprise to God. When Immanuel visited this earthly stage it was already heavily populated with a cast of characters that fully represented the heart and nature of man. God incarnate would rub shoulders with people very much like those who live around us today. When Jesus walked the roads of Palestine he walked where we walk. The people he encountered are in many ways similar to those we encounter every day. He met with pride and prejudice. He bumped up against the pompous and the pious and he to deal with those who had and abused power. There was poverty and prosperity, just as we observe around us today. There was politics and polemics and problems, plenty of problems.

Studying the world of Jesus and observing the challenges he endured and the personalities he encountered should help us appreciate the practicality of Christianity as it was “road tested” in a very real world, and it should challenge us to follow the Master in practice as well as faith. There were the ultra-orthodox or fundamentalists which were just as difficult to get along with in his day as in ours. There were the mystics who seemed to be always looking for “something more.” The liberals, politicals, patriots, and pious. Who were these people? How did Jesus respond to them and how can we minister to them when they cross our path? A study of the world of Jesus should help us to help others.

Someone has said that life is ten percent of what happens to us and ninety percent of how we respond to what happens. Walk through the world of Jesus and marvel at how he reacts and then seek to understand your own world today. Seek to understand the personalities and forces that swirl around you and pray for wisdom and grace to touch your own world for God and turn man’s heart to heaven.

Historically, the fullness of time was when three great cultures became aligned in the constellation of life. One was political, one moral, and one intellectual. Like an eclipse in the heavens the planets lined up to create a brief but impressive phenomenon. As when the moon the earth and the sun become aligned and throw the world into darkness, so two thousand years ago three great societies fell in line and announced a dawn. Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

What did the world of Jesus look like? That world was politically Roman, culturally Greek, socially pagan, religiously Graeco-Oriental. It was the fullness of time.

Three great cultures and currents of history met at the manger in Bethlehem. In the fullness of time the influence of three great societies lined up like three great planets in the solar system. The Oriental, the Greek, and the Roman worlds crossed paths in Palestine. The Jewish ideal was light. The Greek ideal was knowledge and the Roman ideal was glory (as epitomized in the Roman triumph). All this and more is found in Christ. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” 2Cor. 4:6.

The characters encountered by Jesus are very much with us today. We find them in the marketplace and in our churches. Some of them are difficult to deal with. Some seem to be forever blocking our path. Sometimes in them we see ourselves. We would do well to be as patient with our detractors and enemies as Jesus was with his. We would do well to take care around sinful human nature for that nature is just as sinful be it wielding a sword or clutching a Bible. A human nature is just as fallen and corrupt whether it is observed in others or found in ourselves. Are we at times Pharisaical? Can we be given to extremes? Are we at times in danger of dismissing the possibility of the

supernatural? Have we sometimes felt more passion listening to the “Star Spangled Banner” than in hearing the “Old Rugged Cross?” This brief look at the world of Jesus is perhaps a look at ourselves.

Christ came into the world to die on the cross for our sins and to make a way for us into his Father’s house and what he called the Kingdom. Do you remember a time when you opened up your heart and welcomed him into your world?

# The Land

The world of Jesus was not a very large world, but never was there a larger life than his. Jesus never traveled far, but no one ever traveled farther than he. He came from heaven to walk where we walk. And when he came, sinful human nature showed little kindness to him. "He came unto his own and his own received him not." Jesus, who taught that life did not consist of an abundance of things also taught, by example, that a full and overflowing life is not determined by the number of years we live, nor by the number of miles we travel. Happiness is as close or as far as God. Real happiness is being in harmony with heaven.

Millions of people scurry about searching the globe for adventure and excitement while never fully understanding where they are going or why they are here. Our life and the New Testament cannot be understood without understanding where we are and how we got here. The New Testament cannot be understood without appreciating something about the little special plot of earth where Jesus was born, where he lived, and where he died.

We call it Palestine. This is a corruption of the Roman name for Philistia which originally referred to the southern portion of what is today called Israel. The Jews had no name for where they lived. They simply referred to it as "the land." This land was a gift from God to Abraham. The idea of losing, selling, or giving up "the land" was unthinkable. That heathens should trample on such a sacred soil was a painful indignity for these "chosen" people. Under Roman occupation, some grieved, some gained, and others ground their teeth awaiting any opportunity to overthrow and oust Caesar's legions.

This little piece of real estate was one hundred and seventy-five miles long, and one hundred and ten miles across in the north and seventy-five miles wide at the south. On this tiny parcel of soil God came to visit and to work out his wonderful plan of salvation for the whole world.

