

PREPARATION IN JESUS' FAMILY

House of Joseph, House of Zechariah

Even before the birth of Jesus and the birth of John the Baptist, God was working very hard to make sure that the two houses would know clearly the role and mission of their sons. Especially important was the mission of John the Baptist in preparing the way for Jesus' mission. The degree and scope of that spiritual preparation indicates how important it was that all responsible parties are made aware.

The first account of heavenly intervention in Matthew's Gospel is, of course, the conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit with the Virgin Mary. Yet, when Joseph hears of it, his first reaction is to not believe. In his view, Mary must have been guilty of sexual impropriety. We read in **Matthew 1:19** that Joseph decided to divorce her "quietly." However, that evening an angel appears to Joseph in a dream:

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."

The House of Zechariah

In Luke's Gospel, we find that six months earlier, God began his preparatory work in the house of Zechariah. In the first chapter, the angel Gabriel announces to Zechariah the coming birth of John. As he is explaining to Zechariah, Gabriel makes a significant and startling announcement:

Luke 1:17

And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the dis-

obedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

There are three areas of significance in Gabriel's statement. It is very important that Zechariah listen carefully so that he will be able to brief John later. They are:

1. John is "Elijah." This is an extremely important statement. The Jews were expecting the literal return of Elijah, the prophet of old, before the appearance of the Messiah. This expectation was based upon the words of the prophet Malachi:

*Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. See, **I will send you the prophet Elijah** before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. **He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers;** or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.*

2. Therefore, Gabriel is indicating to Zechariah that the orthodox expectation of Elijah's literal return is incorrect. Zechariah's son John, instead, will serve in a symbolic way as that hoped-for "Elijah." Gabriel makes this point clear. When he explains that John would be born "**in the spirit and power of Elijah**" he goes on to quote the very scripture from Malachi that served as the basis for the Jewish expectation of Elijah's literal return. Gabriel says, John as "Elijah" will "**turn the hearts of the fathers to their children.**" This reflects Malachi 4:5 "*He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children.*" It is incumbent upon Zechariah to make this important connection between the existing doctrine of Elijah's return and the reality of Elijah's return via Zechariah's son John.

3. "Or else, I will strike the land with a curse!" Malachi's words indicate that "Elijah" accomplishing his mission will determine the outcome of "blessing" or "curse" in Israel. What is John's mission as Elijah? Gabriel states it clearly: *To make ready a people prepared for the Lord!* John will prepare the foundation of people for Jesus.

Mary Arrives

The next significant event is Mary's arrival into the house of Zechariah. Mary is now pregnant with Jesus and as she enters the

house of Zechariah, Elizabeth, Zechariah's wife (and Mary's cousin) is filled with the Holy Spirit and says:

Luke 1:40–45

*Blessed are you among women, and **blessed is the child you will bear!** But why am I so favored, that the **mother of my Lord should come to me?** As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. **Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!***

Elizabeth's words clearly indicate that she is fully aware of the significance of Mary's future son. She refers to Mary as "the mother of my Lord."

John's Birth and Zechariah's Song of Praise

The next important event is the birth of John. On the eighth day, Zechariah, who had been struck dumb since his first meeting with Gabriel, suddenly has his voice returned. It is at that time that Zechariah offers high praises to the coming son of Mary. In this song of praise he also explicitly expresses the nature of his son's relationship with the coming Jesus:

Luke 1:68–79

*Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. **HE HAS RAISED UP A HORN OF SALVATION (JESUS) FOR US IN THE HOUSE OF HIS SERVANT DAVID** (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.*

AND YOU, MY CHILD, (JOHN) WILL BE CALLED A PROPHET OF THE MOST HIGH; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.

Thus, everyone is prepared. Joseph is on board through his dream with the angel. Gabriel, of course, has informed Mary; she has been thoroughly briefed. Elizabeth knows who is the coming

Lord and that her son will prepare his way. Zechariah knows that his son is the Elijah, must make a people prepared for Jesus, the “horn of salvation” raised up in the house of his servant David. Everybody is on board. Heaven has given all the key figures more than enough information to carry out the mission of preparing the two sons for their great mission. Would it not be proper to expect that these two families maintain close contact over the coming years?

But something, for some reason, goes horribly array.

The Birth of Christ

The first indication is at the birth scene of Jesus. How out of sync with the glorious pronouncements and preparation is the birth of Christ in a stable? Because there was “no room at the inn?” Excuse me? Aren’t we talking about the birth of, even in a most conservative frame of reference, the KING OF ISRAEL? Where are Zechariah and Elizabeth? I know the census was being taken and Joseph had to register his family in his own hometown of Bethlehem in Judea. But, where, then, is Joseph’s family? If this is his “hometown,” does he not have at least some friends of the family that could offer some assistance? Where is Mary’s family? How could they be so poorly prepared that they would end up in a stable?

We have to open our eyes and try for a moment to snap out of our “nativity” stupor. Oh how we love our nativity displays! What, with the stuffed, odorless, non-defecating animal figurines, our sanitary bales of straw from Mel’s Garden Center, our chorus of heavenly hosts with piped-in Christmas music provided by the Ray Coniff singers.

In truth, all of the circumstances of Jesus’ birth indicate that many providential people were, even at this early date, not steadfast in fulfilling their side of the bargain. Of course, when one rejects out of hand, as most Christians do, that the providential people surrounding Jesus even have a responsibility, it tends to lead one into a stupor of the all-pervasive sort.

It takes an all-pervasive stupor to transform a tragedy into a quaint tradition of hundreds of years, a tradition that provides further assistance toward our refusal to hear and see.

Our first “reality check” should be the awareness of God’s past efforts to bring Christ on the foundation of an unbroken line of kings. The “everlasting kingdom” was to begin, if you’ll remember, with

Saul, David and Solomon. Christ was to be born in the palace to a nation, an empire of unchallenged supremacy.

