

Looking at the Lord's Ways With
Women In The Bible

*- A Brief Study Guide
For Our Kingdom Seekers -*

Dedicated to our Kingdom Seeker Counselors
with deep appreciation
for giving so freely of your time and your talents
to lead the daughters of the congregation
to a closer walk with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter Y. De Jong
- 1997 -

Preface

When several weeks ago the Educational Committee of our church asked me to prepare a brief Study guide for our Calvinettes, I found myself somewhat at a loss. The Bible is so rich in telling the story of our salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ that appropriate materials can be found everywhere. No believer, whether young or old, is ever finished with reading and reflecting on it. And our children and young people as well as adults are privileged indeed. By God's grace we have homes, churches and schools all committed to proclaiming, in one way or another "our only comfort in life and in death."

Yet Calvinettes as well as Cadets have their unique contribution to make.

Here usually in very small groups there can be an "openness" in learning, sharing and spiritual growth which ought never be taken for granted. Here it should be easier, almost on a one-to-one level, to ask and find answers to important questions about "growing up by God's grace in all things into Jesus Christ." With this in mind, I decided to choose stories about the Lord's dealings in one way or another with a few women mentioned in the New Testament. The choice was not simple. On its pages I soon discovered forty, perhaps almost fifty about whose lives something could be said.

My prayer is that this material may be blessed by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, of whom the Savior said, "He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." What a privilege to know so rich a salvation.

- Peter Y De Jong
Minister of the Gospel

Table of Contents

1. *Mary, The Mother Of Our Lord* Page 5
Blessed Above All Other Women
2. *An Old Lady Who Became Young Again* Page 9
The Mother Of John The Baptizer
3. *What Kind Of Water Are You Drinking?*..... Page 13
The Samaritan Woman At The Well
4. *One Word From Jesus' Lips Gives Life*..... Page 17
The Raising Of The Widow's Son
5. *She Touched The Hem Of Jesus' Robe* Page 20
The Woman With A Deadly Disease
6. *The Girl Who Danced Her Way To Death*..... Page 23
The Daughter Of Herodias
7. *The Woman Who Kept On Praying*..... Page 27
The Canaanite Woman
8. *Ladies Who Did What Men Could Not Do* Page 31
The Women From Galilee

- 9. Jesus Came To Save Bad People.....Page 35**
The Sinner Who Anointed His Feet
- 10. She Lost A Silver Coin At Home.....Page 39**
Seeking And Finding
- 11. Mothers Doing The Best For Their Children.....Page 43**
Bringing Them To Jesus
- 12. A Fine Woman Who Did A Bad Deed.....Page 47**
The Wife Of Zebedee
- 13. Even Nice Families Have Their Problems.....Page 51**
Martha, Mary And Brother Lazarus
- 14. The Silly Bridesmaids Who Fell Asleep.....Page 55**
The Foolish Virgins
- 15. Go Quickly And Tell.....Page 59**
Women At The Empty Tomb
- 16. Growing Up Into Living For Jesus.....Page 63**
The Painful Road For Mary

A Few Suggestions For Our Galinettes

What a privilege for me, now 81 years old, to prepare a Study guide for your group. I simply could not turn that opportunity down, most of all because I love to teach about the Lord Jesus. And together you are asked to look up to Him and find life abundant.

As I sit down to plan the lesson schedule, my thoughts go back to a psalm which often we sing in our church services:

*"O happy land, whose sons in youth,
In sturdy strength and noble truth,
Like plants in vigor spring;
Whose daughters, fair, a queenly race,
Are like the cornerstones who grace
The palace of a King."*

And among those beautiful "daughters" the Lord has also numbered you.

Today most people simply pass Him by. Others question whether He really said and did what the Bible tells us. And, worst of all, not a few bad-mouth Him and the precious gift of salvation which He brings. You should guard yourselves against all such persons, especially now that you are entering a very important period in your life.

Don't listen to some of those loud-mouthed women. They are eager to turn the world, at least what is still good in it, upside down. They will tell you, "Women, all women really have a bad time of it today. It is and always has been a man's world and, unless you stand with us and fight, you soon will become their poor slave." Indeed some men, likely not a few, do mistreat women. They should be stopped and severely punished. But not all women are nice and kind and easy to live with either. You see, all of us need what only Jesus gives - the forgiveness of our sins and the power for a new life which soon learns to become a blessing to others.

And that is what this Study guide is all about.

Of course, there is more to Calvinettes than a Bible lesson. You will be engaging in projects and enjoying social events together. But when first Jesus speaks to you through the "good news," then those other activities will soon seem better and brighter than before.

In a small group everyone will have to take part. You should prepare by reading this material. You should be also ready to ask and answer questions. You can then share with your friends the blessings which Jesus gives you each day. And to help you in this, I suggest that you ask your mom or your dad to read with other family members present your Scripture lesson. Let them spend a few minutes explaining what that passage about Jesus should mean to everyone at the table. Around that holy Word we often come far closer to each other as families than at any other time. For where the Bible is taken as "the rule for faith and life," there Jesus is present to bless us above expectation.

Please remember that the Bible is, first of all, about our heavenly Father who in Christ Jesus works salvation. All the other people about whom it tells us are in second place. But from them, when our hearts are open, we can learn much. That is why they find their place in Holy Scripture. And they are very real people, indeed, often much like we are. About their lives and the times in which they lived - so different from ours - we do well to learn about the family, the social, the economic, the religious and the political situations in which the Jews found themselves in the days when our Lord walked and talked among men. These shed light on the story itself. Hence I added a few details after some lessons.

Also helpful may be the suggestions for discussion. But I am sure that either you or your counselors can suggest better ones. Only keep your questions and your comments connected with the Scripture lesson.

And, counselors, my prayers are for you and your responsibilities. Often these will not be easy to carry out. Some young ladies may vex you with their endless chattering. Others can let their thoughts wander far afield. And some are so shy and retiring that they hardly dare open their mouths to breath. All, however, have to learn to love each other for the sake of the Lord Jesus to whom they belong. And what you are doing for His sake is never done in vain. His promises never fail. May this be another fruitful year in His service.

A Brief Word To Our Counselors

Each time you meet with the girls and young ladies for a few hours, you engage in a high and holy calling. Yours is the privilege and responsibility of trying to make also the Bible story with its message as clear as crystal. And this is never easy.

What is found on the previous pages is written for all. Some of the younger ones will not be able to read the material well. That is why I suggest the help of the parents. And the older ones with you can, also by way of discussion, help them as well as themselves.

Other helps, many of them longer and more detailed, are easily available. Let me mention a few. There are Bible Story books a-plenty. And some of them are filled with colorful details. Others are briefer. You may want to consult one or more of the following. Abraham Kuyper, "Women of the New Testament." Frances Vander Velde, "She shall be called Woman," one of the best. Harold Ockenga, "Women Who Made Bible History" Edith Deen, "All of the Women of the Bible."

Some, indeed, are sound. Others have in them too much guess work. Let me cite only one example. In one book we are told that Elizabeth and her husband lived in "Hebron," a very important city in the life of the Jewish people. But the Bible does not say this. There is no evidence that "the hill country" requires that this means Hebron even though some priests may have had houses and lands near there. Far worse, of course, is when in several books which claim to tell the Bible story little or nothing at all is said about our Lord Jesus Christ and the great salvation which He has accomplished for lost and lonely sinners. But that is what the Bible is all about! From beginning to end - in the Old Testament by way of "shadows" and in the New Testament as "the days of fulfillment" - it is His Story. Unless He remains for us center-stage in everyone of the accounts, only an interesting tale about compassion and love is left. And that, my dear friends, is a sad and dangerous misuse of this sacred book.

May the Spirit of light and truth bless you as you engage in preparation, prayer and teaching also our young ladies to a closer walk with the blessed Savior.

Lesson 1
Mary The Mother Of Our Lord
Blessed Above All Other Women

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 1:26-39

No other woman who ever was born - no matter how beautiful or learned or important in the eyes of men - can be compared with Mary. She received a place in God's wonderful plan of salvation which no one else can take. She became the mother of the Savior of the world.

Here, right at the beginning, we must keep everything straight. Unless we believe what the Bible says here we cannot be saved. About Mary, then, we are to believe no less but also no more than what the Holy Spirit tells us about her. Today many preachers and church members do not believe that Mary was a pure virgin until our Lord was born. Some even say that her baby must have had a passing Roman soldier as his father. And that is "blasphemy," an unforgivable sin which against better knowledge despises the Holy Spirit's work. But there is also the danger of adding to what we read here. The Greek and Roman churches teach their members to offer a kind of worship to the virgin Mary which belongs only to the one true God. Nowhere do we read in the Bible that Mary, or any of the saints, can help us in our difficulties. But this is what our God does so willingly through the Lord Jesus. Often we Reformed people, however, take Mary's place in giving birth to the Savior too much for granted. And that is bad, too!

Let us study together what really happened to her.

We know that she was a young woman, perhaps about seventeen or eighteen. She was born in Nazareth, a small city quite far from Jerusalem and the temple. She also had God-fearing parents. Every Sabbath they took her along to the synagogue. Here she sat with the other girls and women on a

gallery. Only men and boys had a place on the main floor near the little "ark," the "scrolls" and the reader's desk. In fact, in one Jewish prayer they thanked God for not making them a woman! But even on that gallery, Mary could listen to the Scripture readings and the explanations. And these were blessed to her heart and life. We know this because of the "song" which she sang for joy six months later. We will hear about that the next time.