God could have chosen any time and any place to visit this planet. Had he come today, modern mass communications would have been at his disposal and he could have transmitted his message across the air waves and into every household. So, why did he not choose our more sophisticated time? Why come in such a primitive age? Could it be that God is not as interested in mass communication as much as in close encounters with individuals one at a time? Had he visited ancient Alexandria or another such center of scholarship and learning he would have had a high tide of worldly intellect from which to launch his crusade. Instead, God chose an insignificant backwater of Bethlehem, and an even more remote hamlet called Nazareth to begin his mission.

Bethlehem, just six miles south of Jerusalem, was the place of Christ's birth. It was one of the two most significant geographic locations in the history of humanity. Bethlehem, of course, was the place where Jesus Christ was born. All are familiar with the Christmas story of Mary and Joseph journeying to the City of David in order to register for the Roman tax. It was in this special place, that God entered our physical world as a new born baby. Why God chose Bethlehem is not clear. Micah predicted that as remarkable as it may sound, the House of Bread (Meaning of Bethlehem) would again give the world a king. This time it would not be the son of Jesse, but rather the Son of God. We can ponder and wonder over the little village and speculate about the spiritual significance of this particular longitude and latitude, only to lose our way. It is sufficient to not that God chose a small place, a quiet place, a remote place and his coming went unnoticed except for some shepherds and some magi who later followed his star.

Could it be that God is found most often in quiet places? Could it be that the Omnipresent One visits humble hearts that patiently wait for him? Could it be that God is more easily found in the solitude of a stable rather than in the culture and chaos of the metropolis? I think so. An id such is indeed the case, may every heart become a Bethlehem into which Christ is born, and may it be the beginning of the life of Immanuel, God with us.

The most significant spot in all the world is not the place of Christ's birth, but rather of his death. The exact spot is lost to us. We with many others believe Gordon's Calvary is indeed the place of the skull.

It is not without significance that geographically the history of Christ begins at the place of "bread" and ends at the place of the "skull." Men, thinking they have discovered the location have either erected a shrine over it, or put a fence around it, and in both instances capitalized from it. Again, finding the exact spot is unimportant, for as the angel said, "he is not here, for he is risen as he said."

Following the ministry of Jesus requires a familiarity with the terrain and topography of Palestine for it helps to explain the opportunities and the oppositions he encountered during his three year ministry.

There are three main arenas or theaters in which Jesus worked. First there was the Galilean ministry, second he ventured into Samaria and Syro-Phoenicia, and thirdly, there was his ministry in and around Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was at the heart of Israel. Bethlehem was located six miles to the south, two miles to the east was Bethany where Jesus found a welcome in the house of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Fifteen miles to the north on the well traveled road was the city of Jericho. Again it is clear that the world of Jesus, by our standards was a very small world.

Jerusalem was situated on two main hills and divided by three valleys: the Kidron, Hinnom, and the Tyropoeon. The Kidron valley is to the east of the temple mount and separates the city proper from the mount of Olives (John 18:1). The southern boundary of the city is marked by the broad Hinnom valley which in ancient times was where Children were (so it is said) sacrificed to the god Molech. It became the place where garbage would be discarded and burned. this smoldering garbage dump called Gehenna became synonymous with what Jesus called Hell. the Tyropoeon valley divided the city in two from the Damascus gate on the north, to the Pool of Siloam in the south east.

Originally a Canaanite city, Jerusalem was captured by David around 1000 BC. It became the capital of the Jewish nation and the site of Solomon's temple. Destroyed in 586 BC by Nebuchadnezzar, it was rebuilt by the remnant after the return from Exile. It became the stage upon which Jesus would stand and as the place of his death, burial, and resurrection, it is considered the world's most sacred city.

It was destroyed again in 70AD by the armies of Titus, and has just recently experienced its own "new birth" when in 1947 it became the official Jewish state.

