

# Gospel and Signs of the Times

## Outline

1. Questions and Answers on Signs
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## 1. Questions and Answers on Signs

*Matt 24:1-3 Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 2 "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "Truly, I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down". 3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"*

**The disciples asked Jesus two questions in Matt 24:3.**

Question 1: **When** will the destruction of the Temple happen?

Question 2: **What** will be the sign of His Second Coming and the end of the age?

*Matt 24-25 (Mark 13 and Luke 21) is also called the Olivet discourse because Jesus delivered it on the Mount of Olives just east of Jerusalem. This happened only two days before the Passover and Crucifixion (Matt 26:2).*

**Question and Answer 1:** When will the Temple in Jerusalem be destroyed? Jesus answered briefly in Matt 24:2 but elaborated in Luke 21:20-24.

*Luke 21:20-24 "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations.*

*Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.*

This was fulfilled in AD 70 when the Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem and did what this passage said. The invading Roman soldiers even toppled every Temple stone to scrape the melted gold between the stones when the Temple was set on fire. Ever since Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem in 605 BC, Gentile forces occupied the city except for a very brief period. However, since 1967, the

Israeli

Jews recaptured Jerusalem and occupied it — indicating that the times of the Gentiles are possibly over.

**Question and Answer 2:** What will be the sign of His Second Coming and the end of the age? Jesus answered it in *Matt 24:4-28*, wherein He gave some **General Signs** and some **Specific Signs**.

## **2. General Signs during Church Age (Matt 24:4-13)**

The general signs that occur in the Church Age (30 AD to Second Coming) occur increasingly since the early church days:

*Matt 24:4-13 Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. 6 You*

*will*

*hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are the beginning of birth pains. 9 "Then you will be handed*

*over*

*to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because*

*of me. 10 At that time, many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 13 but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.*

*Matt 24:4-5 Many false Christs have claimed unusual powers since the early Church. They were exposed, but new ones have appeared.*

*24:6-7 Wars and rumours of wars have always occurred in human history.*

*However, their frequency and intensity will increase. There will be another end-time war (Rev 16:13-16) before the Second Coming.*

*24:7 Pestilence is increasing despite medical breakthroughs, e.g. AIDS, Cancer, Covid etc.*

Famines and Earthquakes are frequently occurring these days. However, an end-time earthquake will be so massive that it will devastate the nations' cities before the Second Coming (Rev. 16:18-20).

24:9-10 Since 1900, Christians have been persecuted more than ever.

24:11 False prophets, false doctrines have arisen, e.g. Jehovah's Witness, Mormons etc.

24:12 Many who claim to be Christians have grown so worldly and have little love for the Lord and each other. However, he that endures to the end by watching his life and doctrine will be saved and not deceived.

### **3. Specific Signs during End Times (Matt 24:14-31)**

*Matt 24:14-31 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. 15 "So when you*

*see*

*standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,'[a] spoken of*

*through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand— 16 then let those*

*who*

*are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17 Let no one on the housetop go down to take*

*anything out of the house. 18 Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. 19 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing*

*mothers! 20 Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. 21 For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning*

*of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. 22 "If those days had not*

*been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will*

*be shortened. 23 At that time, if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!'*

*or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. 24 For false messiahs and false prophets will*

*appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 25 See, I have told you ahead of time. 26 "So if anyone tells you, 'There he*

*is, out in the wilderness,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. 27 For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west,*

*so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 28 Wherever there is a carcass,*

*there*

**Matt 24:14 The gospel will be preached in the entire world.** The end of the age is delayed because of the Lord's mercy as He wants more people to repent and to believe the gospel and thus be saved (2 Pet 3:9). He has entrusted the task of spreading the gospel to us. This is now possible in the 21st Century because of TV and the Internet.

**Matt 24:15-22** There will be a period of great trouble in all the earth called "**The Great Tribulation**".

**24:15** Our Lord Jesus specifically draws our attention to the vision in *Daniel 11-12*. He mentions that the appearance of the abomination that causes desolation (destruction) will trigger the Great Tribulation. The specific signs mentioned in *Matt 24:14-31* and *Dan 11-12* are increasing in intensity both in the Church and the world. People are increasingly giving up following Christ, and many Christians are significantly compromising their lifestyles. **Evil is increasing on the earth very**

**rapidly, and the very foundations of society are being threatened. Life as we knew it in the last fifty years will not return; instead, it seems to worsen every month. I am not a prophet of doom but one who seeks to understand the signs of the times and give hope. Dan 11:32-33 speaks of a people who know their God and will firmly resist the abomination, and they will instruct many. Beloved, be prepared now, draw closer to God and help others to do the same. For in the time of great darkness, there will also be the church's finest hour when the glory of God will shine through the church resulting in a mighty harvest through the preaching of the gospel (Isa 60:2-3).**

**Matt 24:22** The days will be shortened to help humanity survive the trouble.

**24:23-25** Our Lord Jesus warns us that many false Christs and prophets will perform miraculous signs to deceive people, even trying to deceive true believers if possible.

**24:23** There will be premature reports of the Lord's Second Coming.

**24:29** There will be remarkable signs in the heavens just before the second coming.

**24:30** The sign of the Lord Jesus will appear in the sky, and the nations will

mourn

when they see our Lord Jesus come on the clouds in the sky (*Matt 24:30*)

**24:31** The angels will blow a loud trumpet. They will gather the true believers from one end of the heavens to the other.

#### **4. Three additional signs before Jesus' Second Coming**

**(i) The rebellion (a great falling away) occurs (2 Thess 2:3, Rev 22:11)**

This rebellion or great falling away (Greek: *apostasia* meaning something separated or divorced) is the spirit of the end times where there is a great separation between the children of light and the children of darkness, as mentioned in *Isa 60:2* above. "Continue" in *Rev 22:11* means "to a greater degree".

Therefore, the separation of the wicked from the holy will be to a greater degree.

*2 Thess 2:3-4 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. 4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.*

*Rev 22:11 Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let him the holy person continue to be holy.*

**(ii) Anti-Christ in person appears who wants to be called God (2Thess 2:3-4).**

**(iii) Great end-time worldwide revival and awakening** accompanied by a harvest of souls from all nations and many of their rulers (*Isa 60:2-3*).

*Isa 60:2-3 See, darkness covers the earth, and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you, and his glory appears over you. 3 Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*

**Other scriptures:**

*1 Tim 4:1-3 The Spirit clearly says that in later times, some will abandon the faith*

*and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. 2 Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.*

*3 They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, 2 Tim 3:1-5 But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.*

**5. Negative Signs during End Times**

Negative Sign 1: Nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. (Luke 21:25, Matt 24:7). **The era of peace and prosperity of 1960-2010 is over and will not recur again.** This occurs in the war between Russia and Ukraine, the rise of China and increased polarisation worldwide. Pope Francis said this was the beginning of WW III. Also, financial markets are increasingly becoming uncontrollable. Global warming would increase the occurrence of floods.

Negative Sign 2: Many will turn away from the faith...increase of wickedness...

love

of most will grow cold (Matt 24:10-12, 1 Tim 4:1, 2 Tim 3:1-5).

Increase of wickedness: Porn, homosexuality, living without marriage commitment, divorces. Today we are talking of a post-Christian era. Just 100 years ago, there were great revivals in Wales, England, US. Today they have forgotten their heritage.

Negative Sign 3: The trigger to begin the Great Tribulation will be the appearance of the Anti-Christ in person who will declare himself to be God (Mat 24:15, 2 Thes 2:3-4).

## **6. Positive Signs during End Times**

Positive Sign 1: End-time world revival will occur. *Isa 60:1-3 Arise, shine, for your*

*light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. 2 See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you, and*

*his glory appears over you. 3 Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*

Positive Sign 2: Those who know their God will do great exploits and instruct many.

*Dan 11:31-33 And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there*

*the abomination of desolation. 32 Those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall corrupt with flattery; but the people who know their God shall be strong and*

*carry out great exploits. 33 And those of the people who understand shall instruct many (NKJV).*

## **7. Generation in which End Times signs occur (Luke 21:32)**

The generation (in which the signs occur) will only pass away once these signs are fulfilled. We see that the End Times signs arise all around us today. A biblical

Luke 21:32-36 I tell you the truth, **this generation** will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened...34"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you **unexpectedly like a trap**. 35 For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. 36 Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

## **8. Prepare Now**

**Continue increasingly in the right direction:** During this generation — Rev 22:11 *Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy.*" [**continue** (Greek eti) means, to a greater degree]. Therefore, the separation between those perishing and those saved will increase.

**Fear will drive many to make wrong choices** — *hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life (Luke 31:24).*

**Faith will drive many to make the right decision "Watch and Pray"** (Luke 21:36).

**Watch** — is a mind activity to understand the signs of the times.

**Pray** — is a heart activity to engage with God. They will be able to stand up before the Son of Man, meaning they will be strengthened in love for God and His people.

