

Jesus the Witness (John 3:31–36)

Bible scholars do not agree as to who is speaking in John 3:31–36, John the apostle or John the Baptist. For that matter, some students believe that John 3:16–21 came from the Apostle John and not the Lord Jesus. There were no quotation marks in early manuscripts, but since all Scripture is inspired, it really makes little difference who said the words.

The emphasis in this paragraph is on witness (“testimony”), one of the key subjects in John’s Gospel. The Greek word translated “witness” or “testimony” is used forty-seven times. John bore witness to Jesus (John 1:7; 5:33), but Jesus was also a witness to the truth. Why should we heed His witness? For several reasons.

He came from heaven (v. 31). He was not simply called from heaven, or empowered by heaven; He *came* from heaven. It was this claim that the Jews disputed, because they knew it was His claim that He was God (John 6:38–42). John the Baptist certainly was not “from above,” nor did he claim to be. No earthly messenger of God came “from above.” Only Jesus Christ can make that claim and prove it to be true.

Since Jesus came from heaven, He represents the Father; and to reject His witness is to reject the Father (John 5:23). We know that His witness is true because He is the true God. We can trust it and rely on it.

It comes from Him firsthand (vv. 32–33). He shares what He has seen and heard from the Father (John 8:38). Those who receive His witness *and act on it* know by personal experience that His witness is true (John 7:17). Our Lord’s teachings are not to be studied intellectually, separated from everyday life. It is when we obey His Word and put it into practice that we see its truth and experience its power.

The Father has authorized His Son (vv. 34–35). God sent Him (another key theme in John’s Gospel); God gave Him the Word; God gave Him the Spirit; and God gave Him all things (John 13:3). What a commissioning! To reject the Son’s witness is to rebel against the highest authority in the universe.

We usually think of God’s love for a lost world (John 3:16), but John reminds us of the Father’s love for His Son. Jesus is the Father’s “beloved Son” (Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). Because the Father loves the Son, He has given Him all things, and He shows Him all things (John 5:20). It is a love that can hold nothing back.

Therefore, when we receive His witness, we share in His love and His wealth. To reject Christ’s witness is to sin against love and light. No wonder our Lord wept over the city of Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37–39). They had rejected His witness—both His messages and His miracles—and their rejection led to judgment.

We might escape the wrath of God (v. 36). This is the only place in any of John’s epistles or his Gospel that he uses the word *wrath*. (He uses it six times in the Book of Revelation.) This verse parallels John 3:18 and makes it clear that there can be no neutrality when it comes to the witness of Jesus Christ: we either trust Him or we reject Him.

“Everlasting life” does not simply mean eternity in heaven. The believer possesses that life right now! It is the life of God in the believer. The opposite of eternal life is eternal death, the wrath of God. A person does not have to die and go to hell to be under the wrath of God. “He that believeth not is condemned already” (John 3:18). The verdict has already been given, but the sentence has not yet been executed. Why?

Because God is patient and long-suffering, and continues to call sinners to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

As you review John 3, you can see that the Apostle John is emphasizing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

It is a *living relationship* that begins with the new birth, the birth from above. When we receive Jesus Christ into our lives, we share His very life and become children in the family of God.

It is also a *loving relationship*, for He is the Bridegroom and we are a part of the bride. Like John the Baptist, we desire that Jesus Christ increase as we decrease. He must receive all the honor and glory.

It is a *learning relationship*, for He is the faithful Witness who shares God's truth with us. What a delight it is to receive His Word, meditate on it, and make it part of our very lives.

But we must never forget the cost of these blessings. For us to be born into God's family, Jesus Christ had to die. For us to enter into the loving relationship of salvation, He had to endure the hatred and condemnation of men. He had to be lifted up on the cross so that we might experience forgiveness and eternal life.

May we never take this for granted!

"He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BAD SAMARITAN

John 4

In John 4, our Lord ministers to a variety of people: the sinful Samaritan woman, His own disciples, the many Samaritans who trusted in Him, and finally, a nobleman and his household. What did these have in common? *Faith* in Jesus Christ. John was fulfilling the purpose of his Gospel in showing his readers how various kinds and classes of people came to believe in Jesus as the Son of God.

Let's meet these various persons and discover how their faith began, how it grew, and what it did for them and for others.

The Samaritan Woman (John 4:1–30)

Because the Pharisees were trying to incite competition between Jesus and John the Baptist (John 3:25–30), Jesus left Judea and started north for Galilee. He could have taken one of three possible routes: along the coast, across the Jordan and up through Perea, or straight through Samaria. Orthodox Jews avoided Samaria because there was a long-standing, deep-seated hatred between them and the Samaritans.