After its destruction by Titus, a temple dedicated to Jupiter was erected in its place in 136. This period called the Roman period lasted until 326. Hadrian banned all Jews from the city, however there were times when they were permitted to briefly visit the temple mount to mourn and pray. The Byzantine period (326-638) was a period of Christian dominance initiated by the conversion of Constantine and the devotion of his mother Helena. Christians had control of the city throughout these years except for the brief reign and influence of Julian the Apostate (361-363). Julian granted permission to the Jews to rebuild the temple knowing that its destruction was a constant reminder that Jesus' prediction (Mk. 13:2) was considered proof of his claims and authority. Shortly after work began a fire broke out among the scaffolding and foundational supports injuring workers. The work stopped. The city was captured by the Muslim Caliph Omar Ibn el-Khattab in the year 638 and the Dome of the Rock was begun in 691. The city was held by Muslims until Crusaders re-took the city in 1099. This brief history of the destruction of the city should put into perspective the words of Jesus to the woman of Sychar about a day coming in which we "shall neither [worship] in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem..." (Jn. 4:21). Jesus went on to say that "God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

The destruction of Jerusalem was thorough and complete. The possession of the remains changed hands many times. Some buildings were never rebuilt, others were cannibalized to make new ones or new walls. One generation built on top of the ruins of another making it near to impossible to reconstruct with absolute certainty the physical world of Jesus.

Jerusalem has become a city of shrines. Pilgrims have erected monuments and memorials everywhere attempting to mark the spot of this and that particular event. Woe to us if we attempt to capture the Omnipresent One and attach some significance to stones. God defies our attempts at containment, be in a tabernacle or in a temple.

#### The Galilee

Galilee was a region west of the sea that bears its name. Originally given to the tribe of Naphtali (Josh. 20:7), this area which they were not able to conquer, became known as “Galilee of the Gentiles.” In later years it was politically absorbed by decree of a Jewish king by (by 130BC) and all non Jews were driven out of the region except those willing to submit to the rite of circumcision. Jewish families were given tracts of land, cities and settlements sprang up in the land of the gentiles (goyim). While Judea was stark and sterile, Galilee was lush and green. Because it was separated from Judea by a spiritually corrupt Samaria, it was not as sectarian and religiously rigid as those Israelites who lived close to the hub of Jerusalem. Jesus was able to begin his ministry and operate without immediate opposition, scrutiny and interference in their province.

The sea of Galilee is twelve miles long and six miles wide at its broadest point. Fed by the Jordan river which itself is fed by springs and run-off from Mt. Hermon, it rests six hundred and eighty-two feet below sea level. For this reason violent changes in weather were not uncommon. The Jordan continues south and ends in the Dead Sea.

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Nazareth, located on the southern edge of the region was the boyhood home of the Lord Jesus. From it could be seen the plain of Esdraelon to the south and Mt. Carmel to the west, jutting out into the Mediterranean. On the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee was Capernaum which was connected to the port of Via Maris by a Roman road. Five miles from Capernaum was the little town of Cana where Jesus performed his first miracle.

Capernaum was called “his city” (Mt. 9:1) and became the base of operations for the early ministry of Jesus. It was a city of considerable size and importance having a tax collector and a centurian. It was here that Jesus healed the centurian’s servant and a man “borne by four” was lowered through a

hole in a roof in order to be healed. Eventually Jesus would condemn this city for its lack of faith and predict its demise (Matt. 11:23-24). On the western shore of Galilee was the city of Tiberias, built by Herod Antipas as his capital, always considered a polluted and unclean place since it was built on an ancient cemetery. Jesus never visited this city.

Along the Mediterranean coast were two significant sea ports. Caesarea, about sixty miles north west of Jerusalem, and Joppa which was approximately forty miles west of Jerusalem. Caesarea was the headquarters of Pontius Pilate and despised by the Jews. Joppa was a vibrant Jewish center that played an important role in the growth of the early church.

There were three main highways that fed the life of commerce. One lead from Jerusalem to Capernaum along the eastern side of the Jordan until just south of Galilee it crossed the Jordan avoiding the cursed Samaria. The second followed the central mountain ridge on the western side and passed through Shechem on its way to Capernaum. The third important artery connected Damascus with the Mediterranean and was known as the via Maris. It was along this road that Roman tax collectors exacted payment for Caesar. It was somewhere along this road that Jesus found Levi sitting in the seat of customs collecting revenue for Rome and a substantial income for himself.

The land was called the promised land. God always keeps his promises. After a difficult start and a stumble in faith Joshua finally led the Children into the land. The land had to be conquered. The Israelites had to take possession. God has given us a new life outside of the bondage of Egypt. In what way does our salvation parallel the promised land as Joshua found his upon first crossing the Jordan? (Phil. 2:12; Josh 1:1-9,24:13ff).