# Gospel and Survey of Future Events

## Introduction

Often, people tell us not to focus on future events because of uncertainty. Instead, they ask us to focus on the gospel. They advise us this way because interpreting future events may often divide us, whereas the gospel will always unite us. But consider also:

(i) Future events are part of the gospel. The most crucial part is that Jesus is coming back, we will be in His presence, and God will complete our full salvation.

We will receive glorified bodies, and God will free us from our struggle with sin.

(ii) Paul planted the church in Thessalonica and was only a few weeks there when he began teaching them the future events surrounding the Second Coming of Christ (1 Thess 4 and 2 Thess 2).

(iii) God revealed the Book of Revelations because He wants us to know of certain

future events to live our lives today confidently.

## There are Six Significant Future Events

1. The Second Coming of Jesus Christ
2. The Rapture
3. The Great Tribulation
4. The Resurrection of the Dead
5. The Millennium
6. The Future Judgments Including Heaven and Hell.

### 1. The Second Coming of Jesus Christ

The Bible accurately informs us of Jesus' Second Coming:

• At the Ascension of Jesus in Acts 1:10-11, *"After he had said this, while they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud hid him from their sight. As they were still staring into the sky while he was going, suddenly, two men in white clothing stood near them and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come back in the same way you saw him go into heaven'".*

• When Jesus taught His disciples in Matt 24:30-31, *"At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they*



*will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.*

• In Rev 1:7, *"Look! He is returning with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes on the earth will mourn because of him. This will certainly come to pass! Amen".* (Rev 19:11-16 describes the majestic climax of Jesus' return as King of kings and Lord of lords).

## **2. The Rapture**

The Rapture refers to an event in the future when believers in Jesus Christ who are alive at the time of the 2nd Coming will be taken into heaven without physically dying. Those believers who had died will rise from the dead, and all those in Christ will receive immortal bodies. Rapture is from the Latin word 'rapturo', which means to be "caught up." All evangelicals agree that the Rapture will happen. However, **they differ about the timing of the Rapture in relation to the Great Tribulation and the 2nd Coming of Christ.**

There are two primary passages on the Rapture in Paul's writings.

• 1 Thess 4:15-17 *"For we tell you this by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the Coming of the Lord, will surely not go ahead of those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord, himself, will come down from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be suddenly **caught up** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord."*

• 1 Co 15:51-52 *"Listen, I will tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in a moment, in the blinking of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."*

## **3. The Great Tribulation**

It refers to a time of great global suffering that comes just before the 2nd Coming of the Lord.

• Jesus stated in Matt 24:21-22, *"For then there will be **great suffering** unlike anything that has happened from the beginning of the world until now, or ever will happen"*.

• John writes in Rev 7:13-14, *"Then one of the elders asked me, "These dressed in long white robes - who are they and where have they come from?" So I said to him, "My lord, you know the answer." Then he said to me, "These are the*

*ones who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb!"*

The Great Tribulation" lasts seven years (Dan 9:27, Rev 13:5). It is a time of God's wrath (Rev 6:17). It involves at least three series of judgments from God toward the world that are global (seals, trumpets and bowls mentioned in Rev 6 to 18); The suffering and conflict will be more severe than has ever been seen (Matt 24:21-22). It involves great evil driven by the Devil, the Antichrist and the False Prophet (2 Thess 2:3-4, Rev 12-13). People must repent, worship God, or follow evil and receive consequences.

#### **4. The Resurrection of the Dead and Glorified Bodies**

The foundation of our Christian faith is the death and resurrection of Christ, which is the firstfruits of the resurrection of believers, which takes place when the Rapture takes place. (See point 2: The Rapture, 1Thess 4:15-17).

- Paul writes in 1 Cor 15:20, "*But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep*". Fallen asleep symbolises Christians who had died but will wake up again in the resurrection with a glorious imperishable spiritual body like Jesus.

- Paul describes it in 1 Cor 15:42-44, "*It is the same with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body*".

#### **5. The Millennial Reign of Christ**

The word Millennium comes from *mille* (in Latin means 1000). Here it refers to the 1000-year reign of Christ on earth, mentioned six times in Rev 20:1-7

*Rev 20:1-6 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the Abyss and locked and sealed it over him to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. 4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand*

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*years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy are those who have a part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. 7 When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison.*

There are three major views related to the millennial reign of Christ. They are termed amillennial, postmillennial, and premillennial.

## 6. Future Judgments

There are two basic types of judgments described in the Bible, one for believers and one for unbelievers. The gospel is the defining factor. Jesus stated in

*John*

*3:18, "The one who believes in him is not condemned. The one who does not believe*

*has been condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God".*

The final judgment and condemnation of unbelievers is sometimes called the

great

white throne judgment.

• *Rev 20:11-15 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books...15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

There is also a final judgment and reward for believers in Jesus Christ. This judgment is not related to whether or not a Christian gets into heaven but

rather the reward that awaits when one gets there (ref 1 Cor 3). It is also called the **Bema judgment** (bema in Greek means judgment seat)

• *2 Cor 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat (Gk. Bema) of Christ, so that each one may be paid back according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or evil.*

• *1 Cor 3:10-15 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 their work will be shown for what it is because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. 14 If what has been built survives, the builder*

*will receive a reward. 15 If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.*

**What is hell like?** The Greek word for hell is *Gehenna*. It is a place of:

- fire (Matt 13:30, Luke 3:17);
- weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 8:12);
- darkness (Matt 8:12);
- separation from God (1 Thess 1:9) and
- eternal destruction (2 Thess 1:9).

From these verses and others, it is clear that the Bible pictures hell as a place of conscious eternal torment.

On the converse side, **what is heaven like?** It is a place where there is

- Continuous praising of God in his presence by saints and angels (Rev 4-5). Paul says that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (1 Cor 5:8).
- No more sin, death, crying or pain (Rev 21:4).
- We will be in resurrected eternal bodies.
- Heaven is a place with Jesus and our fellow saints forever (1 Thess 4:17).

God will create a new heaven and new earth for us to live in (Rev 22).

The tree of life gives healing to the nations, and God's glory lights the new creation (Rev 22:1-5).

**Question: What happens to human beings after death?**

*Heb 9:27-28 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.*

The universal experience of fallen humanity is death, final and unrepeatable, followed by judgment. The human soul/spirit will separate from the corpse immediately after death. Then three categories arise:

(a) **The soul/spirit of NT believers will be with the Lord** (2 Cor 5:6, Luke 23:43)

*2 Cor 5:6-8 Therefore, we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord [complete intimacy with the Lord is impossible on earth]. 7 We live by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. (Luke 23:43 Jesus says to the thief, "Today you will be in paradise")*

(b) **The soul/spirit of the OT righteous will be at Abraham's side, the good side of Sheol** (Luke 16:22)—a place of blessedness or even heaven. After Jesus' resurrection, these saints will undoubtedly be in heaven with the Lord.

(c) **The soul/spirit of all unrighteous and unbelievers will be on the bad side of Sheol** (Luke 16:23), awaiting the final judgment (the great white throne judgment in Rev 20:11-15) and sent to hell.

**Sheol** is the OT word, and **Hades** is the NT word — for the place for the dead.

# Gospel and Hell

## Outline

1. Hell is Biblical
2. Hell teaches of this life and the next.
3. Hell teaches God's justice that gives you peace
4. Hell teaches God's love that gives you security

### 1. Hell is Biblical

The Bible teaches that.

(i) Everyone will exist eternally, either in Heaven or Hell: *Matt 25:46 Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.* (also, John 5:28, Rev 20:14-15)

(ii) Everyone has only one life on earth. God will judge us on earth and send us to Heaven or Hell. *Heb 9:27 Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.*

(iii) Jesus is the only way to heaven (John 14:6). Therefore, trusting in Jesus or not will determine our eternal destiny in Heaven or Hell: *John 3:16, 36 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life... 36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.*

For the past 2000 years, every Christian denomination has believed this teaching is biblically accurate. But many people cannot imagine a loving God would make a horrible place like eternal Hell to punish man for sin. So, they have three theories:

- Hell is when a person ceases to exist after death — against (i) above.
- Hell is permanent, but God gives a 2nd chance to repent in Hell — against (ii).
- Hell is temporary, and God will eventually save everybody — against (iii).

The person who talks most about Hell in Scripture is our Lord Jesus. In fact, except for James 3:6, Jesus is the only one who even uses the word Hell (Gehenna, which means Valley of Hinnom). The Canaanites worshipped Baal and the fire-god Molech in this valley by sacrificing their children in a continuous fire. Even Ahaz and Manasseh, kings of Judah, were guilty of this terrible practice (2 Chron 28:3; 33:6). But King Josiah ended this worship. (2 Kings 23:10).