Christ's birth scene is, in reality, a filthy animal dwelling, surrounded by droppings, dangerous bacteria, and disease. It provides very little protection from the elements.

Jesus' life, even in infancy, is in imminent peril. Israel as a nation had been wilted down to a tiny patch of territory that had been conquered by the pagan powers of Babylon, Persia, Greece and, now, Rome. The king of Israel, Herod the Great, a hatefully vicious dictator, will be none too happy to abdicate his throne to this new King Jesus.

It seems that God, in understanding the situation, sends in the Magi, the wise men from the East. They being neither Jew nor, of course, Christian are led to Jerusalem following a star which, to them, indicated the birth of a great new king.

Their mistake was they went to Herod, whose own plan was to use them to locate and then have the new king killed. After the "wise men" found and worshipped Jesus, they returned home by a different route. Pretty wise. Except their effort to protect Jesus underestimated the ambition of Herod. He simply ordered the death of all male children under the age of two in the city and vicinity of Bethlehem. The first Christmas ends with Joseph, Mary and the infant messiah fleeing for their lives and leaving behind the weeping and wailing of mothers and their children snatched from their loving arms.

What could be the reason that Mary and Joseph appear so isolated and vulnerable? On the one hand, the Holy Spirit is working so powerfully around them, yet their practical circumstances only become more threatening.

We could consider a possibility. When Joseph first heard of Mary's pregnancy, did he believe her? He concluded that she had betrayed her vows to God and to him. No doubt, he was hurt and deeply saddened. Why did he change his mind and not divorce her? Was it because an "angel of the Lord" appeared? Well, the angel didn't exactly appear. It was actually *a dream* about an angel. A dream? This is considerably lower on the food chain of spiritual phenomena. After all, Mary and Zechariah both received a personal appearance from no less than Gabriel himself.

Think about this, Joseph has to be sustained by this dream for all his life. If, for even a moment, he begins to doubt his dream, in that very second, Mary will become, in his eyes, a good for nothing,

lying, cheating whore and Jesus her bastard child of fornication! Don't forget, scripture has already shown us that Joseph is not beyond deciding it is in his interest to get out of the relationship.

Little consideration is given to Joseph. It is because he is in the archangel position. He had to pay a tremendous price for being in Lucifer's position. For example, Mary's untimely pregnancy no doubt required a change in wedding plans. Things had to be moved up a bit, don't you think? In those days, they didn't have telephones and email, so a large family event such as a wedding would be planned even years in advance. This would allow for all the necessary communications and arrangements to be accomplished.

How does Joseph communicate with Mary's family and his own family about the reason for a suddenly expedited wedding schedule? What will they no doubt assume? After all, what did Joseph himself initially assume? Father explains:

Do you think that naturally he would ask her whose baby it was, since after all he had saved her life? Could she reply that she conceived through the Holy Spirit and expect Joseph to accept it? If the Pope was in Joseph's position would he believe her? Would Billy Graham believe his wife if she told him that? That kind of conversation between Joseph and Mary could have led only to a great argument, with Joseph accusing that even though he saved Mary's life she still was not being honest with him. Though this is not exactly what took place, do you think there was no tension in that family when Jesus was finally born? At first the community would think he was Joseph's son, but it was impossible to keep secrets. Any conversation between Mary and Joseph must have been overheard, even by the birds or insects, and I'm sure rumors spread quickly that Jesus was an illegitimate child.

More children were born to Mary and Joseph, and they all knew that somehow Jesus was different. The Bible does not speak directly about this, but the fact is that when Jesus was a boy there was a great deal of tension, and even Mary was distant with him at times because she was a victim of the everyday situation. Jesus was lonely as a child and often left the house to be alone. Once his parents even left him behind in Jerusalem for three days, only coming back to look for him later. How could parents leave a young boy behind that way? There were not many happy days in that family. —Sun Myung Moon, "Day of Victory of Heaven," October 4, 1979

They will assume the worst, of course. Can you picture Joseph trying to explain the circumstances to Mary's father?

Joseph: "Excuse me, sir, may we have a word with you?"

Heli or Jacob (the possible names of Mary's father): "Certainly, come in, my children."

Mary and Joseph enter and sit down. "Ah, first, Mary and I would like to again express out gratitude for all you have been doing to prepare for our wedding day . . ."

"Yes, yes, one day you will have the same duties for your children," answered Mary's father.

Mary piped up, "it's funny you should mention children, because actually . . ." Joseph cuts Mary off. "Because actually, uh, we look forward to bringing you, uh, many grandchildren. . . . in the future," Joseph added awkwardly, glancing at Mary and giving her his best "let me do the talking" expression.

"Uh huh," said Mary's father, suddenly more quiet and pensive.

"Well, what can I do for you?" he asked, breaking the moment of uncomfortable silence.

"Mary and I have an idea that we would like to share with the family," Joseph begins to explain.

"An idea," Mary's father repeats unenthusiastically.

"Yes, well, yes an idea, ah, just an idea, well more of a inspiration really," Joseph stammered. Mary began to think to herself, "he's imploding, be ready to step in"

"Okay then, what's the . . . *inspiration?*"

Joseph leaned forward, "We want to move up our wedding date just a tad."

"WHAT! THAT'S OUT OF THE QUESTION." Mary's father leaps to his feet. "WHAT IS GOING ON HERE WITH YOU TWO!"

Joseph steps back, "Nothing, no . . . it was just an idea . . . forget it."

Mary suddenly leaps to her feet, "Father, I'm pregnant by the HOLY SPIRIT!"

Joseph whispers under his breath, " And I'm dead."

Do you think Joseph could convince them by reporting about his dream? Can Mary explain that it was the work of the Holy Spirit? Well, unless Gabriel, himself, went door to door and handed out flyers, I doubt anybody was buying their story.