The Samaritans were a mixed race, part Jew and part Gentile, that grew out of the Assyrian captivity of the ten northern tribes in 727 b.c. Rejected by the Jews because they could not prove their genealogy, the Samaritans established their own temple and religious services on Mt. Gerizim. This only fanned the fires of prejudice. So intense was their dislike of the Samaritans that some of the Pharisees prayed that no Samaritan would be raised in the resurrection! When His enemies wanted to call Jesus an insulting name, they called Him a Samaritan (John 8:48).

Because He was on a divinely appointed schedule, it was necessary that Jesus go through Samaria. Why? Because He would meet a woman there and lead her into saving faith, the kind of true faith that would affect an entire village. Our Lord was no respecter of persons. Earlier, He counseled a moral Jewish man (John 3), and now He would witness to an immoral Samaritan woman!

He arrived at Jacob's well at six o'clock in the evening, the usual time for women to come for water. The disciples went to the nearby town for food while Jesus deliberately waited at the well. He was weary, hungry, and thirsty. John not only presents Jesus as the Son of God but also as true man. Our Lord entered into all the normal experiences of our lives and is able to identify with us in each of them.

As you read our Lord's interview with this woman, notice how her knowledge of Jesus increases until she acknowledges that He is the Christ. There were four stages in this experience.

He is "a Jew" (vv. 7–10). In that day, it was not considered proper for any man, especially a rabbi, to speak in public to a strange woman (John 4:27). But our Lord set social customs aside because a soul's eternal salvation was at stake. It certainly surprised her when He asked for a drink of water. She surmised that He was a Jewish rabbi, and perhaps she tried to "read between the lines" to find another meaning to His request. What was He *really* seeking?

The information in John's parenthesis at the end of John 4:9 was for the benefit of his Gentile readers. Since the disciples had gone into the city to purchase food, it is obvious that the Jews did have *some* "dealings" with the Samaritans; so John was not trying to exaggerate. The phrase can be translated "ask no favors from the Samaritans" or "use no vessels in common with the Samaritans." Why would Jesus, a Jew, want to use her "polluted" vessel to get a drink of water?

Of course, our Lord's request was simply a way to open the conversation and share with her the truth about "living water." Whenever He witnessed to people, Jesus did not use a "sales talk" that He adapted to meet every situation. To Nicodemus, He spoke about new birth; but to this woman, He spoke about living water.

Jesus pointed out to her that she was ignorant of three important facts: Who He was, what He had to offer, and how she could receive it. Here was eternal God speaking to her, offering her eternal life! The Samaritans were as blind as the Jews (John 1:26). But our Lord's words had aroused her interest, so she pursued the conversation.

"Greater than Jacob" (vv. 11–15). Jesus was speaking about spiritual water, but she interpreted His words to mean literal water. Again, we see how easily people confuse the material and the spiritual. Furthermore, this woman was concerned about *how* He would obtain this water, instead of simply asking Him to give her a drink of it.

Of course Jesus *is* greater than Jacob—and greater than the well itself! To paraphrase His reply: "Whosoever *continues to drink* of this material water (or anything

the world has to offer) will thirst again. But whosoever *takes one drink* of the water I give will never thirst again!" (see John 4:13–14) How true it is that the things of this world never completely satisfy. In hell today, people are crying, "I thirst!"

We have noted before that *life* is one of John's key concepts. He uses the word at least thirty-six times. Campbell Morgan has pointed out that mankind needs air, water, and food in order to have life. (We might also add that he needs light.) All of these are provided in Jesus Christ. He provides the "breath" (Spirit) of God (John 3:8; 20:22). He is the Bread of Life (John 6:48) and the Light of Life (John 1:4–5), and He gives us the water of life.

The woman's immediate response was to ask for this gift, but she did not know what she was saying. The seed of the Word fell on shallow soil, and the shoots that sprang up had no root (Matt. 13:20–21). She had made progress, but she still had a long way to go; so Jesus patiently dealt with her.

"A prophet" (vv. 16–24). The only way to prepare the soil of the heart for the seed is to plow it up with conviction. That was why Jesus told her to go get her husband: He forced her to admit her sin. There can be no conversion without conviction. There must first be conviction and repentance, and then there can be saving faith. Jesus had aroused her mind and stirred her emotions, but He also had to touch her conscience, and that meant dealing with her sin.

"I have no husband" was the shortest statement she made during the entire conversation! Why? Because now she was under conviction and her "mouth was stopped" (Rom. 3:19). But this was the best thing that could have happened to her!