In Jesus' time, people used the Valley of Hinnom as the garbage dump of Jerusalem. They threw all the filth and garbage of the city, including the dead

bodies of animals, executed criminals into this valley, and lit constant fires to burn them. Worms thrived in filth.

Jesus used this awful scene as a symbol of Hell. In effect, He said, "Do you want to know what the Hell is like? Look at the Valley of Hinnom (Gehenna) — *"where their worm does not die, and fire is not quenched"* (Mark 9:48).

Some people question whether Hell has actual fire or is fire symbolic. But remember, the reality is greater than the symbol. The Bible cannot find human language to describe either Heaven or Hell. Heaven is more glorious than we can see, hear or conceive (1 Cor 2:9). Hell is more terrible than the language expressed in the Bible.

## **2. Hell teaches of this life and the next.**

Read the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). We divide the parable into the story (Lk 16:19-22) and the dialogue (Lk 16:23-31).

**The story teaches of this life (Luke 16:19-22):** There were two men — one very rich and one very poor and weak whose name was Lazarus. The rich man dressed in purple (purple dye was expensive) and fine linen (worn as undergarments). He lived every day in luxury, housed in a compound with a gate. Lazarus was very poor and weak that he couldn't even beg at the marketplace but lay at the rich man's gate. It was a custom for wealthy Jews to feed the poor Jews. But Lazarus longed to eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table (which generally would feed dogs — Matt 15:27). It showed that the rich man was uncaring. Even the dogs showed compassion to Lazarus and licked his sores. Both men died—the rich man woke up in Hell, but angels carried Lazarus to a place of honour at Abraham's side (Lk 16:22-23). Abraham is the father of the covenant people of God.

One principle this parable **doesn't** teach is that the rich go to Hell and the poor go to Heaven. Many wealthy people in the Bible, like Abraham, Lot, Esther, Philemon, and Theophilus, were godly. Many poor people mentioned in Proverbs were wicked — where laziness, drunkenness, and debauchery led to their poverty. The principle of this parable is in *Luke 16:13 No one can serve two masters.*

*Either*

*you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."*

Whenever there is competition, something always wins. Whatever wins in your life becomes your god, which you pursue, serve, and **highly value**. It becomes the measure of how you judge your success and by which you rank yourself compared

to others and justify yourself before others, making you worthy of their respect. Then things that you highly value become idols in your life (Col 3:5). It is detestable in God's sight (Luke 16:15). It breaks God's greatest commandment to love Him with all your hearts, soul, strength and mind and love neighbour as yourself (Luke 10:27).

*Luke 16:15 He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight.*

**So then, how do you manage wealth and talents?** Be a steward that uses wealth, talents, or gifts as an investment for life after death. Read the parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16:1-12. The fundamental principle is that if God blessed you with certain valuable assets, then manage them with integrity and invest them in God's kingdom. But suppose you think they are your own to give

you

self-worth, value and importance with others (justify yourself in the eyes of others). In that case, it becomes detestable in God's sight. What you do with material blessings in this life reflects where your heart is, and what you cherish the most in your life becomes your god. Therefore, even the **good things** God gives you, like money, talents, intelligence, beauty, family, and strength, can prevent you from seeing your need for a Saviour. Suppose you make the good things the most important things in your life to give you identity, without which you feel you're nothing — then, it is idolatry, making it more valuable than your need for God.

This parable is about two men— the poor one has a name (Lazarus), and the rich man is nameless. Lazarus means "One whom God helps" or one who depends on God for help (My help comes from the Lord—Ps 121), which made all the difference. God honoured Lazarus. The rich man depended on his wealth on earth for his identity. He ended up in Hell and remained nameless throughout eternity.

**The dialogue teaches of the after-life (Luke 16:23-31):**

**Lk 16:23** The rich man wakes up after death in the torment of Hell and sees Lazarus far away at Abraham's side. The shocking thing is that the rich man doesn't cry, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I beg you, let me out". He doesn't repent and doesn't ask for forgiveness. **No one in Hell can repent because the Holy Spirit is absent there. He gives us the grace to repent and believe the gospel**

(John

**16:8-11) while we live on earth.** Without grace, man's heart is set on self-



centeredness that can only grow in eternity, making man a horror. Hell is an eternal horror movie that is real.

**Lk 16:24** The rich man doesn't address Lazarus throughout his dialogue. But he addresses Abraham and asks him to send Lazarus to serve him with a little water to ease his agony. He still thinks of his self-importance and Lazarus as a servant.

**Lk 16:25-26** Abraham replies that **the boundaries are fixed**. No one can cross over from one to the other. Abraham also tells the rich man to remember the life on earth that caused his heart to be stuck on "good things".

**Lk 16:27-29** Then the rich man tells Abraham to send Lazarus a message to the rich man's five brothers to warn them of Hell. He still is self-centred. He doesn't repent or ask Lazarus for forgiveness but treats him like an errand boy sent on his behalf with a message. Abraham replies that they have Moses and the Prophets. Abraham refers to **the scriptures as a witness**; if they don't believe them, they won't believe Lazarus.

**Lk 16:30-31** Then the rich man tries to correct Abraham, saying that the scriptures won't be sufficient, but a resurrection of Lazarus will make his brothers repent. Abraham replies that if they don't heed the scriptures, they won't heed a resurrection. This happened when Jesus resurrected a real man, Lazarus, in front of a crowd. Some still disbelieved in Him (John 11:46). Later, Jesus Himself rose from the dead (John 20), yet people do not believe in Him till today. They do not believe they need a Saviour. Why? Because they believe in themselves.

Of course, spending life eternally in Hell would frighten anybody. But since they don't believe they need a Saviour, they think they would not go there if there is ever a hell.

### **3. Hell teaches God's justice that gives you peace**

Many wonder how a God of love can pass such a harsh judgment as an eternal hell. While we can sympathise with them, we say they don't understand the doctrine of Hell. God does not impose Hell on people "*Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9).

When Abraham looks at the rich unrepentant man in Hell (Luke 16:25), he calls him, "Son", showing tragedy and sadness. God does not look down on people on their way to Hell with contempt but with sorrow, even though they remain unrepentant.

**God of justice:** We have heard of horrible wars. I have witnessed Hindu- Muslim riots in Mumbai. People are killed, women are raped, and families and homes are destroyed. How can we stop them from taking revenge? We know that retaliation will inevitably set the cycle of violence against each other to go on and on. We can tell them, "Oh, violence is not the answer because it doesn't solve anything". But such words will not touch their hearts because it shows no concern for justice.

The only resource powerful enough to soothe the human heart's desire for justice and keep us from the endless cycle of violent revenge is to believe in the God of justice, who will make everything right in the end. If you don't believe in God's justice, you will inevitably enter the cycle of violent revenge. But believing in God's justice is the only resource strong enough to live in peace in this world. *Rom 12:17-19 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at*

*peace*

*with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay."*

#### **4. Hell teaches that God's love gives you security**

We notice the rich man continued to be self-centred and unrepentant even in Hell. So, the fear of Hell will not change the human heart, which is selfish and self-centred. Abraham knew sending Lazarus with the news of Hell would not change his five brother's hearts. So, what will change our hearts? **Only the gospel will change our hearts.** The gospel is the good news that **Jesus came to die for our sinful, self-centred hearts out of infinite love for us.** Dying on the cross, He suffered judgment on our behalf. There was supernatural darkness for 3 hours from noon to 3 pm, symbolic of judgment (Luke 23:44). He cried, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me" (Mark 15:33-34). He was buried and rose again on the third day, having paid for our sinful hearts. When we believe in Him, we receive His forgiveness, righteousness (2 Cor 5:21), and **a new heart and spirit** to follow His ways (Ezk 36:25-27). We become children of God, whom the Father loves as much as He loves Jesus (John 17:23, 15:9).

**Conclusion:** Even as I write and preach this sermon, I fear God for everybody. For I know death is sure, and we are destined only to die once and after death to face judgment (Hebrews 9:27). The Bible tells us God is not slow to keep His promise (of judgment). He does not want anyone to perish but to repent and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:9). Therefore, I implore you, on Christ's behalf, to be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:20).

# Gospel and Heaven

## Outline

### 1. Resurrected Bodies in Heaven

(a) Our resurrected bodies will be like Jesus' glorious resurrected body

(b) Five qualities of our resurrected bodies

(c) Each believer will receive a different measure of glory in their resurrected body

### 2. Life in Heaven

(a) God's eternal purpose is for heaven to join earth.

(b) Inside view of New Jerusalem

(c) Life inside the New Jerusalem

## 1. Resurrected Bodies in Heaven

The gospel is that Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead; thus, all who believe in Him will be raised from the dead. The Bible teaches us that God will give us a resurrected body similar to Jesus'.