Examine what God has given you. Study your strengths and weaknesses (do you know what they are?). Is there an unclaimed area of promise or potential that is still awaiting your dominion? Are there enemy strongholds that you have not marched against and allowed God to drive out of your life? Has doubt, fear or procrastination kept you from crossing the Jordan still? Is there a desert of disappointment yet to blossom as a rose? Is there a dead sea that God wants to break open? Have you found the source and headwaters of your Jordan? Those snow capped high places and those fountains that keep your spirit ever green? What or where are they in your life?

Do you visit the bustling interchanges of life like Jerusalem and still have time to retreat to the quiet places? Take an emotional and spiritual survey of your life? Where are you today what does the land look like today? Consider the promises and the potential. Write in your private spiritual journal 1. One area that God has given you victory over. Thank and praise him. 2. Think of one area in your life that has yet to be conquered. Write a brief prayer asking God to help in this area as you begin to act and take possession. 3. Is there a bottle neck (a dead sea) in a dream, a relationship, or a situation that you want to see break fourth and be a blessing to others? Act on it today, reach out and give. Do you visit Bethlehem often and thank God for coming into your World? Do you visit Jerusalem, visit the temple mount as if to recognize the law and holiness of God and then step outside the camp in order to bow at the foot of Calvary and remember grace? Tell someone about God's grace today? Tell someone who is still in bondage in Egypt about the Lord Jesus and the promised land.

God owns the world and everything that is in it. We are merely stewards to whom goods have been entrusted (Matthew 21:33ff and 25:14ff). God gave Adam some land to keep. He did not keep it long. God gave Israel a land to conquer. Not only did they fail to take full possession of it, they failed to keep what they had. We too are tenants. We are stewards of our own little kingdom, our lives. This spiritual kingdom has only one rightful king- that is Jesus. Each Christian life is surrounded by many powerful and hostile forces that press against its borders. Only when we are spiritually strong within may we repel attacks from without. Only when understand our life to be a precious stewardship can we truly understand and enjoy our birthright.

## The Ultra Religious Right 2

Some people see only black and white. For them the world is simple. It is divided, like the moon into a light and a dark side. And as there is no rotation or turning of our lunar planet, these people are fixed and set in their dogma. Every nation and religion has such individuals who refuse to yield a single inch of ground and passionately resist any suggestion that this rigidity is a state of death, not life. The rigor mortis of the moon is hidden to us as we watch her from a distance, but coming close to this satellite reveals that it is a lifeless corpse. Such were the Pharisees. Jesus spoke of them as “whitened sepulchers filled with dead man’s bones.”

Such people have many “proof texts” that prove their world is flat and simple. “Because thou art neither hot nor cold, I will spew you out of my mouth.” Are not these words of Jesus to the church at Laodicea a warning and a proof that we must not temper or tamper with dogma or truth? If they err, are they not at least erring in the right direction? The beliefs of extremists are not hot, they are scalding. Whoever plays with their matches will one day be burned. Because their world has no room for compromise it is littered with the corpses of those who stood in their way.

Christian doctrine is non-negotiable. Truth, like the earth, did not evolve, but was born in a single moment with a word from God. It is true that light has no communion with darkness (1Cor. 7) and God still says “woe to him who calls evil good and good evil” (Isa 5:20). The Pharisee fully believed he had and held the truth (as does the Muslim, the Jehovah Witness, militant fundamentalist, and the Mormon) but they do not. In order for truth to enter a man’s heart, it must first break that heart. It is obvious to anyone who has ever felt the cold steel of extremism pierce their soul that, the one who flails such a sword fails to have a heart at all, and falls very short of the glory of the one who wept over Jerusalem before he was led to the cross by these self appointed defenders of truth. Peter, “put up your sword” said Jesus, for “he who lives by the sword dies by the sword.”

Truth needs no defense, only declaration. Bury it, and on the third day it will rise again. The early church was not called to defend the truth, but to die for it. The Pharisees threw the stones that killed Stephen. Stephen threw no stone, instead he offered up prayers for those who walked in darkness yet imagined they were the light.

This group, or sect was the most influential and numerous of all the religious parties. They were the Ultra-right wing party. They considered themselves to be champions of tradition and defenders of the faith. They placed an emphasis on tithing and ceremonial purity. The name Pharisee means “Separatist.” Their chief aim was to prevent contagion from contact with all that was not religiously clean (what we would call Kosher today). They had a deep dislike for all collaborators, compromisers, and cosmopolitan people whom they considered contaminated. They had a particular hatred for “publicans” and “sinners” (Lk. 15:1-2).