However, instead of listening to Jesus, she tried to get Him on a "detour" by discussing the differences between the Jewish and the Samaritan religions. It is much more comfortable to discuss religion than to face one's sins! However, Jesus once again revealed her spiritual ignorance: she did not know who to worship, where to worship, or how to worship! He made it clear that all religions are not equally acceptable before God, that some worshipers act in ignorance and unbelief.

The only faith that God will accept is that which came through the Jews. The Bible is of Jewish origin, and our Saviour was a Jew. The first Christians were Jews. A religious worker in an airport told me that the world's deliverer came from Korea, but Jesus said, "Salvation is of the Jews." Only those who have the indwelling Holy Spirit, and who obey the truth, can worship God acceptably.

It was a devastating statement to say that worship would no longer be limited to the Jewish temple. This ties in with John 2:19–21 and also Stephen's statement in Acts 7:48–50. John's Gospel clearly reveals that there is a new sacrifice (John 1:29), a new temple (John 2:19–21; 4:20–24), a new birth (John 3:1–7), and a new water (John 4:11). Jews reading this Gospel should realize that God has established in Jesus Christ a whole new economy. The Old Covenant Law has been fulfilled and set aside.

"The Christ" (vv. 25–30). In spite of her ignorance, there was one truth this woman did know: the Messiah was coming and would reveal the secrets of hearts. Where did she learn this truth? We do not know, but that seed had lain buried in her heart until that very hour, and now it was going to bear fruit. Our Lord's response to her statement was, literally: "I that speak to thee, I am!" He dared to utter the holy name of God!

At this point, the woman put her faith in Jesus Christ and was converted. Immediately she wanted to share her faith with others, so she went into the village and

told the men she had met the Christ. When you consider how little spiritual truth this woman knew, her zeal and witness put us to shame. But God used her simple testimony, and many of the people came out to the well to meet Jesus. The rabbis said, "It is better that the words of the Law be burned than be delivered to a woman!" But Jesus did not agree with that narrow prejudice.

Why did she leave her waterpot when she hurried into the city? For one thing, she had the living water within and was now satisfied. Also, she intended to come back; and perhaps in the interim, the disciples and Jesus could use the vessel to satisfy their thirst. Gone were the racial barriers and battles that had existed before! They were all one in faith and love!

This woman did not come to faith in Christ immediately. Jesus was patient with her, and in this, He sets a good example for us in our own personal work. Certainly she was the least likely prospect for salvation, yet God used her to win almost an entire village!

The Disciples (John 4:31–38)

When the disciples returned from obtaining food, they were shocked that Jesus was conversing with a woman, and especially a Samaritan; but they did not interrupt. They were learning that their Master knew what He was doing and did not need their counsel. But, after the woman left, they urged Jesus to share the meal with them, because they knew that He was hungry.

"I have food to eat that ye know not of" was His reply and, as usual, they did not understand it. They thought He was speaking of literal food, and they wondered where He got it. Then He explained that doing the Father's will—in this case, leading the woman to salvation—was true nourishment for His soul. The disciples were satisfied with bread, but He was satisfied with accomplishing the Father's work.

"Seek your life's nourishment in your life's work," said Phillips Brooks. The will of God ought to be a source of strength and satisfaction to the child of God, just as if he sat down to a sumptuous feast. If what we are doing tears us down instead of builds us up, then we may well question whether it is the will of God for us.

Our Lord did not look on the Father's will as a heavy burden or a distasteful task. He viewed His work as the very nourishment of His soul. Doing the Father's will fed Him and satisfied Him inwardly. "I delight to do Thy will, O my God; yea, Thy Law is within my heart" (Ps. 40:8). The Samaritan woman was now doing the Father's will and finding excitement and enrichment in it.

Jesus then changed the image from that of food to that of the harvest, which is the source of the food. He quoted the familiar Jewish proverb about waiting for the harvest, and then pointed to the villagers even then coming out to the well to meet Him, thanks to the witness of the woman. The disciples went into the village to get food for themselves, but they did no evangelizing. The woman took their place!

The image of the harvest is a familiar one in the Bible and is often applied to the ministry of winning lost souls. Both the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Tares (Matt. 13:1–30) relate to this theme, and Paul used it in his letters (Rom. 1:13; 1 Cor. 3:6–9; Gal. 6:9). We plant the seed of God's Word in the hearts of people who hear it, and we seek to cultivate that seed by our love and prayers. In due time, that seed may bear fruit to the glory of God.

