

**PREFACE**

*"I was physically very tired when I came up to Andes, New York, this weekend. Through the week, I could not figure out what was wrong with my body. I lost appetite for food and kept feeling tired and giddy. I thought coming up to Andes would aggravate my tiredness because of the cold. However, once again God confounded all my unbelief. This weekend is one of the best for me. Even my appetite came back once I was with pastor and God's people and my body felt stronger. I agreed with what Joy Tan told me. It has to do with the company of God's people and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Where the Holy Spirit is not found, even the food loses its flavour and sleep is never sweet. I felt it also further affirmed to me that my campus is filled with the evil spirits that vex me daily. I give thanks to God that in this faraway land, I can still find a refuge with the people of God in this rural town of Andes. It has been a rest unto my soul and also my body. Thank God for the zeal of the man of God to expound to us from the Gospels. As we sat down on Saturday, pastor went on and on from Luke to Matthew, and to Malachi and other parts of the Scriptures. By the time we ended, nobody felt that four hours had passed until we looked at the clock.*

*The benediction of Elizabeth, Mary's doxology and Zecharias' prophecy in Luke 1 is one of those chapters that is very familiar to us. However, when pastor went from one verse to another asking us what it really meant, he showed us the beauty of all the intricate details therein. Pastor even showed us that the change in tenses has different meanings. I was awed at the accuracy of the Scriptures. It once again affirmed to me that the Scriptures is truly infallible. It is truly the power of God. The coming of Christ and His work is the fulfillment of the oath, covenant and promise which God swore to our godly forebears, starting right from Adam. The whole of Scriptures attests to this, that is why even Mary, Elizabeth and Zecharias could say all these. It is because they have been tutored and cultured in the Old Testament Scriptures. I marvelled at the faith that they possessed to believe in the things that they had not seen. Mary's response to the angel was, 'Be it as unto thy handmaiden' (Luke 1:38). She was willing to do anything for God, even to be a doormat. I felt I am so far from their love for God.*

*Actually at the end of today's message, I had the same cry as the disciples of Christ, 'Who then can be saved?' (Matthew 19:25) I felt very punctured at the end of the message. Pastor showed us the mind of the Holy Spirit in the way Matthew wrote this book. Many times we are taken up by all the parables and actions that we missed the main message. Matthew's main theme was firstly to affirm the Person of Christ, that He is the Son of God (Matthew 16:13-19). Secondly, it is to show us what manner of heart we have, and lastly, to show us the actual character of true religion. True religion is not the religion of the Pharisees and Sadducees. A true Christian is one who places the kingdom of God first, one who lays up treasures in heaven and not on this earth and one who is single-eyed in the seeking of God. I see how far I am from the kingdom of heaven. I am like the rich young man who could not sell all to follow Christ. If I say I put the kingdom of God first, then why is it that I am not concerned about the welfare of Jerusalem?! If I say I lay up treasures in heaven, then why is it my daily life constitutes of going to class, eating and sleeping?! I see that I am truly far from what God demands of us. I am still dwelling in my lusts and love of this world. But what punctured me the most was Matthew 16:17—'flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven'. True religion must start with the revelation of God the Father concerning Christ through the attestation of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. God has to convict me and God has to reveal His Son to me. I felt so helpless. Thus I felt the cry of the disciples very real: Who then can be saved? However, I thank God for pastor who pointed us to the works of Christ. Christ's sole mission on this earth was to die and rise again the third day (Matthew 16:21). It is because of the work of Christ that God the Father can remain just when He acquits sinners of their sins. We are to claim the promises of God based on the work of Christ, just like those who came to Christ seeking for help as recorded in the Gospels." Esther Ng's Sabbath vespers to presiding pastor's exposition on the book of Matthew at the last Sabbath worship service in Andes, NY, USA, 11 October AD 2009*