*1 Cor 15:2-4, 20, 49 By this **gospel** you are **saved**, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. 3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that **Christ died** for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that **he was raised** on the third day according to the Scriptures... 20But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, **the firstfruits** of those who have fallen asleep.... 49 And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.*

**(a) Our resurrected bodies will be like Jesus' glorious resurrected body.** The firstfruits is like a guaranteed prototype of what follows. Therefore, God will give us a resurrected body like the glory of Jesus' resurrected body.

*Phil 3:21 And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will **transform** our lowly bodies so that they will be **like his glorious body**.*

**Jesus' resurrected body radiates glory** (Matt 17:2, Rev 1:16).

*Matt 17:2 There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.*

*Rev 1:16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.*

**Our resurrected bodies will radiate glory** (Dan. 12:3; Mt. 13:43).

*Dan 12:3 Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.*

*Matt 13:43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.*

**Let us examine what the Bible tells us about Jesus' Resurrected body**

Jesus could veil His glory—fully or partially. At times, Jesus was not recognised as He veiled His resurrection glory (Lk. 24:16, 31). He could suddenly appear or vanish from sight. Jesus' resurrected body has "supernatural flesh" with bones and the capacity to eat food.

*Luke 24:15-43 [On the road to Emmaus] As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognising him...31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight... 33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem... 35 Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognised by them when he broke the bread. 36 While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. 38 He said to them...39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." 40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. 41 And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate it in their presence.*

**(b) Five qualities of our resurrected physical body that will affect all of our abilities.** There is a connection between our earthly physical body that dies and our resurrected physical body. The resurrected physical body will have each person's unique personality and appearance brought to complete perfection.

*1 Cor 15:42-53 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable; it is raised **imperishable**; 43 it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in **glory**; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in **power**; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a **spiritual body**...53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with **immortality**.*

- (i) **Perishable, but raised in imperishable:** Vitality and strength replace sickness and decay.
- (ii) **Dishonor, but raised in glory:** Purity and honour replace failure, shame, and dishonour.
- (iii) **Weakness, but raised in power:** Safety and strength replace pain, vulnerability, and addiction.
- (iv) **Natural body, but raised a spiritual body:** Supernatural capacities replace natural limitations.
- (v) **Mortality puts on immortality:** Unending life and love replace physical death and loss.

This means we will have bodies that are recognisably ours but unimaginably better than we always wished we had on Earth.

**(c) Each believer will receive a different measure of glory in their resurrected body.**

*1 Cor 3:10-15* By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 his work will be shown for what it is because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. 15 If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

*1 Cor 15:41-42* 1 The sun has one kind of splendour, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendour. 42 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead.

*Matt 5:19* Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

## **2. Life in Heaven**

**(a) God's eternal purpose is for heaven to join earth.**

**Heaven** is the supernatural realm where God's presence is openly manifested.

**Earth** is the physical realm where natural processes, human emotion, and physical sensation reach full expression. Jesus will return to establish His kingdom rule over all the earth as He joins the heavenly and earthly realms.

God's purpose has always been to live with His people *face-to-face*. The New Jerusalem will descend to Earth and be our dwelling place (Rev. 3:12; 21:2, 10). Jesus and His people will rule the Earth with the *natural processes*, not *suspended*, but *enhanced supernaturally* by the Holy Spirit — as when Jesus appeared after His resurrection (Jn. 20-21).

*Rev 21:1-2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them...10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. (also Rev 3:12)*

*Eph 1:9-10 He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*

#### **(b) Inside the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22).**

The New Jerusalem is the ultimate *Garden of Eden*. It described its beauty (21:22-27) and close communion with Jesus (22:1-5), who illuminates the City (21:23; 22:5). This city of splendour (21:9-11) is almost 2200 kilometres in length, height, and width with walls about 65 meters or 200 feet thick (21:15-17) that are made of precious stones (21:18-20).

*Rev 21:9-27 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. 11 It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. 12 It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. 13 There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. 14 The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. 15 The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. 16 The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. 17 The angel measured the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits thick. 18 The wall was made of*

*jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. 19 The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst 21 The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass. 22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. 24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it. 25 On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. 26 The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. 27 Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.*

### **(c) Life inside the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:1-5) i**

*There will be the river of life (22:1) and the tree of life (22:2), and face-to-face communion with God (22:4) that points back to life in the Garden of Eden.*

*Rev 22:1-5 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of*

*the*

*great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3 No longer will there be any curse. The throne*

*of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.*

### **Believers will enjoy eating and drinking with Jesus in the New Jerusalem.**

*Luke 22:15-30 And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." ... 18 For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."...29 And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, 30 so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

**With joy, we will remember our relationships with people**

*1Thess 2:19 What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?*



# Gospel and Marriage (Overview)

## Introduction:

Those who listen to or read this sermon would be in one of the categories below

- Married and look interested to know more
- Married and having some real hurting problems
- Divorced and are now single, but some are hurting badly
- Single and have romantic dreams of getting married, hurt about being single, fearful of getting married, or have decided to remain single.

Marriage is God's idea. He instituted it from the time He created human beings. Since marriage is God's idea, He gives His power and grace to all human beings to have a successful marriage, and we see evidence of this fact in successful marriages of people of different faiths or no faith. I will quote extensively from the Bible (especially from Ephesians 5-6 and Genesis 2) to bring three biblical principles of marriage. However, the principles in themselves are universal and equally applicable to everyone. I invite everyone to view marriage through the lens of these three principles. As we go along, I will speak also about the power of the gospel and the life of Christ that empowers a Christian marriage.

## Outline: Three Principles of Marriage

1. The Principle of Submission
2. The Principle of Companionship
3. The Principle of Covenant

### 1. The Principle of Submission

*Ephesians 5:21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

Taken in context, this verse comes after the teaching on being filled with the Holy Spirit of God (Eph 5:1-20). A person filled with the Spirit of God will exhibit the fruit of submission in all relationships with other people—in marriage (Eph 5:22-33, between spouses), at home (Eph 6:1-4, parent-children) and at work (Eph 6:5-9, employer-employee). The Greek word for "**reverence**" is *Phobos*, from which we get the English word phobia, which means fear. We submit to one another in all relationships out of reverence for God (or fear of God) because we are all made in His image. This is clearly stated in Eph 6:9 *And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favouritism with him.* Christians must take this command more seriously because Christ died for us all.

All human beings hate to submit because we are born selfish and self-centred. Selfishness and self-centeredness are related because both come by thinking of yourself and not caring much about others. But in the army, it's vital that you quickly learn to put aside your self-centeredness and be part of the whole unit.

And to do that, you lose control over most of your desires, like your schedule, food and dress preferences, and even your independence. Nobody can be part of an army unit unless everyone, commander and soldiers alike, submit their self-centeredness for the success of the greater whole. They are intensely trained to lose their self-centeredness for this purpose — and it's a deadly matter if they don't.

But we are applying this biblical principle given in Eph 5:21 to marriage. Without each marriage partner putting aside their in-born self-centeredness and submitting to one another, the marriage will run into deep problems, and the romance between them is the first casualty. Putting aside self-centeredness is a sacrifice made for a marriage to succeed. But sacrifice is what is offered in worship. Greater the sacrifice, the deeper the worship. In marriage, each partner becomes a living sacrifice. Marriage, therefore, is an intense training ground for holiness. The Bible says, "*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship*" (Romans 12:1).

Three possibilities occur in a marriage concerning submission.

(a) Both partners will not sacrifice their self-centeredness and blame the other instead, even after much counselling. The marriage fails if they persist in their selfish ways. At best, they vote for peace between them and retain their self-centeredness. But their romance is lost. At worst, they remain married, but with constant warfare raging. Then besides destroying their romance, they also ruin their children too. The alternative is to go for divorce, which grieves God who instituted marriage. (There are biblical reasons for divorce — like unfaithfulness, desertion and violence).

(b) One partner continually sacrifices, while the other doesn't. The Bible commends such a sacrificing partner. And with God's grace, there is every possibility that the other partner will appreciate and change.

(c) Each partner works on their own self-centeredness without insisting that the other does. This is the best case. The marriage is a romantic and enjoyable success, and God is pleased and glorified.

As I said before, the principle of submission works irrespective of whether the partners are Christians or people of other faiths or no faith. Marriage is God's idea for everyone. He is interested that every marriage is a success, and He gives grace for its success. But I also want to say that no one can be unselfish and non-self-centred apart from God's help.

Everyone is created in God's image and has equal worth and value. But there are roles in every relationship and Ephesians 5-6 talks about them. In a marriage, the roles are husband and wife (Eph 5:22-33). In a family, the roles are parent and children (Eph 6:1-4). In a workplace, the roles are employer and employee (Eph 6:5-9). The principle of mutual sacrificial submission also carries responsibility in each role for the success of each unit. Parents are responsible for sacrificing their self-centeredness for the family's success and the children's growth. Likewise, in an army, the commander for the success of his unit. And as the saying goes, on a ship, the captain goes down with the ship — he gives his life.