Which is why we find Joseph and Mary, apparently, in total estrangement from their families and in a stable ready to give birth

to this “questionable” child. Most important, however, will be the continued relationship of the house of Joseph with the house of Zechariah. Will there be any signs of an uneasy family circumstance spilling over and souring the relationship between Jesus and John?

John Is Elijah (30 Years Later)

The first inconsistency with the initial family preparation is displayed as John begins his mission “to make a people prepared for the Lord.” Remember, for all intents and purposes, John should know that he is Elijah and that Jesus is the messiah. That is, if his parents and kinsmen have been preparing him properly.

John 1:19–23

Now this was John’s testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, “I am not the Christ.” They asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I AM NOT” “Are you the Prophet?” He answered, “No.” Finally they said, “Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the desert, “Make straight the way for the Lord.”

“I am not!” but YES YOU ARE! There is no other Elijah that is going to show up except the one who “was born in the spirit and power of Elijah.”

Why did John answer incorrectly? We will never know for sure, but the direct result of his failure to clearly explain that he was the expected Elijah is that the people will continue to wait for Elijah’s arrival and, therefore, will never seriously consider Jesus as messiah until the issue is resolved.

Matthew 17:10–11:

*The disciples asked him, “Why then do the teachers of the law say that **Elijah must come first**?” Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things.”*

You can detect a bit of frustration in their question to Jesus. Obviously they have been trying their best to represent Jesus, the messiah. No doubt, day in and day out, they have had to field the question, “If your Jesus is the messiah, then where is Elijah? Did we miss something?”

Jesus continues to explain to them and provides the answer to their question:

*"But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about **John the Baptist**.*

I'm sure the disciples were relieved to finally have an answer for that question. I'm sure they couldn't wait to go back out to witness. "We'll be ready the next time a teacher of the law tries to trip us up," they probably thought. Of course, once they give that answer they are going to have to be prepared for the inevitable follow-up question from the teachers of the law:

"You say *John* is the Elijah?" asked the teacher of the law incredulously.

"Yes, this is what Jesus himself explained to us."

"Could you show me IN THE WORD OF GOD where it says that somebody else other than Elijah will be the Elijah!" He hands the scriptures to the disciple of Jesus

(Flip, flip, flip), "I saw that verse just the other day" (flip, flip, flip) maybe in the back somewhere, (flip, flip)

The teacher of the law shakes his head and says, "Aw, Christian, Christian, Christian, YOU GOIN TO HA-YELL-AH!!!" (This teacher of the law was from Southern Israel)

History does repeat itself, doesn't it?

Of course, the bigger problem is that John himself had already denied that he was the Elijah. We must consider that if John, in fact, is unaware that he is the Elijah, then John too may struggle with Jesus' messiahship for the very same reasons that all of Israel struggles: How could Jesus be the messiah if Elijah had not come?

Another curious inconsistency takes place when John meets Jesus in the Jordan and sees the spirit descend "as a dove" and remain on Jesus. This is the event of John's first testimony of Jesus.

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'

I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me

to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

All in all, it is the clearest and most emphatic testimony John gives about Jesus. Unfortunately, it will all be downhill from here, as we shall see.

The curious element is expressed by the words, "*I myself did not know him.*" And "*I would not have known him except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."*

John is saying that had it not been for the sign from heaven (the dove appearing) he would not have known Jesus was the messiah because "I did not know him."

He did not know him? Excuse me?

Where does *Gabriel* stand on this?

Where is, "*He is born in the spirit and power of Elijah*"?

What happened to "*a horn of salvation in the house of his servant David*"?

Where is "*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear*"?

What of "*mother of my Lord*"?

Why does John need an addition sign of confirmation if Zechariah and Elizabeth have done their job properly?

Something *has* gone array in the house of Zechariah. It will continue to afflict John as he seeks to accomplish his mission "to make a people prepared for the Lord."

Are there similar signs indicating an erosion of support for Jesus in his own house of Joseph?

House of Joseph

Let's start from the most obvious. Consider the resounding affirmations offered to Jesus by angels, shepherds, Magi, Anna the prophetess, Simeon, the teachers at the temple. Keep in mind, this was all witnessed by Joseph and Mary. Yet, at age 30, Jesus is a carpenter.

Mark 6:3-4

*“Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. Jesus said to them, “Only in his **hometown**, among his **relatives** and in his **own house** is a prophet without honor.”*

This scripture reveals evidence of the same kind of discord in Jesus’ family as we saw in the house of Zechariah. Another curious moment takes place at age 12, Jesus slips away from Joseph and Mary and remains in Jerusalem while they return to Galilee. They “assume” Jesus is with other relatives. Does this seem like a close-knit family? After a whole day of travel, they are still “assuming.” Please.

*Mary and Joseph were disharmonious, fighting and quarreling all the time. They quarreled so much that young Jesus’ mother even forsook him and left him. Three days later she came and found him with the priests. Jesus was very angry saying, “Where else would I be but in my Father’s house?”, which was the temple. Today both Christians and Catholics say that Jesus is such a great person so he stayed in his father’s house. How can you go to heaven with that kind of interpretation? He was there because he was forsaken by his mother and father! The fact that Jesus could not get married was directly due to the failure of responsibility on Mary’s part. How can Mary be a great woman? **Rev. Sun Myung Moon, “Restoration From the Origin and Rebirth are for Myself”***

Read the story of Hannah, the mother of Samuel. Mary should have patterned herself after Hannah. The story of Rebecca and Jacob is another model for the relationship of Mary and Jesus. It should have been Mary who made sure that Jesus was properly prepared to assume his rightful destiny in the palace, not just become a shop boy sweeping up sawdust at Joseph’s worksite.

Hannah pledged that she would give her son, Samuel, to the Lord after he was weaned. She was true to her word and gave her only son to Eli the temple priest so that Samuel could be raised in the most opportune circumstances. Because of this, Samuel could fulfill his mission as one of Israel’s great prophets.