One day when also her work was done, she was sitting alone. Possibly she was thinking of some of the rich promises in the Old Testament about the Savior who would be born to take away sin and bring hope to the Jewish people. Like many godly people in that land with its problems and pains she may even have been praying that such a day would soon dawn.

Suddenly "the angel Gabriel" was sent to her from God. And what a wonderful message he brought. Read and think into it very carefully. It tells us what kind of a glorious Savior would be born. He calls her "blessed," that is, someone who has found special favor in the sight of the covenant God. She was specially chosen by God to become the mother of that very special child. And for this a "miracle" would be performed on her by the Holy Spirit. In fact, her child is to be "the Son of the Most High," one with the Father and the Spirit. Of course, we cannot understand all this about the one God in three persons and about the Savior who is both God and man at the same time. But without this kind of a Savior, however, there would be no forgiveness and no eternal life in fellowship with God.

Of course, she is very surprised. She first asks in her purity how this could be. And when the angel answers, she without any hesitation accepts the place which God assigned to her.

Do not ever take this lightly. The road she must walk will be very difficult. Who would ever believe her, if she tried to explain what Gabriel said? Even her parents, no matter how God-fearing, would raise questions. What would Joseph to

whom she was engaged think about all this? And how quickly would her girl friends and their mothers spread nasty stories about her if they heard the story? Gossip often spreads like wildfire in a small town. Remember too, among the Jews a woman giving birth to a child without being married could be stoned to death. Yet by grace she expresses her faith and says, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

The heavenly Father, who loved her so much, makes the days ahead a little easier for Mary in two ways. First, she is told by the angel of her cousin Elizabeth. And when Mary goes to visit her, her own heart is greatly comforted with peace. Nor does she have to explain what happened to her. Just think how hard that would be. So, some time later God sends Gabriel to Joseph. And like Mary, he believes, takes her under his loving care, and only after Jesus' birth becomes a full husband to her.

Here we can learn much about true "faith." It does not depend on how much we know. It is listening to and then fully accepting what the Lord calls us to do. It is the surrender of heart and life to Him in whose service is our peace for ever and ever.

A Few Comments

Nazareth: A small town. Have a map close by for these lessons to find each place mentioned. This helps a lot.

Betrothed: Engaged to be married. Among the Jews this bound the two partners as much as marriage because they had given their "troth" or pledge. Rarely was it broken.

Joseph: There is no reason to believe he was an old man looking for a young wife.

For Your Discussion

1. Discuss in detail "faith" as God's gift which changes our entire life. Carefully show the difference between it and a historical faith. Let your parents or counselor explain this.

2. Why do some people refuse to believe this miracle?

3. Why can't we be saved if we reject what the Bible teaches here?

4. How is "faith" working itself out in your life?

Lesson 2

An Old Lady Who Became Young Again

The Mother Of John The Baptist

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 1:24, 39-56

Ladies, when they grow older, often begin to worry about their looks.

They really would like to look and feel as they did when they were twenty or thirty. Nearly all of them use cosmetics to cover up a few blemishes and wrinkles. But others go much farther in this search. In the past a few of them took a daily bath in donkey's milk. Now it is becoming fashionable to spend thousands of dollars to get "a face-and-chin lift." But the fountain of youth is not found in a paint pot or under a surgeon's knife.

The Lord often shows us a far better way in His Word. One prophet speaks about running and never growing weary, about walking and never feeling faint. Something like this happened to the wife of a faithful priest not long before our Lord Jesus was born.

I am sure you already know something about her. She is Elizabeth, the wife of Zacharias.

About them we learn a lot in a few sentences. They were "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments of the Lord." The days in which they lived, however, were very difficult. For 400 years the Lord God had not sent prophets with more messages to the people of Israel. During this time they also suffered much from their enemies. One nation after another - the Babylonians, the Persians, the Syrians, the Greeks and at last the Romans - took away their freedom. No doubt this godly couple knew all about the promises of a Savior who would one day deliver the peoples from all their sorrows and sins. And that gave them hope! But across their lives lay

one dark and deep shadow. Never had a child been born to them. And especially for the lady Elizabeth this meant being "a reproach among men." Every married woman was expected to produce a son, in order "to build up the house" of her husband. Only so would his name then be held in honor for generations to come. But in the long years of living together none was born to her. And now she was too old, far too old to expect a baby.

How surprising, how wonderful are the Lord's ways often with his dear children.

He had a special blessing in store for Zacharias and Elizabeth. No longer would they die without having anyone to remember them with love. The angel Gabriel comes to Zacharias as he offers incense to the Lord. You should know this story with all its details well, also because he at first did not believe. So a very strange "sign" is given. How shocked Elizabeth must have been when, after a week's absence, he returns home and cannot say a single word. Only by writing can he tell her what happened. And what joy began, because she believed without question, to fill her heart and life. Once again she felt almost as young as when she was first married.

But the Lord God had an even greater store of happiness for her. She will be the first one, beside Mary, to know that the Savior of the world is soon, in her own days, to be born. Even before Jesus is born she becomes the first one to know and confess this. And this to a woman among those Jewish men who often looked on even their wives as somehow second-class citizens.

Not so the God of all grace and comfort. Soon after Gabriel leaves Mary, she prepares to visit her cousin. Even when riding a donkey, she will have to take a trip of two or three long days. And as soon as she arrives - Mary does not have to explain anything - Elizabeth prophesies that what Gabriel said will surely come to pass. Here she feels both humbled and honored. Listen to what she says, "And why is this

granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" She greets the Savior many long months before He was born. She confesses Him as the Lord of her life. How thrilled she must have been, also because that son of hers would "prepare the way before the Lord Jesus."

These two ladies, perhaps at times with Zacharias present, must have spoken even deep into the evening about all these wonderful things to come. Faith, you see, always looks ahead. It knows that God keeps His word. And Mary sings the praises of the covenant God who always comes with gracious gifts to those who seek His face and walk in His ways. She stays with Elizabeth about three months. Then she goes back to Joseph who was told by Gabriel what had happened. And together as another godly couple they make ready to welcome Jesus' birth.

You have seen something of this, haven't you, in the life of your grandmother? Even when she may felt very tired and sick, she could be joyful in the Lord and even young in heart. That comes by trusting and praising the Lord Jesus. And so can you and I always have our youth restored, no matter how young or old we are.

A Few Details

Baptizer: Much better than "Baptist;" John baptized people at God's command.

The Priests: They served by turns, a week at a time. It was a special privilege to put "incense" on the special altar in the Holy place. Now all believers are made "priests" by Jesus.

Incense: Sweet smelling spices which signified the prayers of God's people.

hid Herself: She did not go out in public, also because what happened to her was too holy to be joked about by careless men and women.

For Your Discussion

1. Do you think it is wrong for older ladies to want to look nice?
2. Are you spending too much time and effort on impressing others with your looks or clothes? What is sinful about that?
3. Have someone explain to all of you why what Zacharias did was so important. How are you and I to serve as priests also in our prayers?
4. Show Mary's strong faith from her song. Why and how should we all sing?

Lesson 3
What Kind Of Water Are You Drinking
The Samaritan Woman At The Well

SCRIPTURE: JOHN 4:1-43

Everybody needs water every day. Without it plants and animals and people would soon die. And the Lord God takes care of this. He gave it plentifully to our first parents in the garden of Eden. He promised to send rains at the proper time to Noah. And even though people pollute and even waste it, God still gives water to show His goodness to us.

But we need another kind of water far more than what comes out of the tap. And that is what this lesson is all about.

Our Lord with several disciples had spent many months in Jerusalem and Judea after the feast of the Passover. Now He was ready to begin His work in Galilee where He grew up. And He "must needs," says an older translation, pass through Samaria. He knew this, because His human nature was always filled with the Holy Spirit.

After walking for several hours, Jesus was tired. So while the disciples went to buy some food in a small village nearby, Jesus sat down beside the well. It was near noon. The sun was hot. While He was alone, a woman from that village came to fetch water. Likely she had one or two large jars and a cup with her. And with this the story really begins.

This woman - we don't know her name - was not a good woman at all. Soon that will become very plain. Nobody in the village wanted to be her friend; in fact, none of the other women would talk with her. But Jesus did. He asked her for a drink. And she was much surprised. She asks, "How come that you, a Jew, speak to me?" Nearly every Jew "hated" the Samaritans. They were a mixed people, partly Jews left in the land when the ten tribes went into captivity and partly

heathen people whom King Sargon of Assyria forced to live there. They had a mixed religion, too, believing only the first five books of the Old Testament. But all that made no difference to our Lord. He had come to seek and save those who were lost in sin. And this woman certainly was that!

