

# Following Christ Through The Gospels

## Part Six

As His ministry developed the Lord Jesus continued to respond to the needs of the multitudes who gathered around Him (cf. Mk. 3:20,21). He was concerned about the ‘ordinary’, ‘down and outs’ who were on the fringes of society. For example, He healed a man who was possessed of a demon that had rendered him blind and dumb (Mt. 12:22,23; Lk. 11:14). The crowds concluded that He was “the Son of David” [*i.e. the Messiah*, Mt. 12:23]. However, the Scribes and the Pharisees had their own opinion. They called Jesus “Beelzebub” (Mt. 12:24; Mk. 3:22; Lk. 11:15), - a none-too-endearing title! They considered Him to be working hand-in-hand with the devil in order to delude the people. Yet Jesus knew their thoughts and demonstrated how ridiculous their theory was. In fact, He declared that in coming to earth He has bound the ‘strong man’, i.e. the devil (Mk. 3:27). Furthermore, He spelled out to them the nature of the only sin for which no forgiveness can be given, - blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mt. 12:32; Mk. 3:29,30; Lk. 12:10). Somewhat silenced, the Scribes and Pharisees tried a new tactic, - “Master [*Teacher*], show us a sign” (Mt. 12:38). Jesus saw through their feeble attempts and He rebuked them for their unwillingness to believe. Also in the vicinity were His mother and brothers (Mt. 12:46).

As Jesus and the twelve disciples travelled through the countryside the crowds continued to follow Him. He boarded a ship and spoke to them as they stood on the shore. In Mt. 13 the main theme is the subject of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew; Mark and Luke refer to it as the Kingdom of God). Jesus told them many parables, including the parable of the sower. This parable He later explained to His disciples as the various responses that are given to the message of the Gospel.

Returning to Nazareth, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath, where He upset His listeners when He quoted from Is.61 and told them that the passage referred to Him. Sure they knew His father and mother, His brothers and sisters, ... and they knew Him as ‘the carpenter’ (Mt. 13:55,56; Mk. 6:3; Lk. 4:22)! Sadly, His ministry among them was rejected because of their unbelief.

Meanwhile, Herod Archelaus heard reports of Jesus’ ministry (Mt. 14:1). He feared that Jesus was John the Baptist risen from the dead. [*Herod had beheaded John, see Mk. 6:17ff.*]. Others thought that it was Elijah or one of the prophets. Indeed, Jesus was causing quite a stir! In the meantime, He continued to attract the crowds and “was moved with compassion toward them (Mt. 14:14). As the evening approached the disciples suggested to Him to send the crowds away, ...but Jesus gave instructions for them to be fed. With only five loaves and two fishes He miraculously fed the 5,000+ (Mt. 14:15ff.; Mk. 6:35ff.; Lk. 9:12ff.; Jn. 6:5ff.).

In order to avoid the crowd’s aspirations of making Him king (Jn. 6:15) He departed into the quietness of the mountain where He prayed (Mt. 14:22ff.). Meanwhile, as the disciples travelled on the Sea of Galilee a wind arose. It was about 3 a.m. (‘the fourth watch’, Mk. 6:48) and Jesus walked out upon the water to meet them. The disciples were so frightened, - they thought it was a ghost. Nevertheless, as they came to recognise Who it was Peter jumped over the side of the boat and began walking on the water towards Jesus. However, after a few moments Peter’s fear damaged his faith and he began to sink. Jesus stretched out and lifted him from the waters and brought him back to the boat. Immediately the wind ceased.

Then, landing on the north-west side of the Sea of Galilee (Gennesaret) Jesus was again surrounded by the crowds as they sought His healing powers. On this occasion He sought to explain to them the real reason for His coming (Jn. 6:29,35,37-40,44,47,48). However, as He taught them in the synagogue at Capernaum He managed to further annoy the Jews who failed to understand His reference to ‘the manna’ (Jn. 6:51). Even His disciples were finding it difficult (Jn. 6:60). Consequently, He informed them that some of their number were not genuine believers (Jn. 6:64), and many (Jn. 6:66), - not all (Jn. 6:70,71) - left His side.

How depressing it is in the work of the Lord when His disciples begin to consider the cost of following Christ too demanding! As some of them gathered into their little huddles they began to analyse Jesus and the direction He was taking. Some of them recognised He was on a collision course with the authorities and there was no way He could come off the better! These were His ‘fairweather followers’, who would have stuck by Him as long as things were going well. Other disciples were following Him to see what they could get *from* Him; they weren’t prepared to give *to* Him. ... And then Peter stood up and warmed the heart of God with the most beautiful response, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (Jn. 6:68,69).