Rebecca, like Mary, also received a vision of her son’s destiny. Even while the twins were in her womb, God told her, “The elder shall serve the younger.” Rebecca not only “kept that word in her

Comment:

An interesting possible indication of Jesus' lack of formal training is inadvertently revealed in **Matthew 23:35**. Jesus is chastising the Pharisees and teachers of the law for their unresponsiveness. He reviews the woeful history of Israel's prophets. It is a history of rejection, filled with the blood of the prophets.

*And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of **Zechariah son of Berekiah**, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.*

There is one problem with Jesus' narration of this history. It is incorrect. Zechariah of Berekiah was not the Zechariah who was rejected and killed between the temple and the altar. Zechariah of Berekiah is the written prophet Zechariah who came after the Babylonian captivity (with Ezra, Nehemiah, Malachi). This was a time when Israel was heeding her prophets. Zechariah of Berekiah died a natural death.

The Zechariah who was killed is Zechariah of *Jehoiada* and is referenced in **2 Chronicles 24:20-21**:

*Then the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah **son of Jehoiada** the priest. He stood before the people and said, "This is what God says: 'Why do you disobey the LORD's commands? You will not prosper. Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you.' " But they plotted against him, and by order of the king they stoned him to death in the courtyard of the LORD's temple.*

This Zechariah was the last prophet killed. Thus, the list to which Jesus was referring was rightly, from "beginning to end," that is, "from Abel to Zechariah." However, he cited the wrong Zechariah. The intent here is not to be critical of the Lord. We are seeking to point out that the providential people who were called to assist Jesus were falling away and that such failures bore real consequences. These failures required Jesus to carry additional burdens.

heart," *she also brought it to pass* a full forty years later! Did Mary do that? Did Mary bring to pass the things she was "pondering" in her heart?

Certainly the teachers of the temple courts were sufficiently

impressed with Jesus' intellectual prowess. Mary should have seized that opportunity right then and there so that Jesus could have remained in Jerusalem and received the finest education in the temple. In fact, there is evidence that Mary, in her youth, had received a temple education in Jerusalem of her own.

In the non-Canonical *Gospel of the Birth of Mary*, supposedly written by Matthew, chapter one states, "The blessed and ever glorious Virgin Mary, sprung from the royal race and family of David, was born in the city of Nazareth, and *educated at Jerusalem, in the temple of the Lord.*"

Jesus, effectively, was telling his parents he wanted the same when he said to them, "*wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*" But, alas, it was back to the sweatshop in Galilee. How tragically sad! Jesus had to study on his own as best he could. Can you imagine the limited resources available to a country boy from Galilee, a carpenter's apprentice?

The Jews were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?"

Remember, Joseph's faith relied on a single experience in one dream, in one night. Was it enough to sustain him year after year? Was it enough to salve the wounds of years of ridicule and scorn? Was it enough to comfort him each time he looked into Jesus' face and saw no reflection of his own? Was it enough to stem the tide of sorrow and hurt, the inner doubt caused by the touch of someone else upon his virgin bride? Was it enough to quell the fear that her heart still harbored a secret love? When she seemed pensive and quiet, distant and cold, was she still thinking of him?

No, it was not enough. Joseph instead drew a tight circle around Jesus and tried to build another life, as normal as possible, outside that circle. He wanted a life with other sons, his own sons, a life with his own plans and objectives, a life in a real world and not a world of angels, seers and kings.

Mary, too, had to choose which world would be her own. The scripture testifies that she "kept all these sayings in her heart." Yes, she kept them, ever so tightly, and in a place where no one could hear or see, in a place of muted light and distant memory. Were they treasured or merely locked away? Were they placed in an area of deep contemplation or in the realm where dreams slowly fade and die?

John 2:14

*And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, **Woman, what have I to do with thee?** mine hour is not yet come.*

“Woman”? “What have I to do with thee?”

Luke 11:27–28

As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, “Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.”

*He replied, “Blessed **RATHER** are **those who hear the word of God and obey it.**”*

“Blessed rather are those?” Not “Blessed also are those”?

Some may ask the question, did Mary fulfill her due responsibility? Unification Church members jump up and have things to say. If you ask the same questions of Christianity, Catholics will really jump up high and say, “Don’t even talk about that! That is blasphemous!” You can see for yourself.

In the Bible there is an episode when there was a wedding ceremony in Galilee. Mary went there to serve people and Jesus went there, too. Jesus’ mother said something like, “We don’t have wine” and Jesus became very indignant, saying, “Woman, what do you have to do with me?” She was not worried about Jesus’ wedding, which was her responsibility to arrange. She was more worried about a wedding that didn’t have any meaning.

Jesus knew this and he felt so indignant, saying, “Your son, the center of God’s whole dispensation should go this path, getting married to restore all mankind, and you don’t even think about that. You are worried about another person’s wedding. What are you anyway?” That is what Jesus said to his own mother.

*Now we know that clearly. What is your guess? Do you think that was Jesus’ heart at that time? (Yes.) Jesus was thirty-three years old, and the relative who happened to be getting married that day was not even twenty at that time. And Mary had to get Jesus involved, worrying that there was no wine? What kind of mother is she, Jesus wondered. —**Rev. Sun Myung Moon***

In the third chapter of Mark we see Mary and Joseph's other sons in action against Jesus.

Mark 3:20–21

*Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When **HIS FAMILY** heard about this, they went to **take charge** of him, for they said, "**HE IS OUT OF HIS MIND.**"*

And who shows up, leading the pack, intent on "taking charge" of her mentally imbalanced son?

Mark 3:31–35

*Then Jesus' **MOTHER and brothers** arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! **Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.**"*

Jesus' mother and brothers arrive "to take charge" of Jesus because they thought that "he was out of his mind." They were there to conduct the first deprogramming.