Look how Jesus answers. He patiently tells her of a better kind of water which He gives to all who ask for this. She is shocked. After all, what better water could there be than that "in Jacob's well" which for hundreds of years had never run dry! Here she shows some of her Samaritan pride. But when He tells her that the water He gives will never let her get thirsty again, she pricks up her ears. "Please," says she, "give me that water. Then I won't have to come here any longer." And with that Jesus, who knew the hearts of all people, puts her to the test. Only those who see and confess their sins can ever taste this water which He gives. So He orders her to call her husband. But she didn't have a husband. "I know that," He answers, "you had six and the man you are living with now isn't your husband at all." That is why the women of Sychar didn't want anything to do with her. But she is spiritually stubborn. She doesn't want to see and admit her serious sin. So she tries to get Jesus off the track. Piously she asks a "religious question." But He turns this into an opportunity to preach the gospel. It is all about true worship through Him and the call goes out to everyone who believes in Him as their Savior and Lord.

The disciples returning are shocked. When they offer Jesus some of the food which they bought, He tells them that He has been filled with a better kind of food. Do you know what that was?

Meanwhile, the woman's life was changed by Jesus' words. She runs back to town eagerly. She tells all the people she meets about this Jesus. She urges them to see and hear Him for themselves. And with that He stays in Sychar and

many believe in Him as the promised Christ who brings salvation. All those who believed drank of the living stream which opened in their hearts, the fountains of living water which never run dry. When we come to Jesus in faith as they did, we will sing,

*"I came to Jesus and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him!"*

A Few Comments

Wells: In Palestine wells were much needed; no streams and only rivers had water all year long. It was always hard work for women, young and old, to get enough water for the family and the livestock. But at the well they could also pleasantly talk with each other.

Women: While held in honor among the Jews, they would never speak freely with a male stranger when alone. To avoid a bad reputation it simply was not done.

For Your Discussion

1. Why was it necessary for Jesus to be both God and man for our salvation?

2. Why is any kind of race-hatred a terrible sin?

3. What does it mean for you to "worship in spirit and in truth?"

4. Discuss some ways in which you can help to spread the good news of Jesus.

Lesson 4

One Word From Jesus' Lips Gives Life

The Raising Of The Widow's Son

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 7:11-17

When the Lord Jesus comes to town, everything soon changes. That happened also when He came to Nain.

Luke calls it a "city" but only because it had a wall and a gate. Actually it was small. Only once is it mentioned in the Bible. Nothing much ever happened there. But the name, which means "pleasant," tells us about life there. On the map you can find it a few miles south of Nazareth. It was built on the edge of the Galilean hills near a very fertile farmland. Each day the men went out to the fields. Those with sheep and cattle would find pasture on the hillsides. When the sun began to set, women would go for water, men would return home from their acres, and children stopped their play to come in for supper. Afterward a small lamp was lit. Then everybody went to bed early. Life was really quite "pleasant" most of the time. But the people in Nain did not expect much to happen. Every day life stayed much the same.

But look what happened, when the Lord Jesus came!

With his disciples and a great crowd He left Capernaum, his usual home. Now He was going to bring "the good news" of salvation to other places. And when He did, wonderful things soon happened.

After walking the dusty roads for a few hours, He with his companions came close to Nain. Just then a funeral procession passed through the gate. During the night a young man had died very suddenly. In that hot country the body had to be buried on the same day. So his mother with a few friends, weeping loudly, washed and wrapped the dead youth in linen strips. Four men placed it on a "bier," lifted it to their shoulders, and then headed out of the town. Soon the body

would be placed in a cave on the hillside. Everyone was sad, very sad indeed. For here was a young man, struck down by death without warning. He "was the only son of his mother." She had no other children to comfort her. Also, her husband had died. No one would be there to support her as she grew older. Each day would be darker and lonelier than the one before. No wonder she was weeping without any comfort.

But look! Jesus is coming closer. He knew what had happened. He steps up to the widow and says, "Don't cry!" Then He touched "the bier." Everybody stopped and wondered what would happen next? Would Jesus speak comforting words to the sorrowing woman? Would He, perhaps, explain why this young man was taken away from her by death? Or would He begin to preach a sermon to the crowd? Nothing like that at all. He doesn't even ask the widow if she believes that He is able to help. Nor does He even touch the dead body. He only speaks the life-giving word. And everything changes at once. He says to the body, "Arise!" Life flows back into the young man's body and he begins to speak. And then Jesus gives him back to his mother in full health and strength.

Do you know why Jesus performed this wonderful miracle? Of course, He felt sorry for the widow whose joy and strength had been taken from her. But here is much, much more. He did this to teach those people in Galilee and us what everybody needs. By nature all of us are "dead in our trespasses and sins." And sin kills far more than our bodies. It can kill us for ever and ever.

Is the Lord Jesus speaking to your heart to bring the true life which never dies? Listen to him, young ladies, and live with and for Him every day.

A Few Comments

Bier: Not a coffin, just a wide piece of wood or a strong cloth between two poles.

Widow: Unless a woman had a close male relative, her condition was sad. No job or social security was available, God did give many laws for her protection, but in Jesus' day few people paid attention. Even Pharisees tried to get their homes away from the widows. And judges did not listen when widows asked for help.

Fear: The reverence we owe when God speaks his word at home, school and church.

For Your Discussion

1. Give examples from the New Testament of poor widows and their need.

2. Why do you suppose Jesus did not ask if this woman believed? Often He did.

3. What does it mean that all people are born "spiritually dead?"

4. How can you tell whether you are raised from that kind of death?

Lesson 5

She Touches The Hem Of Jesus' Robe

The Woman With A Deadly Disease

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 8:42b-48

Already the Bible teaches us that "touching" is very important.

Anybody who touched a leper or a dead was called "unclean" by God's law. Such a person would have to be washed before doing life's usual duties again. Otherwise he or she could make other people unclean too. For by "touching" we somehow are joined to the other person. Babies need loving touches, leading to playing with and speaking to them, if they are to grow up and be able to make friends. That is why you, too, should not be so friendly that you let everyone touch you. That is reserved only for trusted family and friends.

Tonight's story is about the touch which all of us need.

When our Lord Jesus was on earth to bring salvation for time and eternity, He was very busy. People simply did not leave Him alone. Every day, no matter where He was, they crowded around to hear his words which brought life and peace to all who believed. And to show that His word gave life and peace and joy, He also performed many wonderful deeds.

One day a ruler of the synagogue asked Him to heal his sick daughter. Jesus was ready to come to her. On the way the streets of Capernaum were crowded. It was hard for anyone to get close to Jesus. But here was one woman - again we do not know her name - who slowly but patiently pushed her way through. She simply had to get as close to Jesus as possible.

If we had known her, I am sure we would have felt very sorry for her. For twelve long years she had a very serious sickness. Somehow she had "a flow of blood" which could not be stopped. As the weeks and months passed she grew weaker

and weaker. Often she had gone to the doctors for help. She paid them nearly all the money she had. But not one of them, no matter what medicines or what treatments they applied, helped her at all. But she had heard about the Lord Jesus and how He had healed many people with many different kinds of diseases. So she decided to seek his help. So strong was her childlike faith that she believed that by only touching the hem of His long robe, the flow of her blood would be stopped.

Such simple faith is never put to shame. She passed through the crowd, touched him and was immediately cured. But Jesus, even though He did not see her, knew what had happened. He said, "Someone touched me!" Only because He was the sinless Son of man who had come to take sin away, this woman's touch could not make Him "unclean." Of course the disciples did not understand any of this at all. But the woman did. And with trembling heart and lips she told him of her hope and how she had been healed.

Look how the blessed Savior received her in grace. He called her "Daughter," now one of the believing family of the God of salvation. And He gave her "peace," a peace not only because she was cured but even more because she, by her touch of faith, belonged to Him for time and eternity.

Here are necessary lessons for all of us. Sometimes we hear the gospel but do not respond. That is very, very dangerous. For in the gospel Jesus comes and calls us to bring all our needs, of body as well as soul, to Him. Unless we "touch" Him in true faith, we cannot be saved from our sins and its painful results. Do you really know Jesus? Do you also "touch" Him often, even if only the hem of His robe?

A Few Comments

Robe: A garment reaching from the shoulders to the ankles; always worn over other clothes when sitting down at meals or going outside of the house.

Daughter: Here someone "born of God" shown by faith in the Lord Jesus.

Peace: One of God's great gifts; it includes forgiveness of sins which makes us one with God himself. Without this we are still enemies of God.

For Your Discussion

1. Discuss the importance of touching; also why such acts as shaking hands, kissing, etc. should always be truly meaningful.

2. Could there be reasons why this woman did not come to Jesus earlier?

3. Why didn't Jesus heal everybody in that day? Why doesn't He cure all our aches?

4. What did it mean that Jesus felt that "power" had gone out of Him?

Lesson 6

The Girl Who Danced Her Way To Death

The Daughter Of Herodias

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 14:1-12; MARK 6:17-30

Here we have a very painful story. It is chiefly about the death of John the Baptizer. But the Bible tells us about three people who were deeply involved in his beheading. All belonged to the family of the Herods who ruled in Palestine in the days of our Lord Jesus and his apostles. Our interest is especially in the daughter whose dancing led to killing that faithful servant of God who prepared the way for our Lord's ministry.

Five Herods are mentioned in the New Testament. It is not easy to keep them apart. They were descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob. Earlier that family had become Jews by marriage. Under protection of the Roman emperors, they ruled over the Jews for many years. The first was Herod the Great, a very able ruler. He built cities, fortresses and an imposing harbor. He also had the temple completely restored. He was, however, very suspicious and cruel. Once he killed his first wife, the only one whom he loved of the ten, also her son and her two brothers. He also had the babies of Bethlehem murdered after Jesus' birth. His son in this story was Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee and Perea. He changed the village of Tiberias on the shore of the lake of Galilee into a splendid Romanized city and made it his capital. Here was also his palace with deep dungeons below. As this story begins, John the baptizer was a prisoner there.