We would call them “legalists” today. They were strict and rigid in their interpretation of the law with regard to its letter. They failed, however, in the matter of the law’s spirit. Their beliefs were not unlike any other “ism” made by man. Whenever a person fails to have a strong inner strength or peace upon which their soul (or self) can rest they often resort to constructing an outer wall of dogmatic and brittle standards to protect their identity. Usually that identity is found in a group, and that group as defined by some “ism.”

Some creatures have no inner skeletal system, and thus live in a shell, like a crab, or lobster, or other crustacean which has its skeleton on the outside. The Pharisee, or legalist protects himself by erecting a system of rules and regulations to protect himself from the world.

Jesus received the greatest opposition from these difficult people. They found their identity in their rules, regulations, and rituals. They robbed life of any freedom and spontaneity. In an attempt to

avoid violating God's commandments, they constructed an elaborate system of religious dykes and levies called traditions. This was all to hold back the sea of ungodliness they saw around them.

If the Saducees (another rival religious party) leaned toward belief in a unhindered "free-will" of man, the Pharisees believed in God's complete sovereignty. They believed in "fate," although they held man accountable for his actions.

To their credit, the Pharisees believed in the realm of the spirit and spiritualism. They believed in an after life (heaven and hell), angels, and they believed in miracles. They believed in the resurrection. Paul was a devout Pharisee when he encountered the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus. Paul also triggered a dispute with the Saducees about the resurrection when he was arrested in Jerusalem after his third missionary Journey.

Pharisees were traditionalists. They were ultra conservatives. They defended the "oral tradition" which they called a "hedge about the law."

Pharisees were simple and plain people. They shunned any worldly apparel, ornamentation, and worldly pleasures. Were he living in our day, a Pharisee would never attend or allow a movie in the church. The closest thing to a Pharisee today in the Protestant world would be a fundamentalist, and three hundred years ago, a dour Puritan. In Jewish society the modern day Hasidim seen dressed in black (worn in mourning for un-practicing Jews) can still be seen separated into tightly knit communities in many large cities. These are the true descendants to the Pharisees.

Jesus saw people as individuals, not groups. He came to seek and to save those who were lost. Pharisees were lost, but did not know it. In order for the message of Jesus to penetrate the armor-like shell of their religious pride he spoke some harsh words to all who would seek security within this group. In Matthew 23 Jesus delivered a scathing condemnation of the awful "ism" Pharisaism. It was the outward show of pretended piety that Jesus found so distasteful. The Pharisees considered themselves to be at the top of the religious strata and could only "look down" on others. It was the pride that God hated the most for it is the father of many churlish children.

These took Moses as what would almost amount to be a patron saint (Matt. 23:2). They inherited a legacy that was sacred, but the letter of the law without the spirit can only kill. They did not practice what they preached (v.3). This made a mockery and a sham out of something holy and good. To preach the law without the life example amounted to a Judas kiss. Jesus, therefore did not condemn their teaching, but warned people about their poor example, and evil spirit. They added so much to the religious life of the Jew that it was impossible to draw close to God. These teachers of the law made serving God a heavy burden (v.4). They carried their belief like an oppressive weight that robbed them of joy, and liberty. Jesus and his disciples traveled light. They carried none of those things that crushed life or built walls between themselves and people. Jesus was found among the people. Because he laughed at their tables the Pharisees called him a "wine-bibber."

These Pharisees drew attention to themselves rather than to God (v.5). They considered themselves religious champions or the equivalent to what we see as "black belts" in the martial arts, and were held in awe by ordinary Jews. They enjoyed prestige and titles that came with such a life (vs. 6-7).

The problem with their pretensions and pre-occupation with minor things became an obstruction and obstacle to those who would find, know, and truly worship God. They had applied so many layers of paint to the wood that the real was hidden by the artificial. Jesus came to remove the paint of man made traditions that covered the true beauty of knowing God.

It was the Pharisees who dogged Jesus' every step and questioned every good work. They did not comprehend his compassion, but rather asked "why do you eat with sinners?" (Mt. 9:10). They saw his free spirit and simple trust and said "thy disciples do that which is not lawful on the Sabbath." (Mt. 12:2). They witnessed mighty power and the healing of the sick and they reproached him by saying, "This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of devils." (Mt. 12:24).

The problem of the Pharisees was one of envy and of pride (Mt. 27:18). It is sad that their spirit still thrives today. It is sadder still that these “blind leaders of the blind” so hinder and obstruct the simple and sincere while dressing in religious robes that cover cold and blackened hearts, they still hate what they cannot comprehend.