In the Church, Christ is the head, and He loves the Church and gives Himself up for her on the cross (Eph 5:2, 25). The Bible says husbands must love their wives as Christ loved the Church (Eph 5:25, 28). Christ made the sacrifice

before

we could. He died on the cross while we were still sinners, while we were His enemies, to reconcile us to God. This is gospel. With Christ as the example, we can see the roles of the husband and wife. The husband sacrifices by putting aside his self-centeredness without waiting for his wife to do so. He loves and lives for his wife. The wife submits to her husband as the church submits to Christ by laying aside her self-centeredness to respect and encourage the vision and role of her husband—to be the family's provider, protector and leader. Is a Christian marriage consistently successful? No, not unless Christ is the centre

of

the marriage and each partner meditates daily on the gospel. There is power in the gospel of Jesus Christ. He made the ultimate sacrifice.

## **2. The Principle of Companionship**

*Gen 2:18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."*

Some people say that loneliness is not a good reason to get married. But God says it is not good for man to be alone. Before He could create Eve, God allowed Adam to be occupied with naming numerous animals till Adam was fed up because he was still lonely (Gen 2:19-20). So, it's a good reason to get married if you are single and lonely. Many old friends of mine find themselves lonely because their

spouse has died. Though people chuckle at you when you marry at 70, it remains a good and godly idea.

But in the principle of companionship in marriage, there is this word, "**suitable**". God's idea of a suitable partner is that the partner must be of the opposite gender. That's why God created Eve as a suitable helper for Adam.

Same-sex marriage is not biblical.

**Suitable** would include spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional compatibility. And these compatibilities are essential for substantial and lasting intimacy in marriage. **Your spouse must be your best friend**—one who will understand you, help you, stand with you, and be faithful to your marriage vows throughout your life, in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, till death puts you apart.

But, for whatever reason, if you make someone of the opposite gender a better friend than your spouse, you are substantially damaging your intimacy with your spouse. This may not be adultery, but undoubtedly emotional unfaithfulness. And you are treading a dangerous path towards adultery. Adultery is breaking your marriage covenant and is a ground for divorce. However, it is normal and not damaging to have close friendships with others of the same gender because such friendships can never be compared to companionship within marriage.

Most people marry when they are young when sexual appetites and romantic emotions run high. God gives these appetites and emotions to bind your marriage with intimacy and sexual pleasure and to raise godly children. If these appetites and romantic feelings are not carefully filtered through the word "suitable", then one is faced with the consequence, "Love is blind, and marriage is an eye opener". And then it's too late. Therefore, it is good for a single person to wait upon God in prayer for a suitable partner and simultaneously seek advice from parents and church leaders (or religious or community leaders if you are not a Christian). For a Christian, spiritual compatibility must begin with choosing a suitable partner who is also a Christian (2 Cor 6:14).

**How do you make your spouse your best friend?** By embracing the principle of companionship as your highest priority. But it's easier said than done because each partner brings a lot of emotional baggage and expectations into marriage, and it takes years of hard work and adjustment to develop such a deep friendship with your spouse. But it is worth it, and God is on your side at every step. The hard work is worth it because, besides God, a strong marriage is a vital resource to face every criticism and challenge the world throws at you. But if your

marriage

is weak, no matter how successful you are in the world, you will feel the ache of regret deep down in your heart.

Tom Marshall gives four components to developing a good relationship with anybody, especially with your spouse—Love, Trust, Respect and Understanding. I will briefly comment on each.

**Love** is like a rubber ball. It can survive many offences, slip-ups and troubles and retain its shape, provided you are willing to forgive or ask for forgiveness by saying sorry. But if you cannot forgive or say sorry, love loses shape and shine and grows dim. Jesus calls us to forgive seventy times seven and forgives our countless offences against Him as we repent. When I look at the cross, I see His love for me. It causes me to melt every hardness in my heart. The Bible commands a husband to love his wife to the extent of laying down his life for her the way Christ loves His church. A wife thrives on her husband's love; she finds security in it. God has created her that way. A wife is grieved enormously when a husband flirts with other women. When the flirtation grows serious, wives are driven to despair, and some even commit suicide.

But **trust** is like a glass pane. Once broken, humanly, it is impossible to repair, despite tears of repentance. It has to be renewed. This means it is vital, to begin with, that you remain faithful and trustworthy in your relationship with your spouse. God forbid, but if you break trust, you must start again to earn your trustworthiness back—and that takes a very long time. Nevertheless, God's grace

and encouragement are always there for our failures. The cross speaks to us of that. Jesus died on the cross to pay for every moral failure in our life.

We must **respect** and honour each other because human beings are all made in God's image and equal in God's sight. Respect and honour are communicated through words and actions. Some people find that difficult and wonder why their relationships are not strong. This is especially true with husband and wife. They must respect each other as equals in worth and value. A husband makes a blunder if he respects his parents even more than his wife. He will be challenged when he inevitably faces the struggles between his wife and his mother. Then he should choose to respect his wife and be loyal to her. Such challenges are regular in every culture, but especially so in India.

The Bible commands a wife to submit to her husband (Eph 5:22). This command must be considered part of the previous principle of mutual sacrificial submission

between husband and wife. But the Bible gives this sacrificial submission command especially to a wife because it involves respecting and honouring her husband, especially in front of others and encouraging him privately to be the head of the family. God created him that way, and he thrives on his wife's respect and encouragement. A wife that consistently disrespects her husband is like a woman who is not wise but foolish, and with her hands, she tears her house down (Prov 14:1).

**Understanding** is the fourth and most challenging component of a good relationship. It is difficult because it takes patience and humility to be quiet and listen fully to another person with your heart and head — to understand what it is like to stand under the circumstances faced by another. But it is worth it because understanding is precious. The Bible says, "Though it cost you all, get understanding" (Prov 4:7). Therefore, it is vital that you set quality time to be alone with your spouse, especially in the fast-paced world of today — to understand each other and make your spouse your best friend.

### 3. The Principle of Covenant

*Gen 2:24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. (This verse is repeated in Eph 5:31)*

"Cleave unto his wife" means a strong bonding, in other words, a covenant between

husband and wife. Marriage is not a contract; it's a covenant. What is the difference between a contract and a covenant? A contract protects your rights and limits your responsibilities. A covenant sacrifices your rights and increases your responsibilities. Marriage could have many valid purposes, including sexual intimacy, love and companionship in a secure relationship, and having children. But the **essence of marriage is a covenant** between husband and wife. In the Bible, God always relates to us through a covenant relationship. He made a covenant with

us through Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, and finally made a New Covenant through Jesus. And as I said earlier, covenants are about sacrificing rights and increasing responsibilities. Jesus did that for us throughout His earthly life, even

to death on the cross. He calls us to do that in all our relationships, including our marriage.

*Philippians 2:5-8 In your relationships with one another have the same mindset*

*as*

*Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God*

*something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being*

*found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!*

So, marriage is not about 50-50 in sacrifice and responsibilities. It could be a practical commitment to divide responsibilities in some proportions, like 50-50. But it can't be 50-50 in sacrifice. And in any case, it's a commitment that

changes

in different seasons of life. But a covenant is lifelong. The only way for a marriage

covenant to work is for each partner to give 100% to the marriage without expecting any in return. That's what sacrifice is all about. It's sacrificing one's selfishness and self-centeredness and taking 100% responsibility for the marriage. Marriage is full of opportunities to do so. That's why it's an intensive training ground for holiness and becoming like Jesus.

## Gospel and Restoring Shalom

**Meaning of Shalom:** In the Creation story of *Genesis 1*, we repeatedly see God examining His creation and calling it "good", and after He created man and woman, He saw everything and called it "very good" (*Gen 1:31*). In *Prov 8:30-31*, God rejoiced in His creation and delighted in humanity. Cornelius Plantinga, a theologian, calls it **shalom** — "A webbing together of God, mankind, and all creation in justice, harmony, fulfilment, and delight". The Hebrew word "**shalom**" is an essential value of the Kingdom of God. Shalom is far greater than just "peace". Shalom is a **delight in wholeness that flourishes in all aspects of existence and togetherness**. It is a relationship that grows in which God and humanity (individually and in community) and all creation delight in each other. A picture of shalom is like when different colourful threads are woven together tightly to make a rich and beautiful carpet. Besides being the Creator, God is also the source that makes this rich wholeness flourish.