No doubt the disciples had said, as they approached the city of Sychar, "There can be no harvest here! These people despise us Jews and would have no use for our message." But just the opposite was true: the harvest was ready and only needed faithful workers to claim it. For some reason, when it comes to witnessing for Christ, it is always the wrong time and the wrong place! It takes faith to sow the seed, and we must do it even when the circumstances look discouraging. Read Ecclesiastes 11:4 and take it to heart!

There is no competition in the Lord's harvest. Each of us has an assigned task and we are all a part of each other's labors (1 Cor. 3:6–9). One sows, one reaps; but each worker gets his honest reward for the work he has done.

John 4:38 indicates that others had labored in Samaria and had prepared the way for this harvest. We do not know who these faithful workers were, nor do we need to know; for God will reward them. Perhaps some of these people had heard John the Baptist preach, or perhaps some of John's followers had reached into this difficult field. Some archeologists have located "Aenon near Salim" where John baptized (John 3:23) near the biblical Shechem, which is close to Sychar and Jacob's well. If this is the case, then John the Baptist prepared the soil and planted the seed, and Jesus and the disciples reaped the harvest. Of course, the woman herself planted some of the seed through her witness to the men.

The disciples were learning a valuable lesson that would encourage them in the years to come. They were not alone in the work of the Lord, and they must never look on any opportunity for witness as wasted time and energy. It takes faith to plow the soil and plant the seed, but God has promised a harvest (Ps. 126:5–6; Gal. 6:9). In a few years, Peter and John would participate in another harvest among the Samaritans (Acts 8:5–25). Those who sow may not see the harvest, but those who reap will see it and give thanks for the faithful labors of the sowers.

The Greek word translated "labor" in John 4:38 is translated "wearied" in John 4:6. Sowing, cultivating, and harvesting are difficult tasks, not only in the physical realm, but also in the spiritual. There is no place in the harvest for lazy people. The work is too difficult and the laborers are too few.

The Samaritans (John 4:39–42)

Many of the Samaritans believed because of the testimony of the woman, and then many more believed when they heard Jesus personally. So excited were they about Him that they begged Him to stay with them; and He stayed for two days. During that short time, His word produced fruit in their lives.

It is important that new converts be grounded in the Word—the Bible. These Samaritans began their spiritual walk by trusting in what the woman said, but they soon learned to trust the Word taught by the Saviour. Theirs was no "secondhand" salvation. They knew that they were saved because they had believed His message. "Now we know!" was their happy testimony.

You would have thought that these Samaritans would have been narrow in their faith, seeing Jesus as the Saviour of the Jews and the Samaritans. But they declared that He was "the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42). They had been converted only a few

days, but they already had a missionary vision! In fact, their vision was wider than that of the Apostles!

It is interesting to trace our Lord's movements that brought Him to Samaria. He was in Jerusalem (John 2:23) and then came into Judea (John 3:22). From Judea He went into Samaria (John 4:4), and the Samaritans declared Him to be "the Saviour of the world." This is a perfect parallel to Acts 1:8—"And ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Our Lord has set the example. If we follow, He will give us the harvest.

This unnamed Samaritan woman was a fruitful believer: she bore fruit ("many believed"), more fruit ("many more believed"), and today continues to bear "much fruit" to the glory of God (see John 15:1-5). Nobody knows how many lost sinners have come to the Saviour because of the witness of this woman recorded in John 4.

The Nobleman (John 4:43-54)

Our Lord continued His journey to Galilee (John 4:3) and came again to Cana. Galilee was known as "*Galil ha goyim*—Galilee of the Gentiles." Apparently Jesus had detected in Judea (His own country) the increasing hostility of the religious leaders, though the real opposition would not yet appear for some months. Our Lord was really never identified with Judea even though He had been born in Bethlehem. He was known as the Prophet from Galilee (Matt. 21:11; John 7:52). Jesus knew that the public response to His ministry in Jerusalem had been insincere and shallow (John 2:23-25), and that it was not honoring to Him at all.

Why did Jesus return to Cana? Perhaps He wanted to cultivate the "seed" He had planted there when He attended the wedding feast. Nathanael came from Cana, so perhaps there was a personal reason for this visit. Jesus was met at Cana by a nobleman from Capernaum, some twenty miles away. The man had heard about His miracles and came all that distance to intercede for his son who was dying. The first miracle at Cana came at the request of His mother (John 2:1-5), and this second miracle at Cana at the request of a father (John 4:47).

Was this man a Jew or a Gentile? We do not know. Nor do we know his exact position in the government. He may have been a member of Herod's court; but whatever his national or social standing, he was clearly at his wit's end and desperately needed the help of the Saviour. He "kept beseeching Him" to travel to Capernaum to heal his son.