And what was the state of mind of Jesus' brothers? See **John 7:1–5**:

*After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were **waiting to take his life**. But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, **Jesus' brothers** said to him, "**You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.**" **FOR EVEN HIS OWN BROTHERS DID NOT BELIEVE IN HIM.***

Jesus is purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews are waiting to take his life. Jesus' brothers, however, are purposely trying to trick him into going there, for that very reason! "For even his own brothers did not believe in him." Not only did they not believe in him, they were trying to have him killed.

This was the state of mind of Joseph's family toward Jesus. It became a fortress of disappointment and sorrow. No doubt this lonely family life opened Jesus to a deeper heart in pursuit of "his Father's business."

*I'm sure many of you have grown up with a stepparent, and even in an open society like America's today there is tension between a stepparent and stepchildren, so imagine how much more difficult it was 2,000 years ago. In this sense Americans are in a position to be sympathetic with Jesus' position; many young people are experiencing the same kind of suffering Jesus went through. **Rev. Sun Myung Moon***

The breakdown within and between the two families was like an open, festering wound in the mission of Jesus. Understanding this dynamic will shed new light on the indecisiveness of John as his message vacillates from "behold the Lamb of God" to "are you the one to come or shall we look for another." It will ultimately reveal why the Lord, for whom the people were to be prepared, must beseech God, belatedly, for assistance to remedy his plight of "few laborers."

And looming on the horizon, the ominous pledge, "*or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.*"

Jesus and John

As mentioned, John's initial testimony to Jesus was direct, assertive and unequivocal. It stands out not only for its eloquence but also because of its contrast to all subsequent testimony from John about Jesus.

For ministers and most Christians, John is a hero and a model for their ministry. I talked to many ministers who, since childhood, had revered John. "Of those born of women none rose greater than John," Jesus asserted.

The various doctrines about John have exalted him to highest sainthood. These doctrines begat other doctrines, until ministers are unable to see the proverbial forest for the trees. Open eyes and ears are essential, especially when examining a circumstance that is as fluid and shifting as John's relationship with Jesus.

Over time, Christian thinkers have lost the sense of partnership with God's providence. Thus, they look at scripture as the record of what God, alone, has done, without any consideration of man's role in a particular providential action.

John proclaimed one time, "behold," and that was enough to start the doctrinal legend snowballing. By this age, there is no thought whatsoever, that John should be judged by what he did or did not do. There is no motive for them to examine if John main-

tained his initial faith in Jesus *over time*. Jesus himself said in **Matthew 24:13**, “*but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.*” Until today, no one has seen fit to hold John’s feet to that same fire.

The Results of John’s Ministry

“*You see that a person is justified by what he does . . .*” **James 2:24**

What were the real results of John’s ministry? That is, how many people came to Christ as a result of John’s testimony? How many of Jesus’ disciples started out as John’s disciples? Was John a follower of Christ?

There is no question that John amassed a large following. According to some historical records, John baptized hundreds of thousands of people. “*People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.*” **Matthew 3:5**

Even though he flatly denied that he was Elijah, we can see in his choice of clothing that he, in fact, had at least a modicum of awareness that he and the prophet of old shared some sort of common destiny.

Matthew 3:4 (about John)

John’s clothes were made of CAMEL’S HAIR, and he had a LEATHER BELT AROUND HIS WAIST. His food was locusts and wild honey.

2 Kings 1:8 (about Elijah)

They replied, “He was a man with a GARMENT OF HAIR and with a LEATHER BELT AROUND HIS WAIST.” The king said, “That was Elijah the Tishbite.”

In other words, “I’m not Elijah, but I did stay at a Holiday Inn Express!” There will be other, even more dramatic expressions of conflict within John.

JOHN’S IMPACT ON HIS OWN DISCIPLES

John gives his next notable testimony the next day:

John 1:35–37

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he

saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.

This is the only known account of anyone following Jesus as a direct result of John's testimony. Two disciples. Yes, technically "two" is "a people," as in "make a people prepared for the Lord."

However, even this result is debatable. One of the two is Andrew. Matthew's Gospel records Jesus witnessing directly to Andrew and his brother Peter with no mention whatsoever of John playing a role. The other disciple spent the day with Jesus, but we never find out if he remained beyond that one day. So maybe two, maybe one, or maybe even, none.

We see that John's disciples, even after his initial testimony to Jesus, maintain their separate identity as "John's disciples." Weren't they supposed to be "a people made ready for the Lord"?

Matthew 9:14

Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"

Does this sound like John's disciples have been influenced by John's initial testimony? Notice that they identify more closely with the Pharisees than with Jesus. And, by the way, why does John still have disciples at this late date anyway?

We conclude that though John's initial testimony was powerful, for some reason it exerted little moral authority over his disciples to drop their nets and follow Jesus. Of course, the fact that John, himself, was not dropping *his* net and following may have contributed to that climate of hesitation.

JOHN'S IMPACT ON THE NATION

What was the real influence of John's testimony on the nation? There are two scriptures that give us an insight on this.

Matthew 16:13–14

*When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say **John the Baptist**; others say **Elijah**; and still others, **Jeremiah or one of the prophets.**"*

What does this reveal? What is conspicuously missing from this polling data? Was anyone saying, "Jesus is the Lamb of God"? Can you conclude that they never heard of John the Baptist in Caesarea Philippi? Clearly they are familiar with the name and work of John the Baptist. Obviously, they never heard John proclaiming that Jesus of Nazareth was the Lamb of God.

If tape recorders had existed in those days, John's initial testimony could have been recorded, mass-produced and distributed. Given that was not an option, John should have personally reproduced his initial affirmation by testifying throughout the nation. For some reason, he, apparently, did not do that.

In Judea, Jesus takes another "Gallup Poll"

Mark 6:14–15

Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him." Others said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago."

No one was saying, "Jesus? Isn't that the guy John said was the Lamb of God?"