God gave man the earth to rule. We know that the fall of man was humanity choosing to live independently of God and thereby being cut off from the source that makes shalom possible in this world. Without the source, shalom was lost. This is evident by the continual strife and exploitation in world history — strife between nations causing war, strife within families causing pain, exploitation of creation by humanity causing pollution, climate change and scarcity of resources, and exploitation of the weak (women, children, fatherless, widows, poor, strangers etc.) by the rich and the strong. Individual threads in the carpet are coming apart. The rich and beautiful carpet of shalom is no more beautiful. It looks ugly.

Besides God being the Creator bringing in shalom, He is also the Redeemer, restoring the broken shalom. When God redeemed the Jews from slavery in Egypt, He restored shalom. Our Lord Jesus is the true Redeemer, reconciling God and man and between each other in humanity. Shalom is a characteristic of the Trinitarian God, and He is committed to restoring it in His creation.

The Old Testament uses two important words to give us an understanding of God's heart and desire for "shalom" in His creation: **Righteousness** and **Justice**. They are used 68 times in the Old Testament. They are deeply connected and are often



used interchangeably. They are the foundation of God's throne and an indispensable part of knowing God.

*Ps 89:14 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you (also Ps 97:2, Jer 9:23- 24).*

**Righteousness.** When we think of righteousness, we often think of integrity and sexual purity. It is certainly both of these, but also much more. We could sum it all up by saying it is the right way to live so that **shalom prevails** on earth. It means to love God with all your heart, soul and mind and to love your neighbour as yourself. If everybody followed this, we would be aligned with God and avail of His power to live rightly with our neighbour. **Righteousness is, therefore, "Prevailing Shalom"**. But, because of sin, we are not rightly aligned with God in the first place; therefore, it is impossible to be rightly aligned with our neighbour. Then, shalom is destroyed.

Our Lord Jesus is the true Redeemer. He brought peace between God and man and between man and man. The evangelical creed begins with rightly aligning ourselves with God (the source) by repentance and faith in Christ, our Saviour and Lord. It all starts with the gospel that changes our heart from stone to flesh and with having God's law written in our heart, causing us to move in His ways (*Ezk 11:19, 36:26*). But we must remember that His ways are always to restore shalom in His creation.

Therefore, the church must reach out to society both in proclaiming God's word and demonstrating God's heart to restore shalom by deeds of justice and mercy to deliver people from evil in society. **Biblical Justice is "Restoring Shalom"**.

**Biblical Justice.** When we think of "justice," we often think of our fundamental human rights —the right to believe, do and say what we want, etc. — all, of course, without breaking the law of the land. We also think of justice as retributive justice — that is, if a person violates the law of the land, he must be punished accordingly. But biblical justice goes **far** deeper than this. The best way I could define **biblical justice is that it is "restorative shalom"**. Shalom has been continually broken by sin that causes strife, selfishness, greed, exploitation and disparity. Biblical justice must constantly work towards restoring shalom. Once we understand this, we will realise that Biblical Justice is relational and must include mercy and faithfulness (consistent action) towards our fellowmen (*Ps 89:14, 97:2*). Biblical Justice becomes far more than impersonal legislation. Biblical Justice is an essential mark of a right relationship with God.

## **Outline of Biblical Justice (Restorative Shalom)**

1. Biblical Justice is essential to a right relationship with God
2. Biblical Justice is being partial towards the vulnerable sections of society.
3. Biblical Justice is sharing what you have with the poor
4. Biblical Justice is to speak for those who can't speak for themselves.
5. Biblical Justice is being a Good Samaritan
6. Biblical Justice must include conflict resolution between communities.
7. Biblical Justice must have a strong foundation of effective prayer to succeed.

### **1. Biblical justice is essential to a right relationship with God**

Chris Marshall, an eminent Christian and highly respected Professor of Law at Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand, says in his book, "The Little Book of Biblical Justice," — "*Without the commitment to seek justice, all other means of worshipping God are bankrupt. A lifestyle of justice is the essential mark of holiness*".

Marshall's remark is blunt but biblical. *Amos 5:21-24* below tells us of God's people who observed proper religious practices (*verses 21-22*) and even exuberant worship (*v23*) and were yet despised by God because they failed in justice and righteousness (*v24*)

*Amos 5:21-24: I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. 22 Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. 23 Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. 24 But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!*

Our Lord Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for the same reason of being religiously correct but neglecting the indispensable part of biblical justice.

*Matt 23:23 Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices — mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practised the latter without neglecting the former.*

In *Isaiah 58* below, the Lord shows this disconnect between religious practice and observing justice very clearly:

*Isa 58:1-7 "Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the descendants of Jacob their sins. 2 For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. 3 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. 4 Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. 5 Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? 6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"*

v1: God tells Isaiah to declare loudly to His people that they are rebellious, even though they "seemed" to be doing all the right religious things very well. They diligently and daily sought God's face through Bible study, prayer with humble

fasting

(vs 2-3)

But, as mentioned in vs 4-7, they neglected to do **the indispensable parts of having a right relationship with God**—which are:

v4: having a right relationship with fellowmen.

v3b: giving just wages to their workers and not exploiting them.

v6: breaking structures of injustice in society.

v7: feed and clothe the poor, the naked and the refugee (*poor wanderer*) and treat them as a family (*your flesh and blood*).

v6 is essential because not only must we pay just wages (v3), but we must be active in breaking the structures in society that promote or sustain injustice, exploitation and poverty. How can we do that? There are many ways.

**By educating the poor.** Christians (Catholic and Protestant) have been involved institutionally and individually, educating the poor and mentoring the fatherless and underprivileged — for centuries in different parts of the world with excellent results in lifting the poor and breaking the cycle of poverty.

**By social activism:** Historically, we know of Wilbur Wilberforce in Britain around 1800, coming against the obnoxious slave trade, and Martin Luther King Jr. against segregation and racism in the US around 1960. Both Wilberforce and King were excellent evangelical Christians, and both were used tremendously by God.

My close friend and gospel collaborator, Pastor Chandrakant Shourie, a Brahmin convert, worked to help liberate the Lower caste (Shudras) and Outcastes (Dalits) from severe caste oppression in Central India for over 25 years with great danger to himself and his family. He successfully fought over 500 cases of oppression and intimidation through public awareness of biblical justice that the government and bureaucracy had to give in. His work contributed to forever changing the political scenario in Central India, which was till then dominated by upper-caste Hindus.

Liberation Theology, started by a Dominican Catholic priest, *Gustavo Gutiérrez Merino* from Peru, has spread rapidly in South America, especially Brazil, since 1950. Merino popularised "dignity of the poor" and "preferential option for the poor". These phrases are biblically based and adopted by the Catholic Church. They greatly influenced me as I grew up as a Catholic. They still do. Merino taught that doctrine and practice have a circular relationship. Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) said doctrine and practice cannot be equal; doctrine comes first! I agree with Ratzinger's caution because one must first be rightly related to God by repentance and faith in the gospel (doctrine) to push back our inborn selfishness and receive His power to rightly associate with man (practice). At the grassroots level, Liberation Theology, when done without God's power and love, can be mistaken for reactionary Marxism.

**By justice ministries:** These Christian ministries help the state official law enforcement agencies investigate and prosecute criminal networks that deal with the sex-slavery and bonded labour in many countries worldwide. They also care for the victims of these trades. They have been remarkably successful in bringing down

these criminal networks. Sex slavery is the second largest illegal worldwide trade after the drug trade.

## **2. Biblical justice is being partial to the vulnerable sections of society.**

If we have resources, our priority would be to help the weak. Ignoring them would be unjust and wicked, as shown in point 3 below. Why? Because they are most susceptible to exploitation—and not to favour them would be an injustice. God sides

with the poor, the orphan (fatherless), the stranger (refugee), widows, women and children because of their vulnerability. The Old Testament mentions it 38 times, and

several times in the New Testament. Here are some scriptures:

*Deut 10:17-18 For the LORD your God is God of gods and LORD of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. 18 He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow and loves the foreigner, giving him food and clothing.*

*Isa 1:17 Learn to do right! Seek justice and defend the oppressed. Take up the cause*

*of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.*

*James 1:27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look*

*after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

## **3. Biblical Justice is sharing what you have with the poor**

Not to do so would be injustice and offensive to the Lord.

*Prov 29:7 The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no concern. (Also read Prov 28:27, 19:17)*

Bruce K. Waltke, a very senior Evangelical Christian theologian and a Hebrew scholar, says the Hebrew meaning of "wicked" is people who see their resources as belonging to them and them alone. Whereas, in Hebrew, the righteous people see that much of what they have belongs to the community, the wicked say no, it's all mine.

Among Indian Evangelicals, my close friend and gospel collaborator, Pastor Nitin Sardar, who leads Dinbandhu Ministries, is outstanding. Dinbandhu means "Friends of the Poor". They operate in Central India. Nitin has financially supported over 1,000 widows and families of farmers who committed suicide due to crop failure in drought. He has dug over 2000 bore wells for water in drought-affected villages. He runs boarding schools for children of the most downtrodden tribals. He fed over

hundred thousand families in the villages during the pandemic in 2020-22. He has built fishing boats and a refrigerated supply van for the fishermen in the lakes of Central India. And these are just a few I have known among the many Nitin has done.