John 4:48 was not a rebuke of this nobleman. Rather, it was our Lord's lament at the spiritual condition of the people in general, both in Judea and Galilee. "Seeing is believing" has always been the "pragmatic" philosophy of the lost world, even the religious world. The nobleman believed that Jesus could heal his son, but he made two mistakes in his thinking: that Jesus had to go to Capernaum to save the lad, and that if the boy died meanwhile, it was too late.

We must admire this man's faith. Jesus simply said, "Go thy way; thy son liveth" (John 4:50). And the man believed Jesus and started to return home! Both the Samaritan woman and this anonymous nobleman must have rejoiced the heart of Jesus as they believed the word and acted on it.

The boy was healed the instant Jesus spoke those words; so the man's servants started out to find him so they could share the good news. (Again, it is the servants who know what is going on. See John 2:9; 15:15.) The boy had been healed at the seventh hour, which, in Roman time, would be 7 o'clock in the evening. The father certainly would not have traveled at night, for that would have been dangerous; nor would the servants have taken that risk. The father's faith was so strong that he was willing to delay going home, even though his heart yearned to see his beloved son.

When the father and the servants met the next day, their report confirmed his faith. Note that the father thought the healing would be gradual ("began to improve"); but the servants reported a complete, instant recovery.

This man began with *crisis faith*. He was about to lose his son and he had no other recourse but the Lord Jesus Christ. Many people came to Jesus with their crises, and He did not turn them away. The nobleman's crisis faith became *confident* faith: he believed the Word and had peace in his heart. He was even able to delay his trip home, knowing that the boy was out of danger.

His confident faith became *confirmed* faith. Indeed, the boy had been completely healed! And the healing took place at the very time when Jesus spoke the Word. It was this fact that made a believer out of the nobleman and his household. He believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God; and he shared this faith with his family. He had *contagious* faith and shared his experience with others.

This is one of several miracles that Jesus performed "at a distance." He healed the centurion's servant from a distance (Matt. 8:5–13, and note that he too lived in Capernaum), and He healed the daughter of the Canaanite woman in the same manner (Matt. 15:21–28). These two were Gentiles and, spiritually speaking, were "at a distance" (Eph. 2:12–13). Perhaps this nobleman was also a Gentile. We do not know.

John 4:54 does not state that this healing was the second miracle that Jesus ever performed, for that would contradict John 2:23 and 3:2. This was the second miracle He performed *in Cana of Galilee* (see John 2:1, 11). He certainly gave those people special privileges.

But we must note that both miracles were "private" rather than public. Mary, the disciples, and the servants knew where the excellent wine had come from, but the guests did not. (Of course, it is possible that the servants told the story to others.) The nobleman's son was healed at Capernaum, not Cana; but news traveled rapidly in those days and certainly the word got out.

Jesus' first miracle at the wedding revealed His power over *time*. The Father is always making water into wine, but He takes a season or two to finish the work. Jesus made the wine instantly. In this sense, our Lord's miracles were only *instantaneous* copies of what the Father is always doing. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17). The Father is constantly multiplying bread, season after season, but the Son multiplied it instantly.

In the second recorded miracle, Jesus showed His power over *space*. He was not limited simply because He was in Cana and the sick boy was in Capernaum. The fact that the father believed the word and did not know the results until the next day is evidence that he had confident faith. He trusted the word that Jesus spoke, and so should we.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MAN WHO WAS EQUAL WITH GOD

John 5

Our Lord's first two miracles recorded by John were somewhat private in nature. The servants and the disciples knew that He transformed the water into wine, and the servants and the nobleman's family knew that He had healed the sick son. The miracle recorded in John 5 was not only public, but it was performed on the Sabbath Day and incited the opposition of the religious leaders. We see here the beginning of "official persecution" against the Saviour.

There are three exciting "acts" in this drama.

The Cure (John 5:1–15)

When you visit St. Anne's Church in Jerusalem, they will show you the deep excavation that has revealed the ancient Pool of Bethesda. The Hebrew name *Bethesda* has been spelled various ways and given differing meanings. Some say it means "house of mercy" or "house of grace," but others say it means "place of the two outpourings." There is historical and archeological evidence that two adjacent pools of water served this area in ancient times.

The pool is situated near the northeast corner of the Old City, close to the Sheep Gate (Neh. 3:1; 12:39). Perhaps John saw some spiritual significance to this location, for he had already told his readers that Jesus Christ is "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29).

We do not know which feast Jesus was observing when He went to Jerusalem, and it is not important that we know. His main purpose for going was not to maintain a religious tradition but to heal a man and use the miracle as the basis for a message to the people. The miracle illustrated what He said in John 5:24—the power of His Word and the gift of life.