This brings us to the girl's mother. She was Herodias, a very ambitious and evil woman. She was the grand-daughter of Herod the Great. First married to Philip, another son of Herod the Great, she was dissatisfied because he did not rule over any part of the land. When he and she were in Rome, the

Herod of this story visited them. She decided to make him fall in love with her and so become, hopefully, the wife of a very important ruler. Both divorced their first partners and then married each other. This gave offense to the Jews as a double sin - divorcing and then marrying a close relative forbidden by God's law. No one dared to rebuke her except John. So angry was she, that she saw to it that her new husband put John in prison.

One day until late in the evening this Herod the king held a sumptuous banquet for all the important men of Galilee. Here was rich food in abundance with much wine to make most of the men present - no women allowed at such feasts, of course - more than a little drunk. Everyone behaved like the heathen without any thought of the next day.

And while the festivities went on, Herodias' daughter by her first marriage entered to entertain those present with her dance. Josephus, the Jewish historian of those days, tells us that the girl's name was Salome. Also that the dance was a very wild and sensuous one with veils cast off one at a time. No true Jew would ever have allowed his daughter to entertain in such a fashion. That was done only by professionals of low reputation. But since everyone was thrilled with her exhibition, Herod promised her anything she would ask, even to the half of his kingdom. Likely he expected she would ask for fine clothes or costly jewels.

You know the rest of the story don't you? The girl goes to her wicked mother who wants John beheaded. What a vicious and vengeful woman! Herod, afraid of what his guests would say if he now refused, gives in to this gruesome demand. And when Salome received the bloody head of God's servant on a platter, she brought it to her mother who was delighted to see her "enemy" dead.

The Bible tells us little more than this. That Herod and also Herodias and Salome knew the message of John the Baptizer and even much about the early days of our Lord's

ministry with his miracles seems more than clear. All Galilee and surrounding provinces streamed out to hear both of them. But none of these three ever turned in repentance from their wicked ways. Josephus fills out the account. It reminds us that God did not let this wicked act go unpunished. Herod with Herodias lost their position and were exiled to a far country. Salome married Philip, her great-uncle but one of the better of the evil Herods. Years later she also died a very painful and horrible death.

What a sad, sad story.

It reminds us how mothers can at times be a very evil influence of their daughters. Also, how young ladies - Salome was about fifteen - can by such entertainment degrade themselves to awaken sinful passions in the men who watched.

But far worse is the fact that all three could well have learned the way of salvation unto eternal life. The wife of one of Herod's stewards was a follower of Jesus and lived in or near the palace. But, loving sinful ambitions and the praise of men, they chose to walk the ways which always produce death. The price for wilful sins is always very, very high!

A Few Comments

Forbidden Degrees: The Lord for wise reasons laid down laws forbidding close relatives to marry each other. But the Herods repeatedly transgressed, wanting to keep all their power and possessions within the close family.

Dancing: Often approved by God: as women celebrating victories; David before the ark; the people at harvest times. But always men only with men; women only with men. Much different from the dancing among the heathen which was usually very immoral.

For Your Discussion

1. Why do churches and church leaders today often frown on modern forms of dancing?
2. Have the girls in your group tell what they appreciate about their mothers and why.
3. Why and how should girls and young ladies guard their reputation?
4. When is it wrong, and when is it right and good to keep our promises?

Lesson 7

The Woman Who Kept On Praying

The Canaanite Woman

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 15: 21-28

Do you realize what a blessed privilege is it to pray as the Bible commands? Here we can speak to a faithful heavenly Father who knows and cares. And when we come in Jesus' name, we are assured that He will always listen.

No wonder, then, that we are told to pray in faith and without ceasing. In fact our Catechism calls prayer "the chief part of our thankfulness to God." Here we adore, praise and give thanks. We also confess our sins and ask him to supply what we need. For a Christian believer it is impossible to live without prayer. Yet often we do not feel our need and get busy with all kinds of lesser matters. And when we do that, we cannot grow in that faith and love and hope by which we draw ever closer to our God and Savior.

Of this we are reminded in the story for tonight.

Here was a woman who lived outside of the promised land. She was a Canaanite, a heathen people who served many false gods. But she was in deep trouble. Her daughter was possessed by an evil spirit which greatly afflicted her. Likely the woman had gone to the doctors in her own country. But nothing they did brought any relief to the girl.

Somehow she had heard that in Galilee among the Jews there was a man named Jesus. And He healed many sick people. He also had power to cast out devils. This knowledge should not surprise us. The woman, we know, lived near the border of Israel. Between the two peoples there was always some trade in food and goods. Perhaps, so she began to think within her heart, she would some day find him to ask for the healing of her suffering child. And one day, very unexpectedly on her part, that did happen.

Our Lord had been very busy for several months in Galilee. Every day the crowds surrounded him. He taught them and healed many of their diseases. And now to get away for a little rest, He with his disciples crossed the borders into this woman's country.

Immediately - without her realizing it, the Holy Spirit must have worked this in her heart - she recognized him. She then began pleading for her loved one. Comparing the records of Matthew and Mark, we believe she found him on the street and then followed him into a house without a large crowd around him. But the Lord Jesus did not answer her with a word. Then the disciples, afraid that her cries would call attention to Jesus and themselves, said, "Send her away." Instead, He answered that He was sent "for the lost sheep in the house of Israel."

That would seem to close the door on any help, wouldn't it? But look what happened. She kept on with her pleading as she knelt down to worship him. She also called him "Lord" and "Thou son of David." How much she understood of this, we have no way of knowing. Here were, however, the beginnings of a sound faith. She accepted her place as a Gentile outside of the covenant people. And while keeping her place and confessing that the "bread" which Jesus brought in word and deed belonged to the Jews, she then pleads that even the little house dogs are fed by the "crumbs" which fall from the table. No wonder Jesus exclaims, "O woman, great is your faith!" And with that He heals from a distance. The woman, believing fully what He said, goes home to find her daughter no longer in agonies but healed and resting quietly on a bed. O what joy must have filled the hearts of both mother and daughter!

Prayer, when offered perseveringly by faith in Jesus, is always rewarded in one form or another. That is what the Bible plainly teaches as a sure promise.

This Bible story stops here. But don't think for a moment that these two could ever keep still about the wonderful Jesus who had brought deliverance from the devil. And their witness, like a stone thrown into a quiet pool, made ripples which may well have prepared the way for the full gospel preached also in Tyre and Sidon after our Savior's death and resurrection. In this story we see the beginnings of salvation for the Gentiles, also for our families and friends so long a time after this story.

A Few Comments

Canaanite: Refers to her nationality; Syro-Phoenician; to the country where she lived. The two accounts tell about the same woman and daughter.

Dogs: By God's Old Testament law an "unclean animal." Because the Jews regarded all other people than themselves as unclean, they gave them this name since God's promises had not yet come to them.

Faith: True faith is much more than knowledge; it always includes a heartfelt personal trust in God and all that he reveals in the Bible. But salvation does not depend on how much anyone knows; only enough knowledge of Jesus to awaken a true trust in him.

For Your Discussion

1. Discuss with your group the right way to pray; also how often and for what.

2. Why is it wrong for us today, after Pentecost, to call people "dogs" like Jesus did?

3. Does God ever say "No" to our prayers? If so, why and how?

4. Have your group also discuss why, how and when they can and should witness.

Lesson B

Ladies Who Did What Men Could Not Do

The Women From Galilee

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 8:1-3

Several years ago I found myself in a large mixed gathering. Two women, well-dressed and holding down important jobs, stood near by. As they chatted, one raised her voice a little and said with the other nodding, "I'm sick and tired of our consistency. All we are good for is to bring food to church, collect old clothes, teach some little kids and such. You know, we can really do their job better than..." And with that, eager to avoid a useless argument, I quietly walked away.

Really, I felt somewhat angry at but even more sorry for them.

They forgot two important teachings of the Bible. First, that Jesus promised rich blessing for those who did no more than "give a cup of cold water in His name." And then, that even if we preached like angels and gave all our goods to the poor but did not have "love," all our works would be worthless!

Let these few verses, young ladies, sink deeply into your minds and hearts.

Our Lord has chosen his disciples. It is the second year of His ministry. With them He is going on an evangelistic tour throughout the land. Under God's orders He is to "seek the lost sheep of the house of Israel." The Jewish people needed to hear the message, repent of their sinfulness and sins, and believe in Him as one sent to bring full salvation. That would mean walking long distances on dusty roads and over rolling hills. And every day they would need food. Often their clothes needed washing and mending. Sometimes their sandals wore out quickly. And at night, especially in the colder months, they needed a decent place to sleep. With Jesus his followers have forsaken their homes and jobs. Nor did they have, like

ministers and missionaries today, a congregation that paid them a decent salary. For them there were no heaven-sent ravens who fed Elijah every day.

And now what this brief text tells us.