Again given the scope of John's mission as expressed by Gabriel, "to make a people prepared for the Lord," this appears to fall short of that measure.

Another telling event is John's experience with Herod.

Mark 6:19–20

So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.

John had the king's ear. Herod "feared John," "protected John" and "like to listen to him." What single most important bit of information for Herod would John possess? Perhaps, John needs to inform Herod that he should be preparing for a career change. Is not Herod sitting on Jesus' throne? Is not Herod residing in Jesus' palace while the true king "has no place to rest his head?" (**Matthew 8:20** *Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."*)

I think Herod's unrighteousness is of a far greater degree than that of merely marrying his brother's wife, Herodias.

And yet, after John is beheaded, we see Herod strangely confused by the presence of this new rising figure: Jesus of Nazareth.

Mark 6:16

*For Jesus' name had become well known. But, when Herod heard this, he said, "John, the man I beheaded, has been **raised from the dead!**"*

"John, the man I beheaded has been raised from the dead"? How could Herod be so incorrect about Jesus if John had done his job effectively? Obviously, John never witnessed to the king. Not a word? Not, "behold the Lamb of God"? Not, "Herod, come down and worship your new King"?

No impact on his own disciples, No impact in Caesarea Philippi, No impact in Judea, No influence with King Herod.

Given these circumstances, how could anyone conclude that John accomplished his mission?

JOHN BEGINS TO DOUBT

John's third testimony to Jesus is thought to be a resounding endorsement. But once again, it fails to compel anyone "to pick up their cross and follow." The reason is in between the lines. John expresses ideas that say more about his own unresolved reservations about Jesus than anything else.

This testimony is far less emphatic than the initial "behold, the Lamb of God." It reveals a growing contradiction within John's mind. It is a contradiction that begins to produce an array of contrary signals, not the least of which is his "you follow him and I'll be over here with my disciples" approach to evangelism.

John 3:22-30

After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized.

An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan, the one you testified about, well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him."

*To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, **I am not the Christ***

but am sent ahead of him.' The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less."

It sounds good. Christians cite it as another example of John's deep exaltation of Jesus. But it is not. It is a fatally flawed testimony. It shows that John is stepping away from his initial emphatic endorsement and is, instead, moving toward more of a "wait and see" posture.

First, it is, again, odd that Jesus is in Judea with "his" disciples and is baptizing while John is in Salim with "his" disciples and they are continuing to baptize. That this is a rather odd situation, given the initial testimony, is displayed in the question, "***Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan, the one you testified about, well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him.***" In other words, how come you and your disciple are not over there with "the one you testified about?"

John's answer is an attempt to explain away the issue brought to the surface by that question. The real issue is that John's actions are increasingly inconsistent with the initial expression of conviction in Jesus. On the one hand, John has had a personal spiritual experience. He saw "the dove" descend and remain on Jesus. God told him that such a sign would indicate the messiah. On the other hand, John is publicly denying that he, John, is Elijah even though heaven has declared it and Jesus later affirms it. Also, he should have known Jesus, his second cousin, and he should also have known Jesus is the messiah. Instead, John publicly denies knowing him.

What is John actually saying in this testimony about Jesus? What do these words really mean: "***The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less.***"

He is saying that the one to whom the people go is the messiah. The "bride" belongs to the "bridegroom." The "bride" symbolizes the people. The "bridegroom" is the messiah and the "friend of the bridegroom" is John.

What motivates John's words is a desire to remove himself from the position of having to validate, as he did unabashedly at the Jor-

dan River, the figure who is the messiah. Now, he is saying that the validation of the messiah is, instead, determined by the flow of the people to that figure. The one who has the “**bride**” is the bridegroom. Therefore, he is saying, essentially, “I’m done and don’t come to me requesting any more personal validations.” That is why he insists, “*That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must increase, I must decrease.*”

No wonder no one heard in Caesarea Philippi that Jesus was the Lamb of God. No wonder in Judea, no wonder in Herod’s palace. John had decided that they were to decide for themselves!

What is wrong with John’s “bride and bridegroom” analogy? First of all, the sign for which the people are waiting is the appearance of **Elijah**! John **is** Elijah. On some level, he is aware of this and is **rejecting it**.

Second, if it is true that the bridegroom is the one with the bride, then Jesus is, unequivocally, **not the messiah**! Not in Caesarea Philippi. Not in Judea. Not in Herod’s palace where he would be condemned to die. In case anyone hasn’t noticed yet, the bride passed him by. Jesus ends up in a desperate effort for “laborers unto his harvest.” He was deserted by everyone and died nearly alone at Calvary.

The Truth About John

No matter how hard we try to sweep it under the rug, the truth will always come out. It may not come out according to our timetable, but know for sure that the truth will come out for us all.

The truth comes out about John in the 11th chapter of Matthew:

*Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, “**ART THOU HE THAT SHOULD COME, OR DO WE LOOK FOR ANOTHER?**”*

The truth is that John could never decide.

*Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John **AGAIN** those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. **And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.***

Notice Jesus says, “Go and show John **AGAIN.**” John’s question

was extremely offensive in view of all the signs he had received and all the preparation in his family. What were these mysterious barriers in John's faith toward Jesus? What was this secretive counterweight to the descending dove and the forthright declaration, "Behold"? What were the issues that were holding him back and preventing him from doing his mission to hand over to Jesus a prepared foundation of people? We can only speculate but certainly the disintegration of the faith and support of the house of Joseph and the house of Zechariah must have been a key element.

Jesus' comment leaves no doubt.