#### **4. Biblical Justice is to speak for those who can't speak for themselves.**

*Prov 31:8-9 Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."*

I worked amongst the street people of Mumbai for many years, and my eyes opened to notice how vulnerable they were and why we needed to speak and work for them.

Besides being illiterate, most of them couldn't add figures more than ten. They were unemployable and lived by begging, drug peddling and prostitution. They were lawless and trusted no one. They were habitual liars even if there was no profit or danger to tell lies. Many were raped in their early teens (both girls and boys) on the streets at night. They had no one to listen to their complaints. They were emotionally fragmented. They did not know what to do with their dead. They gathered around the corpse and cried till the Municipality came, picked it up like a pile of rubbish, and cremated it. They couldn't avail of the public hospitals because they couldn't fill out the forms, and no one was interested in them. They were faceless because people ignored them daily.

#### **5. Biblical Justice is being a Good Samaritan:**

We all know the parable of the Good Samaritan (*Luke 10:25-37*). But why did Jesus choose religious types (Priests and Levites) and pit them against the behaviour of a Samaritan (people whom the Jews despised for their compromised religion)? Jesus was making a point that there must always be a connection between true religious faith in an individual and compassionate work in reaching out to your disadvantaged neighbour.

Many years ago, I preached a sermon on the Good Samaritan. I made a point between "Primary love and Secondary love". I said that **Secondary Love** is when one gives money to an institution that uses skilled workers to do works of justice, compassion, etc. This is good and must be encouraged. But "**Primary Love**" is when I see a need myself and attend to it myself and not pass by and say I have given money to an institution, and now it's their work and not mine to reach out to meet this need.

The Good Samaritan was showing "Primary Love". Here are some examples of simple acts of primary love that had the Spirit of Christ in the Good Samaritan.

Two young Christian men, around 20 years of age, were having a casual evening stroll in a well-to-do area of South Mumbai. They saw a poor man, probably deranged, soiled in his trousers, insects all around him and people avoiding him. They decided to help. They carried this man to a nearby apartment, knocked on the door, and asked for a bucket of water, soap and a towel. To their surprise, an internationally well-known gentleman opened the door and gave them all they wanted. They bathed the man and restored his dignity.

A young Indian computer engineer immigrated to the US and got a job there. On Sundays, after church, he would go with blankets and food to a dangerous city area where the poor lived. He would take blankets, clothes and food to them. He said he felt the glory of God upon him when he did this.

A middle-aged Christian couple saw a gorgeous young woman and her three-year-old daughter standing on the roadside in Central Mumbai. The young woman was deranged, screaming and yelling the whole time. She was dirty, and her only bath

was

when it rained. No one could approach her. They visited her daily for a week, giving biscuits to the young child. Then, one day, they invited the young woman to their home for a bath. She accepted the invitation, which began her and her daughter's road to rehabilitation. Her daughter is an educated and confident young woman today.

A senior missionary and his team of young disciples would go every Monday morning with coffee and sandwiches and meet the street people in Mumbai as they woke up. One morning, they saw a pregnant woman in labour about to give birth to a child on the street. They rushed to a nearby hospital, but the authorities refused to send their medics because of red tape and liability. Andy asked for some basic medical instruments, medicine and cotton. And with it, he and his team delivered the baby on the street. Later, a young Indian pastor and his wife adopted that miracle baby.

There are many interpretations of *Matt 25:35-46*, the story about the end-time judgment between the sheep and the goats. I would like to include the "Spirit of Christ in the Good Samaritan" among them. I am not suggesting that good works can

save you. For our Lord Jesus is the only Savior. But when Jesus tells us the parable of the Good Samaritan, I believe He meant that true faith in Him will result in His Spirit moving in us, resulting in "Primary Love"— the Spirit of Christ in the Good Samaritan. I would encourage all Christians to seize the opportunity with Primary Love. It's part of Biblical Justice and part of Matt 25:35-36.

#### **6. Biblical justice must include conflict resolution to restore shalom in society.**

Yes, we all know the Matthew 18:15-35 principle of conflict resolution between individuals. It is easy to preach but difficult to practice, leaving unresolved conflicts that linger for decades, even generations. But, disputes between nations and ethnic groups are even more challenging.

Here, I want to relate a personal experience where God used me to resolve a conflict between two very hostile groups in India — between Hindus and Muslims immediately after the Hindu-Muslim Riots in Mumbai in Dec 1992-Jan 1993. Several areas in Mumbai were burning. Curfew was barely lifted, the streets were still deserted, and the Lord told me to go out and meet the riot-affected people. I went to a nearby slum colony, "Tulsiwadi", near Mumbai Central, with 1000 litres of milk given to me by the Salvation Army. A quick survey showed me that 300 hutment homes were burnt to the ground, 250 more were severely damaged but repairable, about 2000 people were homeless but clung to their ground space where their hutments stood, many were injured and needed medical aid, many more were traumatised and needed healing and virtually everybody there was filled with mistrust, bewilderment and anger — both Hindus and Muslims.

I started alone but was later joined by a small team from our church (which was a church of the poor). I worked there for six months, daily from 8 am to 3 pm. I opened a dispensary with the help of a qualified nurse who volunteered. Later, a pastor from another church, a close friend, supplied me with clothes, blankets, grain, utensils, etc.—many essentials needed to start life from nothing. I prayed for the injured, saw remarkable healings, prayed for the traumatised, and saw a smile return to their faces. Then, some senior Muslim and Hindu leaders from the slum colony came to me, and we began to talk. God came in and brought amazing and unbelievable reconciliation. We formed a committee, and I acted as a facilitator. Soon, money started pouring in from various sources. We rebuilt all the 300 hutment homes and



repaired the 250 that were damaged. The quality of the new construction was far superior to what they had before. I estimate the rebuilding and repair cost about Rs. 1 crore (Rs. 10 million or US \$ 250,000) at 1993 prices. It would be considerably more today. Every rupee came from Indian sources -- from the Government, well-wishers, and mainly Muslim charities. But we didn't take anything from the West.

The conflict resolution was so thorough that we had a Sport's Day in the Mumbai University Stadium to celebrate the rebuilding, where over 300 youth of Tulsiwadi Slums, both Hindus and Muslims, participated in athletics, cheered by their parents. The local YMCA graciously gave the prizes and arranged for the referees who were of national stature and felt privileged to volunteer their services.

The main lesson I learnt from this is that the Lord led me to look at the entire project first with eyes of compassion and then **objectively to restore shalom**. I wasn't looking at this project through the evangelical grid.

I revisited Tulsiwadi in 2010, 17 years after the riots, and saw that a measure of shalom still existed. I shot a video with some leading players there and posted it on YouTube. It is slightly over 4 minutes in length. Here is the link if you are interested: <http://bit.ly/1L6URdm>

But if you read the over two hundred thousand comments on the video, you would realise that the hurt and hate in India between Hindus and Muslims persists throughout the country. Against this backdrop, you would appreciate the miracle of God to restore shalom just after an awful riot between the communities in Tulsiwadi.

#### **7. Biblical Justice requires a foundation of effective prayer to succeed.**

Our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the supernatural powers of darkness (*Eph 6:12*). The intensity of hate and unforgiveness between communities in conflict is undoubtedly reinforced by these evil powers. To ignore them and work is futile. Only a strong foundation of effective prayer (righteous, persistent, united, scripture-based, and working with humility) will disarm them.

Again, in 2002, there were widespread Hindu-Muslim riots in Gujarat — about 500 km north of Mumbai. I sent a team of intercessors from Mumbai to quietly walk the streets there, plead God's mercy and pray for communal harmony. After prayer-walking for 8 hours, they returned. That was our commitment to restore shalom.

# Appendix 1 — Funeral Service

## Introduction

There are various situations that a pastor faces when called to **say a few words** or give a **sermon** at a funeral. In India, a pastor may be asked to say a few words after the cremation of a Hindu friend. Sometimes, he may be asked to say a few words at the death of a friend from a Christian background. I will give some suggestions along the way.

More often, however, a pastor has to give a sermon and conduct a funeral service for a person in the church. Here is what I found helpful:

1. ESSENTIALS
2. PRE-FUNERAL PREPARATIONS
3. SUITABLE SCRIPTURES

### 1. ESSENTIALS

**Sermon length:** A funeral sermon in the church should last at most 20 minutes. (Saying a few words at an informal gathering of friends should be much shorter).