While it is true that some manuscripts omit the end of John 5:3 and all of verse 4, it is also true that the event (and the man's words in John 5:7) would make little sense if these words are eliminated. Why would anybody, especially a man sick for so many years, remain in one place if nothing special were occurring? You would think that after thirty-eight years of nothing happening to *anybody*, the man would go elsewhere and stop hoping! It seems wisest for us to accept the fact that something extraordinary kept all these handicapped people at this pool, hoping for a cure.

John described these people as "impotent, blind, lame, paralyzed." What havoc sin has wrought in this world! But the healing of these infirmities was one of the prophesied ministries of the Messiah (Isa. 35:3–6). Had the religious leaders known their own Scriptures, they would have recognized their Redeemer; but they were spiritually blind.

No matter how you look at this miracle, it is an illustration of the grace of God. It was grace that brought Jesus to the Pool of Bethesda, for who would want to mingle with a crowd of helpless people! Jesus did not heal all of them; He singled out one man and

healed him. The fact that Jesus came to the man, spoke to him, healed him, and then met him later in the temple is proof of His wonderful grace and mercy.

John noted that the man had been ill for thirty-eight years. Perhaps he saw in this a picture of his own Jewish nation that had wandered in the wilderness for thirty-eight years (Deut. 2:14). Spiritually speaking, Israel was a nation of impotent people, waiting hopelessly for something to happen.

Jesus knew about the man (see John 2:23–24) and asked him if he wanted to be healed. You would think that the man would have responded with an enthusiastic, “Yes! I want to be healed!” But, instead, he began to give excuses! He had been in that sad condition for so long that his will was as paralyzed as his body. But if you compare John 5:6 with verse 40, you will see that Jesus had a spiritual lesson in mind as well. Indeed, this man did illustrate the tragic spiritual state of the nation.

The Lord healed him through the power of His spoken word. He commanded the man to do the very thing he was unable to do, but in His command was the power of fulfillment (see Mark 3:5; Heb. 4:12). The cure was immediate and certainly some of the many people at the pool must have witnessed it. Jesus did not pause to heal anyone else; instead, He “moved away” (John 5:13) so as not to create a problem. (The Greek word means “to dodge.”)

The miracle would have caused no problem except that it occurred on the Sabbath Day. Our Lord certainly could have come a day earlier, or even waited a day; but He wanted to get the attention of the religious leaders. Later, He would deliberately heal a blind man on the Sabbath (John 9:1–14). The scribes had listed thirty-nine tasks that were prohibited on the Sabbath, and carrying a burden was one of them. Instead of rejoicing at the wonderful deliverance of the man, the religious leaders condemned him for carrying his bed and thereby breaking the law.

It is not easy to understand the relationship between this man and Jesus. There is no evidence that he believed on Christ and was converted, yet we cannot say that he was opposed to the Saviour. In fact, he did not even know who it was that healed him until Jesus met him in the temple. No doubt the man went there to give thanks to God and to offer the appropriate sacrifices. It seems strange that the man did not actively seek a closer relationship with the One who healed him, but more than one person has gratefully accepted the gift and ignored the Giver.

Did the man “inform” on Jesus because of fear? We do not know. The Jewish leaders at least turned from him and aimed their accusations at Jesus Christ; and, unlike the healed blind man in John 9, this man was not excommunicated. The Lord's words (John 5:14) suggest that the man's physical plight had been the result of sin; but Jesus did not say that the man's sins had been forgiven as He did in dealing with the sick man lowered through the roof (see Mark 2:1–12). It is possible to experience an exciting miracle and still not be saved and go to heaven!

The Controversy (John 5:16–18)

The Jewish leaders did not prosecute the man who was healed, even though he had broken the law; but they did begin to persecute the Lord Jesus. As the guardians of the faith, the members of the Jewish Sanhedrin (the religious ruling council) had the responsibility of investigating new preachers and teachers who appeared in the land,

lest some false prophet come along and lead the people astray. They had looked into the ministry of John the Baptist (John 1:19ff) and more recently had been scrutinizing the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus had healed a demoniac on the Sabbath (Luke 4:31–37), so the Sanhedrin was already suspicious. In the days following the miracle recorded in John 5, Jesus would defend His disciples for picking grain on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1–8), and would heal a man's withered hand on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:9–14). He deliberately challenged the legalistic traditions of the scribes and Pharisees. They had taken the Sabbath—God's gift to man—and had transformed it into a prison house of regulations and restrictions.