*I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is **LEAST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS GREATER THAN HE.***

Of course, many who cling tenaciously to John's saintly status point only to the first part: "Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist." They conveniently overlook the remainder, and most important, part of the statement: "yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

Some will insist that Jesus is merely indicating that John is humble in the Kingdom. Others will suggest it is because John was beheaded before the day of Pentecost and so he did not enjoy the full merits of salvation through Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

What does the term, "least in the kingdom of heaven" mean? How does one qualify for such a position? See **Matthew 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.***

What commandment did John break? How about this one?
Matthew 5:11–12

*Blessed are you when people **insult you, persecute you** and falsely say **all kinds of evil** against you **BECAUSE OF ME.** Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way **they persecuted the prophets** who were before you.*

Here are some important questions from clergy about John:

You said that there was no following of Christ from John's preaching. After the resurrection of Christ, there were 120 followers under John's baptism for repentance. What about these? See Acts 1:5, 18:25, 19:1-7.
Rev. K.T., AME

Answer:

I said that no one except Andrew followed Jesus as a result of John's testimony of Jesus. Acts 1:5 merely makes the statement that "John baptized with water, but you (the Apostles) will baptize with the Holy Spirit." It doesn't say that the Apostles had been John's disciples or followed Jesus because of John's testimony (indeed we know that Jesus gathered his own disciples). You mention Acts 13:15, but it's not clear to me what point is made with regard to this issue. Acts 18:25 states that Apollos had received the baptism of John, but it does not say that it was John who taught Apollos about the Lord.

Whoever it was that did teach Apollos did not teach him adequately enough, because we see that Priscilla and Aquila had to explain to him the way of God "more perfectly." Acts 19:1-7 states that Paul finds some of John's disciples, but "they had not even heard that there was a Holy Spirit," which again confirms the point that though they had been under the tutelage of John, they never came to Jesus or had understood his role.

"You do err in the scripture." How can you say that John the Baptist did not fulfill his mission, when the Word of God says in Acts 13:25 that John, indeed, did fulfill his mission! **Rev. A.H., Pentecostal**

Answer:

Acts 13:25 is not a statement of quality, but rather of duration. "As John was fulfilling his mission" means that his mission was drawing to a close time-wise. His mission would be "accomplished" by testifying to Jesus, following Him, and leading his enormous foundation of disciples to likewise follow Jesus (as dictated by Luke 1:17). If John had "fulfilled" his mission in purpose, we would have never seen John's disciples comparing the standard of Jesus' disciples, negatively, with their own (Matthew 9:14) which took place after John's initial statement of faith in Jesus. We would have never seen Jesus' urgent prayer of Matthew. 9:37, calling out for laborers. We would have never seen such a statement by John as in Matthew 11:3 " . . . are you the one who was to come or shall we look for another"?

John had one message and one mission. It took place before the Holy Ghost was poured out. If you judge him worthless, you have to judge the disciples worthless. John died before the day of the Pentecost. Rev. B.J., Southern Baptist

Answer:

John's mission is clearly stated in Luke 1:17 ". . . to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." He did not accomplish that mission and so Jesus had to gather His own disciples, saying ". . . the harvest is great but the laborers are few." Matthew 9:37-38. It is not I who judges John, it is Jesus when he says John is the least in the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 11:11). For the meaning of "least in the Kingdom of Heaven" see Matthew 5:19. As far as your contention that dying before the day of Pentecost cost John a higher position in heaven than least, I could not agree. Notice that the benefits of salvation can be imputed retroactively (Hebrews 11). Notice also that John's name is conspicuously missing from this list of righteous saints who preceded Jesus.

JESUS CONTINUES HIS MISSION

Why did so many think that Jesus was "John the Baptist raised from the dead"? It has a lot to do with the fact that Jesus was working in a similar way as John. He was baptizing disciples. He was in the wilderness and fasted for 40 days. He was proclaiming the coming Kingdom. He was casting out demons and healing the sick. He was generating a lot of excitement and renown. It was as if Jesus had taken his cue from John.

In a real sense, because John fell short in his mission objective "to make a people prepared for the Lord," Jesus had to step into John's role and seek to make his own foundation. **Matthew 4:12-17:**

*When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali, **From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."***

Most of the Gospel documents Jesus attempting to make a foundation for the messiah to be proclaimed. Until a certain foundation of believers was accomplished, Jesus would not reveal his true mis-

sion. This is why we see, in **Matthew 16:20**, “Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.”

In gathering followers, Jesus was trying to complete the mission of John so that he could then accomplish the mission of the messiah. His own mission was to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth and in spirit.

Jesus begins to gather his own apostles and disciples. We see Jesus’ motivation for his mission:

*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like **sheep without a shepherd**. Then he said to his disciples, “**The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few**. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out **workers into his harvest field**.” **Matthew 9:36–38***

The “harvest” was great because “now was the time.” However, Jesus was left without laborers for the harvest. Where were those laborers? Why would Jesus be in need of laborers if John had been doing his mission?

In trying to accomplish the mission to make a foundation for the messiah, Jesus employed a very practical methodology.

*Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits. **Mark 6:7***

Before he sent them out, he gave them a through training session. After that training, he assigned them to various towns and villages, after which:

*Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. **Matthew 9:35***

After this initial campaign, Jesus expanded the training to include the next tier of the 72 disciples:

*After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, “**The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few**. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.” **Luke 10:1–3***

We can see that sometimes not everything went smoothly with the campaign:

*“This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.” He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? **John 6:58–61***

Finally, after two years of public ministry, Jesus disciples could not be successful enough to stem the tide that was building against Jesus:

*After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life. **John 7:1***

There was no faith in Israel.

Matthew 8:10

Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

Because there was no faith in Israel, the providence, as in the time of Jeremiah, turns toward the secondary path of the cross:

Matthew 16:21:

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

As we explained in the previous chapter, Jesus is faced with the most painful dilemma. On the one hand, because of the faithless nation, he must prepare his disciples and the coming generations until the Second Coming to be able to understand the nature of this prolongation course. His disciples, as we have seen, so enamored with the hope of the immediate establishment of the Kingdom, would tend to turn morose and pessimistic with the prospect of a 2000 year delay. Jesus must try with all his heart to convince them of this “happy” outcome, when in reality, in all of his heart; he too wanted to realize the Kingdom that was “at hand.”