In the land of Galilee there were ladies who had listened to Jesus. They had also come to faith in Him as the one sent from God. And they loved Him very dearly. And loving Jesus, they "provided" for him and his disciples "out of their means." Undoubtedly all the above, but also money. You will remember that Judas Iscariot carried the "bag." That's why the disciples could go out to buy food when needed.

Who were these ladies?

We only know the names of some of them, here a few and then later others when Jesus died and arose again. This is an "honor roll." Although they had duties at home and so could not "follow" Jesus wherever He went, they were faithful to the very end. Not for a moment could they forget Him. "Some" of them "had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities." At times they were even more faithful than His closest disciples. And what a rich "privilege" they received. We will hear about that in connection with the resurrection. First on the list is "Mary called Magdalene." Jesus had released her from "seven demons." She was an honorable lady, not a prostitute as some teachers may tell you. That "mix-up" with the woman who anointed our Lord's feet comes from the middle ages when priests and people did not know the Bible. Another was "Joanna." She was the wife of Chuza, a steward who lived in Herod's palace. Under it were the dark dungeons in which John the baptizer was a prisoner. Of "Susanna" we know nothing except that, perhaps, she was cured by Jesus. Then there was "Salome" the wife of Zebedee whose two sons, James and John, became apostles. Also we read of another "Mary," the mother of James the less and Jesus.

Remember these ladies well. How could Jesus with his disciples have done so much without their constant care? And

if you ask, "But couldn't their husbands help?" Of course, and perhaps they did by giving what money was needed. But I like to think that those ladies, when living quite close together, would get together, make their plans and send what was needed to serve the Lord Jesus whom, they loved so much.

A Few Comments

Steward: A very important position. Herod must have had several; one to give orders to the servants; another to see to it that food and other necessities were on hand; then someone to keep the finances straight. What Chuza did we do not know. But he must have been well paid, so that Joanna could help.

Magdalene: Someone who lived in Magdala or Migdal, the name means "watch-tower," a small town near an important road south of the lake of Galilee.

For Your Discussion

1. Why do some people think women should do whatever men do? Does God give different assignments to men and women? If so, why?

2. Since Herod was such a cruel ruler, should Chuza have looked for another job?

3. Why did Jesus and his disciples also need some money when on the road?

4. What are you as Calvinettes doing for our Lord and his cause?

Lesson 9

Jesus Came To Save Bad People

The Sinner Who Anointed Jesus' Feet

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 7:36-50

Each time I read this story I think of my grandfather. One day walking through the woods we talked about heaven. Suddenly he stopped and said, "When I get to heaven, I expect three surprises; first that some will be there whom I did not expect; then that others I expected to see will not be there; but the biggest surprise will be that I am there by God's grace." It taught me something I hope never to forget.

Here is a wonderfully precious story. Do not read it carelessly. Soon you can learn a much needed lesson also about yourself.

Our Lord Jesus had again returned to Capernaum. After answering the questions raised by John's disciples, He spoke to the people. And what strange things He said told them. People deeply sunk into the depths of sin would enter the kingdom of God before the religious leaders. How shocked many in his audience must have been!

Then Jesus receives from Simon, an important Pharisee, an invitation to eat with him and his friends.

Among the Jewish people that such an invitation was a high honor. A guest would have his head anointed by the host, while the lowest of the house-servants came to wash the dust and dirt of the streets from his feet. So prepared, the guest could recline at ease on one of the couches which surrounded a low table on which food and drink was set. With this, too, there would be a pleasant conversation in which everyone present could take part. In Simon's house, which may have been quite attractive, the place where such eating and drinking was enjoyed could be seen from the street.

Unexpectedly a woman, who was not invited, enters. With her she has an alabaster box filled with fragrant ointment. She kneels at Jesus' feet. Immediately a flood of tears falls from her eyes. With them she washes and then anoints the unwashed feet of our Lord. Everyone at the table, and Simon most of all, were shocked. Here was that teacher who by his words and deeds had become so popular among the multitudes. Didn't He, who seemed to be so wise and spoke with such authority, know what kind of a woman this one was? She was a "sinner," a woman of the worst sort who had been selling her body for a few pieces of silver. Everybody else in Capernaum knew her bad reputation. No decent person, whether man or woman or even child, would have anything to do with her. She even let down her hair in a public place, a shameful thing for any Jewish woman to do. But this Jesus allowed her, steeped in her wicked ways, to keep on with all that washing and wiping and anointing. If He were really a God-fearing man, how could He let her do this to him?

Not even Simon, who provided the meal, said a word. But the Lord knew the thoughts of his mind and heart.

Now quietly He continued with his "office," the work which the heavenly Father had sent him into our sinful world to do. His words are the parable of two debtors. To this preaching - for that is what it is - He asks Simon to respond. And He exposes not only Simon's lack of doing what every self-respecting Jew would do for his guest. He really exposes the sinful unbelief which filled the heart of Simon and most of the Pharisees. They were sure they didn't need Jesus. By their many religious deeds they thought themselves good enough to enter God's kingdom. But not this sinful woman, because she had just heard the words of Jesus about John's baptism. That man of God had commanded repentance from every sin. And our Lord preached the same message. Hearing him she believed that there was hope of salvation also for her in spite

of her grievous sin. And that faith bore the blessed fruit of true love for him. This she felt she had to show publicly also in the presence of those who looked down on her. All this we know for sure, because the Savior himself said to her, "Your sins are forgiven; your faith has saved you, go in peace."

Do you and I truly understand in faith this message of our Lord?

No sin, except one, is too great that it leaves us without hope of forgiveness. What the gospel commands is genuine repentance which turns to Jesus and shows itself in works of love. And the more painful our sense of sinning against God, fellow-man and self becomes, the more sweetly precious will the Lord Jesus as our Savior become. It is God's great gift. Do you and I know and receive it daily by the Spirit's work applying the gospel to our lives?

A Few Comments

Alabaster Box: Something like a perfume bottle; made of light-weight stone which could easily be broken. The ointment was carefully prepared from various sweet-smelling flowers and herbs, used as a cosmetic, also to heal small bruises and burns.

Head: For the Jews the most honored part of the body; to hit or spit on it was an unforgivable offense.

Feet: The most unworthy part of the body, usually the dirtiest and therefore washing feet was humble work for servants.

Repentance: Far more than saying, "I'm sorry," acceptable to God only when there is sorrow for sinning against God's will, true humility which confesses unworthiness to be forgiven, and a heartfelt turning away from sins committed.

For Your Discussion

1. Why was John's baptism so important at that time to prepare for Jesus' teaching?

2. Why and how is every sin in our heart and life a sin against God himself?

3. Discuss the close connection between repentance and faith in Jesus.

4. How can you show your love, day after day, for the Lord Jesus?

Lesson 10
She Lost A Silver Coin At Home
Seeking And Finding

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 15:1, 2, 8-10

The Jewish people also in Jesus' days had many customs which may first seem very strange to us. But the more we learn about them, the better we can understand also his parables.

Here is the story of a woman who happened to lose, perhaps while she was busy dusting and cleaning her house, part of her precious necklace. It had ten silver coins. But somehow one of them broke lose and was lost to her. So dismayed is she, that she right away gets busy to find it. She searches in every corner and under every bed and couch until it is found and replaced. Then she calls all her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her. It may well be that she makes a party of this!

How strange this sounds in our ears, doesn't it? Of course, jewelry is nice to have. And money should never be taken lightly. The Bible teaches us to use it carefully and wisely. Not money but the "love" of money is condemned as a great sin. But there is much more to this little story than that. And everyone who heard Jesus tell it knew this at once. He did not have to explain it in any detail.

This is about a married woman. And marriage among the Jewish people was never entered into without a great deal of care and planning. It began with an agreement between two families. Not only promises but also gifts were exchanged. This does not mean that the young ladies had nothing to say about whom they were to marry. But without such an arrangement, exchange of gifts, and a fairly long engagement there was no wedding with all its festivities. With even the best of marriages, however, the woman did not receive any assurance that everyone would live happily ever after.

According to many religious leaders - and they explained Moses' laws for marriage - a man could divorce his wife for even some of her small failings. Then she would be forced to go back in disgrace to her parents if they still lived. And none of her husband's possessions would ever be given her. Easily could she be left destitute. So whenever possible, her parents at the time of wedding would give her a kind of "dowry" like this necklace. It belonged to her and her only. No husband, even if deeply in debt, could take it away from her. It was the symbol of an approved marriage. It also guaranteed that, if ever divorced, she would not become a penniless dependent on her relatives. No wonder she spent much time and effort to get that one silver coin back.

Of course, there is much more to this story than that.

This is the second of three parables which Jesus taught at the same time. And it was again taught for a very special reason. Here, too, is "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning."

Once more, likely to the people standing around to hear Jesus, the Pharisees and scribes accused our Lord of receiving into his fellowship very bad people. Therefore He must be a very bad and untrustworthy person too. For surely their God who is holy and righteous, wanted only good and respectable people.

In this way all three parables in this chapter belong together. In the first, one sheep among a hundred is restored. In the second, one coin among ten silver pieces. In the last and longest one son of the two (although the older one also was really lost to the father's fellowship). What Jesus teaches so clearly here is the unbounding love of our God for those who are lost in their sins. That includes everyone of us too. And always it is the Lord God himself who does the seeking and the finding.