When they confronted Jesus with His unlawful conduct, He simply replied that He was doing only what His Father was doing! God's Sabbath rest had been broken by man's sin (see Gen. 3); and ever since the fall of man, God has been seeking lost sinners and saving them. But when Jesus said "My Father" instead of the usual "our Father," used by the Jews, He claimed to be equal with God.

The Jewish leaders instantly understood His claim, and they changed their accusation from that of Sabbath-breaking to blasphemy, because Jesus claimed to be God. Liberal theologians who say that Jesus never claimed to be God have a difficult time with this passage.

Of course, the penalty for such blasphemy was death. It is here that the "official persecution" of Jesus began, culminating in His crucifixion. In the days that followed, our Lord often confronted His enemies with their evil desire to kill Him (John 7:19, 25; 8:37, 59). They hated Him without a cause (John 15:18–25). They ignored the good deeds that He performed for the helpless and hopeless, and centered their attention on destroying Him.

Jesus made Himself equal with God because He is God. This is the theme of John's Gospel. The Jewish leaders could not disprove His claims, so they tried to destroy Him and get Him out of the way. Both in His crucifixion and His resurrection, Jesus openly affirmed His deity and turned His enemies' weapons against them.

British writer George MacDonald pointed out that John 5:17 gives us a profound insight into our Lord's miracles. Jesus did *instantly* what the Father is always doing slowly. For example, in nature, as mentioned earlier, the Father is slowly turning water into wine; but Jesus did it instantly. Through the powers in nature, the Father is healing broken bodies; but Jesus healed them immediately. Nature is repeatedly multiplying bread, from sowing to harvest; but Jesus multiplied it instantly in His own hands.

The Claims (John 5:19–47)

In response to their accusations, Jesus made three significant claims that proved His sonship.

He claimed to be equal with God (vv. 19–23). Instead of denying their accusation, He endorsed it! If today a man made this kind of a claim, we would conclude that he was joking or mentally disturbed. Jesus was certainly not insane, and there is every evidence that He was deadly serious when He spoke these words. Either He is what He claims to be, or He is a liar; and if He is a liar, how do you explain all the good He has

done in the lives of needy people? Nobody wants to trust a liar; Jesus' disciples were willing to die for Him.

Jesus claimed to be one with His Father in *His works*. If healing a man on the Sabbath was a sin, then the Father was to blame! Jesus did nothing "of Himself" but only that which the Father was doing. The Father and the Son worked together, doing the same deeds in the same way. "I and the Father are One" (John 10:30).

When our Lord came to earth as man, He submitted Himself to the Father in everything. "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:9). He veiled His glory and laid aside the independent exercise of His divine attributes. In the wilderness, Satan tempted Him to use His divine powers for Himself; but He refused to act independently. He was totally dependent on the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit of God.

Not only did the Father show the Son His works and enable Him to do them, but the Father also shared His love (John 5:20). The first three Gospels open with the Father calling Jesus "My beloved Son," and John echoed this statement in John 3:35. We usually think of the Father's love for the lost world, as in John 3:16; but we must also remember the Father's love for His dear Son.

Because the Father loves the Son, the Father shows Him His works. The blind religious leaders could not see what Jesus was doing, because they did not know the Father or the Son. In fact, even greater works were in the Father's plan, works that would cause them to marvel. Perhaps He had in mind the healing of Lazarus; for in John 5:21, He mentioned the raising of the dead.

For Jesus to claim to have power to raise the dead was a blasphemous thing in the eyes of the Jewish leaders; they gave that power to God alone. They said that Jehovah held the three great keys: the key to open the heavens and give rain (Deut. 28:12); the key to open the womb and give conception (Gen. 30:22); and the key to open the grave and raise the dead (Ezek. 37:13). As far as the Gospel records are concerned, Jesus had not yet raised anyone from the dead; so to make this claim was to invite even more opposition.

John 5:21 certainly can mean much more than the physical raising of people from the dead, for certainly Jesus was referring to His gift of spiritual life to the spiritually dead. He amplified this truth further as recorded in John 5:24–29.

So, Jesus claimed to be equal with the Father in His works, but He also claimed to be equal with the Father in *executing judgment* (John 5:22). To the orthodox Jew, Jehovah God was "the Judge of all the earth" (Gen. 18:25); and no one dared to apply that august title to himself. But Jesus did! By claiming to be the Judge, He claimed to be God. "Because He [God] hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained" (Acts 17:31).

Our Lord claimed equality in another area, namely, *equal honor with the Father* (John 5:23). The fact that He is the appointed Judge should cause men to honor Him. What a tremendous claim: if you do not honor the Son, you are not honoring the Father! The "religious" people who say that they worship God, but who deny the deity of Christ, have neither the Father nor the Son! Apart from Jesus Christ, we cannot know the Father, worship the Father, or serve the Father.