In the last year we see the collapse of his ministry. With each

passing day, the cross looms larger on the horizon.

From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. **John 6:66-67**

But even the faith of the 12 begins to crack. We see evidence of the condition of their faith at the Last Supper. When Jesus mentions that, "one of you here will betray me" each one of the twelve responds tepidly:

And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I? Matthew 26:22

That each one has to ask "Lord is it I," indicates that every one of them had been contemplating betrayal, not just Judas.

GETHSEMANE

Jesus takes his followers and retires to the Garden of Gethsemane. It is here that Jesus shares his soul's true feelings about the impending offering of his life.

*And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, **let this cup pass from me:** nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.*

And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.

If, indeed, Jesus' sole destiny was to die on the cross, how could he face this moment so reluctantly? Jesus attempted to convey to Peter, James and John the content of his sorrow. He explained that his soul was "exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death."

It is so tragic that not one of them could have consoled Jesus in that moment and, perhaps, be able to provide us with a clearer insight into the nature of his overwhelming grief.

Instead, when he returned to them after his tearful prayer, he found them fast asleep. What greater expression could there be of the divide between Jesus and even his closest apostles? How much more alone and deserted could he have been?

This lonely domain of incomprehensive sorrow has been his dwelling until today. No subsequent theological ponderings could adequately unlock the secret substance of his pain. In fact, this grieving Lord offends our theologies and our narrow definitions of his purpose.

And in what must be the pinnacle of human pomposity, we presume to apologize for the Lord by explaining away his tears as a momentary lapse of messianic dignity. How relieved Jesus must be to know that he can be forgiven for violating our doctrinal blindness.

Jesus' sorrow is displayed in Gethsemane because it is there that he lays down his foremost aspiration and, instead, burns to ashes all his hopes and dreams for the Kingdom in his lifetime. The gate is shut and sealed. Jesus says farewell to the hope of God in him for that ideal.

Farewell, to his disciples and his people, faced now with a most arduous course of exile and destruction. Farewell, to the peoples of the next two millennia, peoples of all lands and all languages who would have been able to live in a world controlled by a covenant of peace. A world where knowledge of the Lord covers the earth as waters cover the sea, where swords are beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. Where weeping and wailing shall cease and be no more.

And, farewell, holy bride who would never be, would never embrace, nor ever excite the warm glowing passions of her perfect husband. This unknown beloved partner, a hope held in his deepest heart, now never to console him. Nor will she ever display for him the tenderness, calm and mercy of woman. Farewell, to these loves for which only he was worthy. Farewell to the sons, the daughters that this love would have borne and to the infinite solace and serenity abiding in the sleeping child pressed to poppa's chest. . . All those moments of love, those treasures, he left behind, farewell, farewell, farewell to his family; God's very own, farewell.

Jesus sacrificed more than just himself when he mounted Calvary's cross. He not only laid down his one life, but also all the quality and quantity of life that would have emerged and everlastingly increased.

All these were laid down and left behind in the Garden of Gethsemane. He waits for us there, waiting for us to awaken from our long, deep sleep.

Our nation, despite our Christian Heritage leads the industrialized world in an ever increasing spectrum of problems that find their root in the breakdown of the family.

The family is declining, not because of homosexuality, not because of the sexual revolution, not because of the porno industry. The family is declining because of Christian refusal to understand the deeper meaning of Jesus' sacrifice in relation to the family. We have been blind to the deepest measure of family value.

When Jesus put his family on the cross, he grieved. He grieved because he knew the value of the family that would never be. His grief, then, is the perfect expression of that value. If we know not that grief, we know not that value. That is why the family declines.

He gave it up for us. But he had to give it up because we defied God's will for a lineage as certainly as did Onan, whom God killed. We deserved Onan's fate yet Jesus interceded beseeching God, saying, "Father, forgive them they know not what they do." We never expressed an appropriate level of gratitude for the full measure of that sacrifice because, to this very day, "we know not."

Thus, until this day, Jesus grieves alone. We stand on the perimeter of Gethsemane and ponder his unhappiness from afar. We stubbornly cling to our man-made doctrines that disqualified him from marriage and make obscure the very substance of his grief. In this way, like the dozing apostles who exalted sleep over consoling the Lord, we embrace our doctrinal slumber rather than awakening to a grieving Lord. Today, our crumbling family institution bears final witness against us that it has always been about us and never about him. For this we must repent.

Today, the family must revive. Only when we find the ultimate meaning of the family will that revival commence. That deeper meaning is implicit in the shed blood of Christ, yet it has been unknown until today. When men and women realize that greatest meaning, then there will be a newborn motive to uplift and cherish marriage. That will be given birth when all believers can feel at one with Jesus' "sorrow unto death." That is the heart with which he placed his family on the altar for us. Jesus called Rev. Moon to awaken us, yet sleeping, for lo these many years:

Thus, the prayer at the garden of Gethsemane will never end. Throughout endless ages and centuries, this heartbreaking and blood-stained voice of the final plea should always stay alive in the human heart. God is working hard, hoping for a day when your heart will resonate with the heart of Jesus, who cried out, "My God."

*The believers in the last days should inherit the historical and grave heart of Jesus as he prayed on Mount Calvary and in the garden of Gethsemane. They should awaken the Christians who are in the position of the three disciples sleeping in the garden of Gethsemane. You should know that such an age is approaching. With the same heart as Jesus, who prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me," (Matthew 26:39) you should also pray, "Father, if possible, do not let our messiah be taken to the cross."
—Rev. Sun Myung Moon, "The Sorrowful Heart of Jesus as He Went to the Mountain," January 25, 1959*

Jesus gave his up his family so that we could have a family. In view of this, Can we, then, simply throw it away?