Several commentators suggest that the first parable teaches the love of God the Son who comes to seek and save his people like lost sheep. The second tells us of God the Holy Spirit who finds and brings back people who like coins cannot

find the way into God's saving friendship. The last, about that lost son (or both of them!), about God the Father who never lets go of those whom He has placed in his family.

How angry those Pharisees and scribes must have been when they heard these parables. From the Old Testament they knew about the seeking and saving love of God. But they were so sure that they did not need such saving. Stubbornly they refused to see and confess themselves as sinners in need of the salvation which Jesus came to accomplish. That is why later they, too, helped to have him condemned and crucified.

And now, how about you and me? Jesus through the gospels is still preaching also these words to us. Do we see ourselves as we should? Do we also rejoice as we tell others that He has found us as lost coins, helpless in ourselves, but restored to the bride's necklace, the symbol of the marriage between the Savior and his redeemed people? Only then do we really rejoice and give our God all the glory.

A Few Comments

Silver: A precious metal, but not as valuable as gold of which few Jews then had much.

Necklace: We can compare this to the wedding ring given to the bride. If ever lost, she would do anything to find it again.

For Your Discussion

1. Why do you think Jesus spoke not one but three parables here?

2. Should parents today have anything to say about whom a son or a daughter wants to marry?

3. Do you think many young people get married too quickly and without much thought?

4. Discuss with the group, according to age-level, the necessary work of the Holy Spirit in bringing us to salvation? Or do you think we can receive salvation by the power of our mind and will?

Lesson 11
Mothers Doing Their Best For Their Children
Bringing Them To Jesus

SCRIPTURE: MARK 10:13-16 & LUKE 18:13-17

Three of the four gospels tell this story. In each case the record is very brief. When we compare the accounts, however, we soon notice that the words are not precisely the same.

Does that surprise you? Or, perhaps, are you wondering which account is the best? Here you should remember some very important things about Holy Scripture and its details. The gospels were written at different times, by different writers and first for different groups of people. To make the message as clear as possible to those readers, the Spirit of truth by his special inspiration enabled each writer to put down the story in precisely that form and in those words which could be most easily understood. Here - God forbid such a possibility - there is not a single mistake. Every detail - Paul says this clearly in 1 Timothy 3:16 - is "God-breathed."

What an attractive picture of our blessed Savior and Lord is found here.

Always He was busy, so very busy in seeking by his words and deeds to draw men to salvation which only comes in and through him. Only rarely did He withdraw himself to take rest and seek strength in prayer from the Father who had sent him into the world to bring salvation.

One day - each account makes this plain - He again was very busy. People were always coming and going with their questions and their needs. While so engaged, a large number also came to him with their children. Some of them were fathers as the word "they" in the Greek language shows us. But Luke tells us that some of the little ones were "infants." See the picture for yourself. As always when He was in Galilee

large crowds of men and women as well as religious leaders crowded around to see and hear him. One and all, according to need, He heard and answered. In this multitude there were also parents, including several women. Fathers might take along growing children to listen to Jesus. But hardly would babies be present without their mothers!

Also these mothers - how many or few is not told us - approached our Lord and asked him to bless their little ones. No mother today can do anything better for her child. But the disciples at once spoke up and "rebuked them." Perhaps they thought Jesus was far too busy to be bothered with little ones who could not understand what was happening. But Jesus turns in "indignation" against his disciples and teaches them together with us today a very necessary lesson. Don't send them away. He insists, for "of such is the kingdom of God!" Several different explanations of those words have been given. But by far the simplest and best is that He was teaching how dependent and helpless especially such little ones in arms are. They are the ones whom He "blesses!" For the disciples and all who read this story it is a "show-and-tell" lesson. Only those people who learn to recognize their total helplessness and inability to come in their own strength or worthiness to the Savior will experience his great blessing of salvation.

Today we hear a lot about "family values." And it is more than high time. Since earliest times and in nearly every land the family was always the most important and stable of all relationships. Now it is under attacks of every sinful kind. How then can families, children as well as parents, enjoy the stability and strength which is so necessary for them? What "value" alone will insure a true and lasting togetherness in a world where everybody seems to want to do only his or her own thing?

Here our blessed Lord shows the way.

Only that family in which mothers seek the blessing of salvation which Jesus gives can remain strong. This they are to

seek for their children as well as for themselves. In your baptism, on the basis of God's promises, our parents confessed that before the Lord and the congregation. Are we truly thankful for them? Are we, also as you grow in your appreciation and understanding, personally confessing our deep need of Jesus' blessing of salvation? Never be ashamed of your helplessness to save yourself from sin and all its sad results. And when you so respond in coming to and calling upon the Lord Jesus, what strength, what peace, what joy will be yours for as long as you live.

A Few Comments

Indignation: The Bible tells us that our Lord at times became very, very angry when He saw in people's lives what sinful ideas made them say and do; even when they sinned with what they supposed were "good intentions!"

"Of Such": Here the phrase means people, whether old or young, who now see themselves as helpless as babes to come to Jesus by their own power.

For Your Discussion

1. What kind of a "blessing" do you think these mothers (and fathers) expected from Jesus?

2. Why is it very wrong to think that Jesus never became angry?

3. Discuss among yourselves in some detail what your baptism begins to mean to you.

4. How are your mothers also bringing you to the Lord Jesus? Be specific.

Lesson 12
A Fine Woman Who Did A Bad Deed
The Wife Of Zebedee

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 20:20-28 & MARK 16:1-8

Every believer, old or young alike, is commanded to guard against any sin which may easily enter our heart and life. When we fail to do this, we are sure to fall deeply away from God for a while.

That happened to this lady who in many ways showed by her deeds that she was truly a faithful follower of our Lord Jesus. But somehow one day she let pride and selfish ambition for her two sons take control. And Jesus, for her own good, taught her a much-needed lesson. Even when his word rebukes, there is healing for our heart and mind when we listen.

Let's take time and thought to learn about her from several Bible passages.

Her name was Salome. She was married to a very prosperous fisherman named Zebedee. Two of her sons, James and John, became close disciples of the Savior. Her husband had a fleet of boats which plied the Sea of Galilee. Beside other helpers, John and James as well as Andrew and his brother Peter worked for him. Nor is this at all surprising. Salome was a cousin to Mary the mother of our Lord. We also know from the gospels that both she and Zebedee very early became believers in Jesus. He did not protest when all four cousins followed Jesus during his earthly ministry. And she, having a good marriage and money at her disposal, served him with a true devotion which often took her far from home.

One day, in the neighborhood of Jericho not long before our Lord suffered and died for the sins of his people, she did a very bad deed. Like many Jews who listened to Jesus she looked for "the kingdom of God." She firmly believed that

it would come with Jesus. After all, didn't He as well as John the Baptizer preach about this often? And, seeing and believing all the mighty deeds He did, she looked for its coming on earth in a very visible form. How wonderful that coming would be for her, for all the Jewish people, and hopefully especially for her two fine sons!

As she thought about all this, pride and sinful ambition for herself and her two sons began to fill her mind. In that kingdom she wanted them to have the most honored and important places. None of the other ten disciples, as far as she was concerned, were anywhere as fine as hers, not even Peter. Look too what she and her husband had given up for Jesus. Surely such sacrifices ought to and would be rewarded. Nor would it do any harm to somehow remind the Lord of this. So, when opportunity came, she asked for the most important places in that coming kingdom for her sons. This she did when the other disciples were around. She didn't seem to care that her request made the others very angry and jealous. But now think carefully how Jesus dealt with her, her two sons and then the other ten disciples. What a patient, what a wise and understanding but firm teacher He showed himself to be. And especially what necessary and very important lessons about the kingdom and about themselves they all had to learn.

Praise the good and gracious God; this is not the end of Salome's story.

Indeed, her ambitious pride as well as her wrong view of the kingdom of God were sharply corrected by him. And she learned her lesson well. Salome was one of the women who stood by when the Savior suffered and died on the cross. How this must have pierced her loving and now tender heart. She was also with Joseph and Nicodemus when they laid Jesus' body in the tomb. And with a few other women she went, at first in great sorrow, to anoint that body which she thought would still be there. But with what joy she heard the angel say, "Fear not. He is not here for He is risen from the dead."

Remember those painful but precious lessons which Salome had to learn - how easily pride in doing something for Jesus can produce great sins; how the Kingdom where Jesus is Lord forever is much better than anything earthly; also how even such sinful pride and ambition can and is forgiven when we trust in him who is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Do you so learn to know this Savior and his wonderful salvation?

A Few Comments

Sea of Galilee: Near and on it Jesus did many mighty miracles; it was also rich in fish so that Zebedee with his family became very prosperous.

Pride: A very bad character fault which makes us think of ourselves as better as and more worthy than others, especially if we sacrifice a lot for Jesus as Salome did.

Drink The Cup: Jesus uses this as a picture of his terrible sufferings when He bore on the cross the curse of God which our sins deserve.

For Your Discussion

1. What kind of ambition for our children can be proper? What kind is always very bad?

2. How can doing much for Jesus, also in love, make us think we deserve special blessings?

3. What does the kingdom which Jesus established mean to you in your daily life?

4. What is pride? Can you see it in some of your thoughts or deeds?

Lesson 13

Even Nice Families Have Their Problems

Martha, Mary And Brother Lazarus

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 38-42; JOHN 11:1-44; MATTHEW 26:6-13

A faithful Christian family is like a light shining in dark and often dismal world. Sometimes even the heathen will openly witness to this. When serving as a missionary in India years ago, a Hindu merchant said to me one evening, "Explain to me, please, why with your five very busy children your family always seems to be so happy." What an opportunity to tell that man about the wonderful change which Jesus also makes in the home.