As a group, they are obstructionists who neither go in themselves nor allow others to enter (v.13). They were gate keepers who sold tickets when God declared that entrance into his kingdom was free.

Their spirit can still be found in many legalistic religious sects. Not all, but many are insincere and pretentious (14). They are proselyters who seek followers of their cause and party more than true worshippers of God. Their methods are devious (16), their spirit petty (23), and their actions calculated, their religion cosmetic and their faith all too shallow (25). Dishonesty (27,28), was employed when it was thought to accomplish a greater good. However they are deceived (31,32), their doctrine is deadly (33), their influence destructive (34), and their future damned (33,36).

Beware the Pharisee. He may carry a large bible and wear a three piece suit. He may sing Amazing Grace but he is seldom gracious. Give him a wide berth and be prepared for his canon fire. Sinking enemy ships seems as important to him as saving souls.

While born of good intentions fundamentalism fails to honestly represent the message of the God's kingdom. Fundamentalism was a rush to defend the barricades and keep an attacking modernism at bay. The theory of evolution seemed to threaten every belief and institution of man. Fundamentalism's goal was to underscore the non-negotiable of the Christian faith. In that, as with the origination of the Pharisees during the revolt of the Maccabees, its birth was noble. Yet somewhere along the road it lost its way. It soon turned its guns on Christian brothers who failed to live by man made standards and traditions. It soon confused outward conformity with conversion and majored on minor things. It censured other servants and forgot the very grace that bestowed mercy upon them. It began to measure saints by capricious standards forgetting the admonition of Paul who warned against comparing our selves with ourselves. Fashion, hair length, the right Bible version became their Shibboleth.

It would do us well to remember that Pharisaism was a political movement within Judaism. It fought for control of government within the Jewish community. It added to the word of God the words of men which they called oral tradition. It was not their orthodoxy but their hypocrisy that was offensive. It was their pride and their arrogance exasperates us. But what grieves us most of all is their ugliness and lack of grace. If there is any sign or signature that betrays the evil spirit that masquerades as the only true and faithful remnant of the Church (which fundamentalism purports itself to be) it is its unkindness. Only God knows the number of casualties this movement has left in its wake. To those so wounded or crushed by the tyranny of man's teaching or by attempts to live an impossible life imposed upon them by others, we can only hope they will realize that what they have rejected is but a caricature and not Christianity at all. It is our prayer that they will return to the Bible and find the true Christ, know, worship, and follow him.

It is not our desire to crucify the ultra-rightist as they crucified Christ, nor are we called to castigate those who are well intentioned and over zealous. I do not fear the extremist down the street or even next door. The Pharisee I fear the most is the one who would live in me. And make no mistake, as sure as there is still an old nature alive in us there is the danger that that nature will don the fringed and tasseled robes of self righteousness and hypocrisy while assuming the acrimonious attitude of the Pharisee.

Do not compare yourself to the heathen or to the hedonist, instead contemplate Christ and marvel at his mercy that he should save such a sinner as you and I. Bow your head in humility and wonder about his so great a love. He who stands at the foot of the cross with broken heart gazing at so lovely a one who took your place has no time to throw stones, or build gallows for any other no matter how vile.

“And when his disciples James and John saw this [the Samaritans rejected Christ], they said Lord wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?”

But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." (Lk. 9:54-56). Jesus' disciples should spend less time attempting to imitate Elijah and more time imitating Jesus. And regardless of our preference, of Kempis or Calvin, let us follow Christ.

Above all else, the Pharisee has a "God-complex." A person who believes he is called to go through life "correcting" everyone is a very annoying individual to be around. When someone presumes to judge and condemn everyone for their sins and shortcomings he is doing a very poor job of playing God. It is interesting that when these people "play God" they never go around blessing, loving, or helping people. Instead they are forever shooting lightning and sounding thunder. Run from such people. Beware their leaven.

We are called to "speak the truth in love." And should that truth be rejected and thrown back in your face, hold on to the love as much as to the truth to steady you. Ask yourself "of what spirit" am I? Beware the spirit of the Pharisee. It is this same ugly spirit I have too often recognized in myself. Beware of this. This spirit that feigns piety when it is merely flesh dressed up in its Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes. Beware of this. The spirit that fails to worship and bow before the Master because it is too busy measuring other mortals is the spirit of the Pharisee. May the Lord deliver us from such a spirit.