**Celebrate the deceased's life:** Say a few good things about the deceased.

**Judgment:** If you are unsure whether the deceased believes in Christ, don't say they are now gone to a better place (like heaven). Though it may comfort the relatives of the dead, it will give false hope. Worse still, it is not the gospel. (But if the deceased underwent a long time of suffering, it is comforting to everyone to acknowledge the relief that the suffering has ceased).

However, even if you are sure the deceased is an unbeliever, don't say the deceased is going to hell. In other words, don't judge life after death unless you are sure the dead is a believer and will go to heaven.

**Grief:** Whether the deceased is a believer or not, you **must** acknowledge that the relatives are grieving. So, saying a few words of comfort and praying for the relatives is essential.

**Words of comfort:** Few people know how to process grief at the death of a loved one. Some unfortunate accidental deaths occur, and often loved ones blame themselves or have regrets for having failed to meet the need of the deceased

when they were alive. But there is a universal truth that the pastor can stress that would bring comfort: God appoints the day of birth and the day of death. When we acknowledge this, then the causes of death become less important. We help grieving relatives see a broader perspective than blaming themselves or others for neglect.

**Long-term grief counselling:** Grief doesn't go away by just using words, however comforting they may be. Silent commitment to listening would be a better option. It will help the grieving to talk about their loss. Some people grieve so much that they don't want to talk about it, even after a month or a year. **Pastoring is always a long-term occupation.** You have to be sensitive in each case. If the grieving relatives are members of your church, then you are responsible for caring for them. Even if they are not your church members, you may still be the best person available to help them. You could act as a trusted friend. In doing so, you are a good witness to the community.

**Focus at the Funeral:** Your focus at the funeral mustn't be on the deceased but on the living. So, a funeral presents an excellent opportunity to give the gospel. **Even amid grief, there is hope in the gospel** — eternal life after death. There is no hope at all without the gospel.

**Worship:** Ask the family if they have any favourite worship songs/hymns they want to be sung. But suggest that they ought to be Christ-centered.

**After worship, you may begin the funeral service with the following words:**

- *Funerals are a stark reminder to us all that we will all face death one day*
- *Funerals remind us that life is short and life is vanity.*
- *Funerals help us stop momentarily and start living with an eternal perspective.*
- *Funerals remind us that man is destined to die once and, after death, face judgment.*
- *Funerals remind us that there is hope only in Christ, in His gospel.*
- *Funerals also remind us that even amid grief, there is hope in the gospel of Christ—eternal life after death. There is no hope without the gospel.*

Such an introduction invariably makes people sit up and hear what you say in the sermon.

**Scripture:** Choose an appropriate scripture to preach the basic gospel message.

**Basic Gospel Outline:**

*God is holy and has given us a conscience to know we are breaking His laws daily, weekly, yearly, even to the day we inevitably die. Then we face His judgment.*

*God is love. And He loved us so much that He sent His One and only Son Jesus, who came on earth, lived a perfect life that we should have lived and then died on*

*the cross to take the judgment we should have. But Jesus rose from the dead on the third day—having paid for our sins and having conquered death.*

*Christianity is unique because we believe good people don't go to heaven. And*

*bad*

*people have every chance to make it to heaven. Jesus says, I am the way, the truth and the life—no one comes to the Father except by Me". So whether you are a very good or horrible person, you need Jesus.*

*Today, you can be sure you are going to heaven if you turn around from the way you are living and from the way you are trusting and turn to Jesus and trust only Him as the way to heaven and make Him your only Lord of your life. Ask Him to forgive you and give you eternal life with Him now and in heaven when you die.*

**Responding to the Gospel message:** You may ask all those attending whether

any

of them would like to respond to the gospel message. (Even if you are asked to say a few words in an informal gathering of friends of the deceased, you may still ask them to respond to the gospel message and ask if they have any questions).

**Prayer:** End the funeral service by praying for the deceased's spouse, children and grandchildren, and friends that they would be comforted by God and find their hope in the gospel.

#### PRE-FUNERAL PREPARATION

Whether you are dealing with the very poor or with the very rich, with the well-educated or with the illiterate, whether with people from the North or South, East or West, in the world — when a person dies, **you are dealing with grief, you are dealing with chaos, and you are dealing with limited time to arrange for burial.** Taking all this into account, as a pastor, you have to conduct the full funeral service, knowing that you represent Christ to the community. **Funerals are not rituals.** Take them seriously!

The following must be done:

- (i) Cause of Death Certificate from a doctor (or) Inquest Report from the Police (Panchnama, in India) along with a post-mortem coroner's report if the person died on the street and a doctor's certificate is not available.
- (ii) A coffin and a hearse must be arranged

(iii) A grave must be dug in the Christian Cemetery

(iv) You must visit the grieving family to assess their emotional, physical and financial support and as a comfort that you are with them in their life ahead.

(v) You may want to display relevant scriptures in the church and print them on a leaflet for distribution among those attending the funeral service.

(vi) Your worship team and your sermon must be ready, as well as what you will say at the burial site in the cemetery.

(vii) You must be early at the church to greet the family when they arrive.

If your church has middle-class members, you would have to concentrate only on items (iv, v, vi and vii). But if your members could be poor and illiterate, you would have to deal with all the above points and arrange the finances. I know this because, for some years, mine were.

### SUITABLE SCRIPTURES

You can use some of the following scriptures to make a funeral leaflet for distribution. Choose anywhere from five to fifteen that you find appropriate for the life of the deceased and the grieving relatives.

#### **Regarding how short our life is on earth**

• *Psalm 89:46-48 How long do we put up with this, God? Are you gone for good? Will you hold this grudge forever? 47 Remember my sorrow and how short life is. Did you create men and women for nothing but this? 48 We'll see death soon enough. Everyone does. And there's no back door out of hell. (The Message)*

• *Psalm 144:3-4 O Lord, what is man that you even notice him? Why bother at all with the human race? 4 For man is but a breath; his days are like a passing shadow. (The Living Bible)*

• *Ecclesiastes 3:11 Everything is appropriate in its own time. But though God has planted eternity in the hearts of men, even so, many cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end. (The Living Bible)*

#### **After Death, there is Judgment.**

• *Heb 9:27-28 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. (NIV)*

#### **Regarding faith in Christ alone**

• Rom 3:22-24 *The God-setting-things-right that we read about has become Jesus-setting-things-right for us. And not only for us but for everyone who believes in him. For there is no difference between us and them in this. 23 Since we've compiled this long and sorry record as sinners (both us and them) and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us, 24 God did it for us. Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of our mess and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ (Message Bible).*

• Romans 5:6-11 *Christ arrives right on time to make this happen. He didn't, and doesn't, wait for us to get ready. He presented himself for this sacrificial death when we were far too weak and rebellious to do anything to prepare ourselves. And even if we hadn't been so weak, we wouldn't have known what to do anyway. 7 We can understand someone dying for a person worth dying for and how someone good and noble could inspire us to selfless sacrifice. 8 But God put his love on the line for us by offering his Son in sacrificial death while we were of no use whatever to him. 9 Now that we are set right with God by means of this sacrificial death, the consummate blood sacrifice, there is no longer a question of being at odds with God in any way. 10 If, when we were at our worst, we were put on friendly terms with God by the sacrificial death of his Son, now that we're at our best, just think of how our lives will expand and deepen by means of his resurrection life! 11 Now that we have received this amazing friendship with God, we are no longer content to say it in plodding prose. We sing and shout our praises to God through Jesus, the Messiah! (The Message)*

• Romans 12:2 *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will. (NIV)*

• Ephesians 2:8-9 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works so that no one can boast. (NIV)*

### **Regarding Resurrection of the Dead**

• John 11:25-27 *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I*

*believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." (NIV)*

*• Phil 3:20-21 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. (NIV)*

*• 1 Thess 4:13-15 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again, so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. (NIV)*

**As believers in Christ, we are better off with Him than being in this world.**

*• Phil 1:21-23 For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.*

*• Rev 21:3-4 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

**In heaven, we will see our loved ones** (King David was sure he would see his son)

*• 2 Sam 12:23 But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me."*

**Often, we ask God why He has taken our loved ones away. Remember, we can't see what He sees. We must trust Him to work things out for our good.**

*• Rom 8:28-29 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

*• 2 Cor 4:16-18 Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, inwardly, we are being renewed daily. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

**In the time of grief, let us come to the Lord and pray for His loving kindness, peace, comfort and strength. God is our Father, and He knows. Come to Him.**

- *Ps 34:18 The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those crushed in spirit.*
- *Ps 61:1-2 Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. 2 From the ends of the earth, I call to you; I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I.*
- *Isaiah 49:15-16 Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! 16 See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.*
- *Isaiah 66:13 As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem."*
- *2 Corinthians 1:3-4 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we have received from God.*
- *Matthew 11:28-39 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*
- *Hebrews 4:16 Let us confidently approach the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*