But that does not mean that Christian families have no problems. Like the others they, too, have misunderstandings and sooner or later face sickness and death. But in Jesus Christ they always have an anchor which holds firm even in life's greatest storms.

Such a family we meet repeatedly on the pages of the gospel.

It is the family of Martha, Mary and brother Lazarus. Three characters, each quite different from the others. But how they loved and cared for each other because they knew and believed and loved the Savior who often came to stay with them.

The family lived in the small village of Bethany two miles east of Jerusalem. They were prosperous with a house large enough to provide lodging for our Lord and his disciples. Likely the house belonged to Mary as the widow of Simon the leper, mentioned twice as "house" in which Mary anointed the feet of Jesus. Always there was food in abundance. Not only did they entertain the One whom they have learned to love so well. Other friends from Jerusalem came to visit them in the days of their distress. Always Martha was in charge of things. About Lazarus we know less. But as a Jew commanded by God, "Six days you shall work," he may have been a farmer or a

merchant. Jewish men simply did not spend their days in idleness. And how convenient it was for our Lord to stay with them, when He went to the temple to keep the three great festivals. The ties which bound this little family to him were strong and sweet. Here was love which like a gentle river flowed over one and all to bring happiness.

Of course, you remember the three stories told about them. Each in its own way is interesting. Much more, each teaches us important lessons for our spiritual life.

Look first how Jesus dealt with Martha. She was a fine hostess. For Jesus even the best was none too good. See how busy she makes herself getting food and table setting ready for a delicious dinner. That day may have been hot. Or else, everything did not go quite as well as she had planned. So, like many a busy hostess, she lost her temper and complained. "Lord, why don't you tell my sister to get up and help me?" Ah, how patiently He corrects Martha and us.

Then comes that dramatic story of Lazarus. Dark shadows had fallen on this loving family. Dear brother Lazarus is desperately sick. O, if only the Lord Jesus were close by. But to escape the Jews who twice tried to stone him, He went across the Jordan. "His hour" had not yet come. Now read slowly and thoughtfully every verse of this story. Quickly they send word. But Jesus tarries two more days. Meanwhile Lazarus died and was buried. Only then, with two more days for travel time, does He arrive in Bethany. Both sisters are sure that all hope for the three of them to live happily together again was gone. How patiently He teaches them and the disciples. Only after this does He show the glory of God in raising Lazarus from the dead. He and He alone is the Resurrection and the Life. And all who believe on him will never die even when their dead bodies lie in a grave somewhere. Do you believe this about yourself and your loved ones? What an unspeakable peace and comfort for everyone who looks to Jesus.

Now the time comes for Jesus to die and be risen from the dead. Willingly in obedience to the Father's will for our salvation He must sacrifice himself as a sin-offering for many.

Before this can happen, several things must take place in preparation. In one of these, sister Mary plays an important part. She, loving that dearest of all friends so deeply, anoints his feet at a dinner. Likely she understood the deep meaning of Jesus' words at the time of the raising of Lazarus better than the others. She may have remembered, too, the times when she sat at his feet and learned about His work. But that anointing also had to remind the disciples, who did not want to understand that before the kingdom of God could come, that their Master had to die and be buried honorably and then arise as Victor over death and the devil with all his dominion.

Often we wonder why the disciples were so slow to remember all that Jesus so clearly taught them. But are you and I, with the complete word of God about the glorious way of salvation, any better? Let's think about this too.

A Few Comments

House of Simon the Leper: Still called by his name after his death; Martha could hardly be in charge unless she owned it. If he lived, he would have had servants for this.

"His Hour": In the gospels for the time He would bring salvation by his death and resurrection.

Spikenard: An expensive oil from a fragrant herb to cover the smell of death.

For Your Discussion

1. Do you try to make your house a Christ-pleasing "home?" How can you?

2. Is there ever any excuse for losing our temper and complaining? Explain.

3. Why did Jesus weep? When is weeping proper; when is it sinful?

4. Give examples why and how also as young people you should help the poor?

Lesson 14
The Silly Bridesmaids Who Fall Asleep
The Foolish Virgins

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 25:1-13

When I was in grade school, we memorized many psalms and hymns. One of them came to mind as I was writing this lesson. Perhaps you can sing it too, even though it is not one of the popular ones. This is how it begins:

*"I think, when I read that sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men...
...How I wish I could have been with him then."*

Do you sometimes wish that you lived in Palestine in those years so long ago?

Then you would be joining large crowds who followed him day after day. You would also be seeing the sick healed and eating with the thousands whom He fed with a few fish and loaves. From his gracious lips you would be hearing the words which give life everlasting. And his words are so important that without them we can never understand any of his works. No wonder people said, "Never spoke any man like this!"

That was true also when He preached about the great Day of the last judgment. Only those who put into practice what He said will be welcomed to the eternal wedding feast.

This parable is about "the kingdom of heaven," already present in the hearts and lives of everyone who believes on him. Much more of its joy is found with those who have died in faith. One day - O, happy thought - it will be seen and experienced in all its fullness. And it is like a wedding, in fact, the only wedding which lasts forever.

Let's review again a little about how the Jews prepared for weddings. This came in three stages. First, the parents of the man and the woman came together to make the

arrangements. Both agreed that the couple could and should get married. Promises were exchanged which pledged these two for each other. But the next step was far more important. The couple had to be officially engaged or betrothed to each other. Gifts were given by all the parties. Also a big party was given at one of the homes. With this the wedding date was set. Usually it followed about a year later. Meanwhile the bridegroom was expected to prepare a house for the bride as well as a lavish banquet with entertainment to welcome her and her friends. What a happy, happy occasion!

Some time on the wedding day he with his companions went in procession to the home of the bride. She, of course, would be ready. But so, too, her bridesmaids. They would wait outside the house to welcome with song the bridegroom. No matter when he would come - at noon or in the evening or at midnight - these young ladies were to be ready and wide-awake. It would be an insult if they did not greet him properly.

Now the story continues. There were ten bridesmaids, all dressed in their best. Not knowing when the bridegroom would arrive, they also took lamps. How necessary in a town which had no street lights. Going out early, the young ladies had to wait for hours and hours and hours. Finally as the night grew darker, one after the other became drowsy to fall asleep. Suddenly a shout rings out, "Behold, the bridegroom comes!" All ten hear the voice. But by then their lamps had gone out. Five of them, shaking off their sleep, had shown sense by taking along a small jar of oil to replenish their lamps. They had remembered that the time of the bridegroom's coming had not been given. So with their lights burning again, they could welcome the bridegroom, lead the way to the bride's house, and then in procession go where the feast would be held. But what about the other five? Their lamps had also gone out. But they had forgotten that the bridegroom might not come until long after dark. Without oil for their lamps, they begged from the others. "No," said the five who were

prepared, "then there will not be enough for us and for you. Go instead to the merchant and buy for yourselves." Not knowing what else to do, the foolish ones hurry from one street to the next hoping to buy a little oil. But - and everyone who hears will know this - at midnight no store in the city was still open. When afterward they stumble in the darkness and try to enter the marriage feast, they find that "the door was shut!"

Earlier our Lord had told the multitudes and the disciples much about His coming. It, so He said, is absolutely certain. It will also come suddenly. Nobody can know the hour. The command is to be prepared at all times. That is the point of this story. All ten fell asleep. That can be very dangerous. But far worse is it to be unprepared. Without the "oil" which makes the lamp of our life shine brightly at his coming, there is no welcome at the heavenly banquet.

This is a very personal duty for everybody. Nobody, not a preacher or a friend or even a loving parent, can do it for you. It is God's gift which awakens an obedient faith. But we are called to keep it burning brightly until Jesus comes again. Is that faith yours? And does it keep you waiting and watching for him?

A Few Comments

Lamps: Likely these were small torches; not the little clay lamps for a room.

Virgins: Unmarried girls from among the family and friends.

Wise: In the Bible always those who hear and obey the word of God; the foolish hear but do not obey.

For Your Discussion

1. How would you apply this message to your own life?

2. What does the Bible tell you about the joy in heaven?

3. In what way is Jesus like a bridegroom?

4. What higher privileges do we have than those people who lived when Jesus was on earth?

Lesson 15
Go Quickly And Tell
Women At The Empty Tomb

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 28:1-10 & MARK 16:1-8

Don't ever regret, young ladies, that the Lord made you what you are. He is preparing you to grow up into womanhood. Of course, you may be facing pains and problems; so does every boy and man who has ever walked the earth. Keep in mind what Schiller, a highly gifted German of long ago, once wrote, "Honor to women; they entwine and weave the roses of heaven into our lives on earth."

Often the Bible reminds us of this fact. Sarah receives her place among the great heroes of faith. Deborah stirs the heart of cowardly Barak to fight the cruel Canaanites. And Hannah, the mother of Samuel, sang a song far sweeter than that of any nightingale.

But few ever rose to such heights of bravery as the grief-stricken women who went to the tomb on Easter morning.

All Jerusalem had been in a tumultuous upheaval during the long hours of Good Friday. Jesus, that prophet from Galilee, had been arrested shortly after midnight. Then led from one ruler to the next. He had been mocked, spit upon and beaten. Stirred to an uncontrolled frenzy of hate by their leaders, multitudes, who five days earlier had shouted their "Hosannas," now screamed for the crucifixion of the Savior. "His blood be upon us and upon our children!" And with that precious blood flowing from his head and tortured back, Jesus was led out to Calvary to die in agony between two murderers. All those first hours, people continued to mock him.

But where were his disciples during all those dark hours? Every one had fled when He was betrayed. Peter then denied him three times in the high priest's court. Only the disciple whom Jesus loved so well stood watching the terrible

events on the hill of the skull. But the women from Galilee were there! Those big bronzed and brawny fishermen had scurried like frightened rabbits to find a hiding place. There, fearful of what the people might do to them as Jesus' closest companions, they felt sorry for themselves as they lurked behind the closely-locked doors. And it was much darker in their souls than on the darkest streets at midnight.

Although their hearts also grieved at Jesus' death, the women did not sit still. How fitting the few lines of a poet:

*"When greater perils men environ,
Then women show a front of iron;
And, gentle in their manner, they
Do bold things in a quiet way."*

Two or three followed Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus to lay his body in the grave. As soon as the Sabbath day was past, they went to the shops to buy what was needed to provide an honorable burial for one whom they loved and served during his life.

Now let us follow them on Resurrection morning.

A few are listed by name. The first is *Mary Magdalene* about whom we shall learn more. Also "the other *Mary*," the mother of James the Less one of the twelve. *Salome* the mother of John and James is on this honor roll. And Luke mentions *Joanna*, the wife of Chuza who served as steward in Herod's palace. Others not named also accompanied them. A glorious company.

And do not take their going out lightly.

Early, very early as dawn began to paint the eastern skies with a delicate crimson, they come together. Then they walk with measured haste through the still-dark streets of Jerusalem which "had killed Jesus!" The gate is already open. For a short while they continue quietly on their way. What really is there for them to say to each other? The One whom they loved and served was dead and buried. Each of the women must have been pondering when and how to return to their own homes after the last work they could ever do for Jesus was

over. But then they break their silence. Reality has to be faced. Who will be able to roll away the large stone? And what about those Roman soldiers? Will they as defenseless women be rudely driven away by them? Also, they had forgotten completely what that our Lord had said about being raised on the third day. And while their going to the tomb now seems so foolish and their spices quite useless, their love deserves all our praise. It stands in sharp contrast to the disciples who only felt sorry for themselves and brooded over their loss. All honor to those women from Galilee.

And the God of heaven and earth will privilege them above the disciples.

They are the first to hear the blessed message. "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here for He is risen from the dead." Even though they cannot take in the wonder of it all, they receive some of the highest honors. Women in the Bible occupying only some low and secondary place in Christ's church? Don't believe that for a moment. Without their loving services the church would be a cold and cheerless place.

None of the men, not even John who took Mary the mother of our Lord under his care, will be honored as the first messengers of our Savior's victory over sin, death and the powers of hell. This has been reserved for those who in the face of danger went out for what they thought would be the last service they could render to their Lord. And ever since, without the need of being ordained in the church, women of all ages have kept on telling the story of Jesus joyfully and fruitfully to the glory of God. Hallelujah, Jesus Christ is risen indeed!

A Few Comments

Environ: Here the word means environment where there would be danger.

Hosanna: The Greek form of a Hebrew word meaning, "Save, we beseech Thee." Although it offered praise, it was also a prayer.

Sabbath: It ended when the sun went down on what we call Saturday evening, for two hours or so shops were then opened.

For Your Discussion

1. Describe some of the pain which these women must have felt at Jesus' crucifixion, also when the people mocked him.

2. Discuss a few things women can do much better than most boys and men to show love for the Savior. Also on the mission fields.

3. Why were the Roman authorities always afraid of another revolution especially at Passover time? Does this help explain the disciples' fear?

4. Since Resurrection is such an important day for faithful believers, how can you help to make every Sunday a happy day also in the family?

Lesson 16
Growing Up Into Living For Jesus
The Painful Road For Mary

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 8:1, 2 & JOHN 20:1-18

Under this title we could tell the story of Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus. Hers was a very painful life. Step by step she learned the hard lesson of letting go of the Savior whom she cherished with the deepest kind of mother-love, receive as a substitute one of his disciples, and then take her place as an ordinary member of the first congregation. Only so could she experience salvation through the price paid on Calvary's cross.

Instead, we turn to Mary Magdalene. Hers, while tasting blessings richer by far than most others enjoyed, was also a painful path before she could know Jesus fully as her Savior.

One day a little girl was born to a couple who lived in Magdala. This was a small village or town north of where Herod's palace had pride of place in Tiberias and a little south of Capernaum where our Lord performed so many mighty works. Of her parents we know nothing. But she received the name Mary, which means "beloved." No doubt her mother and father loved her dearly and taught her about the God of the covenant. Her childhood was likely a happy one, as she with her friends played in the streets and on the shores of the lake of Galilee.

Then something very terrible happened. We do not know whether this happened in her childhood or youth. Seven devils entered her to make life more miserable than anyone of us can ever imagine. This seems to have lasted for several years. Nowhere do we read, as we do of many other women recorded in the Bible, that she ever had a husband or children. No relief came until she was a full-grown woman.

Precisely what form her demon-possession took we do not know either. But devils were exceedingly active during the days when our Savior lived on earth. By their fall they had not lost any of their angelic powers. And under Satan, who tried in every

possible way to discredit our Lord and destroy his works, these evil spirits went about doing their deadly work. Some of their victims screamed about as if they were insane. Others were seized by spells during which they had no control over their bodies. One lad, we know, was thrown violently into the fire which could burn him severely. And the demon-possessed man in Gadara could not be chained by anyone but ran around naked frightening old and young. Reading the verses in Luke, we may suppose that in the case of Mary Magdalene other "infirmities" were added to make her distress even more painful.

One day Jesus came into her life. Together with some other women she was completely freed from all those years of suffering.

O, how eagerly she listened to his life-giving words. Now she joined with several others to follow the Lord wherever He went. Each experience in that company with him only deepened her devotion. Whatever earthly goods were hers, she used to show her thankfulness for so great a deliverance.

In the last days of Jesus' earthly life Mary Magdalene with others accompanied him to Judea and Jerusalem. Even more painful did her experiences now become. She, too, stood near the cross to witness his agonies. She was near the tomb when He was buried and was also one who bought spices after the Sabbath was over. How dark and distressing her loving heart must have been.

Soon, however, her sorrow will be turned into joy!

At first reading the records of that glorious Easter day seem somewhat unclear. But nowhere is there any contradiction. Several women went to the tomb. It may well be, as we read John's account, that this Mary in her eagerness ran somewhat ahead of the others. To her amazement she finds the stone rolled away and the grave empty. Quickly she runs to tell this to Peter and John. Deeply troubled she says to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they laid him." Meanwhile the other women are receiving the angel's message. Hearing her words the two disciples, with Mary following them, run in surprise to the

place where Jesus had been laid. They find the facts just as she had told them. Then, wondering what all this could possibly mean, these two go back to where they had been staying.

"But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb and... stooped to look into the tomb."

Now the scene becomes far more startling. She sees two angels sitting where the body of Jesus had been placed. They ask her why she is weeping. She answers them. And before another word is said, Mary turns to see someone behind her. She thinks that he will be the gardener. She explains her distress to him. And all He says in response is "Mary."

O, how her heart thrilled with joy inexpressible. Now she has her loving "Teacher" back. Everything - she is convinced - will soon be as it was before. With the others she can follow him, listen to his gracious words and serve him with her earthly goods. But Mary must be taught a very necessary and painful lesson. She, too, must not hold on to him as before. His earthly ministry has been accomplished. Far greater glory must now be his. He will ascend to the highest heavens, the place from which He had come to be born at Bethlehem. And with this she - the first to be so blessed - becomes the first to see with her own eyes the resurrected Savior and Lord. With that blessed experience she can witness to the rest.

Yes, a painful lesson indeed, very likely the hardest one she ever had to learn. And so also for us. Wonderful is all that our Lord Jesus has done on earth for his people. Far greater and more glorious, however, is that work which He is now doing from heaven for everyone who turns to him in simple faith-obedience. He applies personally to them that salvation which He earned on the cross. That is the blessed gospel which has cheered the hearts of millions ever since.

A Few Comments

Hold On: Older translations have "touch" which fails to give the true sense of the word.

Magdalene: Early some scholar identified this Mary as the unknown sinner who had earlier washed Jesus' feet (Luke 7). This is completely erroneous.

Tomb: Here a cave in the hillside; a place where the body would not be corrupted by coming into contact with the ground.

For Your Discussion

1. Why would the devil, claiming to be "prince of this world," use also this means to show his control over people? Does this happen today?

2. Discuss, especially with older girls, the danger of the occult and of Satan worship in our day.

3. How would you trace the events of that first Easter day?

4. Why must we connect closely our Lord's death, resurrection and ascension? Why is also the ascension, forgotten by many in the churches, so very important for our comfort?