He claimed to have authority to raise the dead (vv. 24–29). For a second time, Jesus introduced His words with the solemn "verily, verily" (see John 5:19, 24–25). More than twenty times in John's Gospel you will find Jesus using this solemn form of

address. It is as though He was saying, "Pay attention to this! What I am about to say is important!"

In this fascinating paragraph, Jesus spoke about four different resurrections. He described the resurrection of lost sinners into eternal life (see John 5:24–25; Eph. 2:1–10). The lost sinner is as lifeless and helpless as a corpse. No matter how an undertaker may prepare a corpse, it is still dead; and no corpse is "deader" than any other corpse. If you are dead, you are dead! The lost sinner is helpless to save himself and he certainly cannot give himself life.

How are dead sinners raised from the dead? By hearing God's Word and believing on God's Son. Jesus healed the paralyzed man at the pool by His word (John 5:8). Each time He raised somebody from the dead, He spoke the word (Luke 7:11–17; 8:49–56; John 11:41–44). His Word is "living and powerful" (Heb. 4:12) and can raise sinners from spiritual death. "Everlasting life" means that they can never die spiritually again, nor can they ever come into judgment (Rom. 8:1). To hear His Word and believe means salvation; to reject His Word means condemnation (John 12:48).

The second resurrection mentioned is the resurrection of our Lord Himself (John 5:26). Our life is derived, but His life is original, "in Himself." "In Him was life" (John 1:4). The grave could not hold Him because He is "the Prince of Life" (Acts 2:24; 3:15). Jesus laid down His life and then took it up again (John 10:17–18). Because He has life in Himself, He can share that life with all who will trust Him.

The third resurrection named is the future resurrection of life, when believers are raised from the dead (John 5:28–29a). This wonderful truth is explained in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 and 1 Corinthians 15. Keep in mind that resurrection is not reconstruction. It does not imply that God "puts the pieces back together again." The resurrection body is a new body, a glorified body, suited to the new heavenly environment. Death is not the end for the believer, nor will he live in heaven as a disembodied spirit. God saves the whole person, and this includes the body (Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:20–21). This resurrection of life will take place when Jesus Christ returns in the air and calls His people to Himself.

The fourth resurrection He mentioned is the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:29b). This resurrection involves only the lost, and it will take place just before Jesus Christ ushers in the new heaven and the new earth (Rev. 20:11–15). What an awesome event that will be, when the dead "small and great" stand before Jesus Christ! The Father has committed all judgment to the Son (John 5:22) and has given Him the authority to execute judgment (John 5:27). Today Jesus Christ is the Saviour, but one day He shall sit as the Judge.

The title "Son of man" used in John 5:27 refers to Daniel 7:13–14 and is a definite messianic title. It is used twelve times in John's Gospel and over eighty times in all four Gospels. The Jews would know this title from their reading of the Book of Daniel; and they would know that, by using it, Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah, and the Judge.

Believers will be given resurrection bodies so that they might reign with Christ in glory. Unbelievers will be given resurrection bodies—but not glorified bodies—that they might be judged and then suffer punishment in those bodies. Bodies that were used for sin will suffer the consequences of that sin.

The fact that Jesus has the authority to raise the dead is proof that He is equal with the Father, and therefore He is God.

He claimed that there are valid witnesses who support His claim to deity (vv. 30–47). The word *witness* is a key word in John's Gospel; it is used forty-seven times. Jesus did bear witness to Himself, but He knew they would not accept it; so He called in three other witnesses.

The first was John the Baptist (John 5:30–35), whom the religious leaders had interrogated carefully (John 1:15ff). In fact, at the very end of His ministry, our Lord pointed the rulers back to the witness of John the Baptist (Matt. 21:23–27). John knew who Jesus was and faithfully declared what he knew to the people of Israel. John told the people that Jesus was the Lord (John 1:23), the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36), and the Son of God (John 1:34).

John was a “burning and a shining lamp” (Jesus is the Light, John 8:12), and the Jewish people were excited about his ministry. However, their enthusiasm cooled; and nobody lifted a finger to try to deliver John when he was arrested by Herod. The leaders looked on John as a “local celebrity” (Matt. 11:7–8), but they did not want to receive his message of repentance. The publicans and sinners accepted John's message and were converted, but the religious leaders refused to submit (Matt. 21:28–32).

Whenever God raises up a spiritual leader who commands attention, there is always the danger of attracting people who want to bask in his popularity but not submit to his authority. A “mixed multitude” followed Moses and Israel out of Egypt, people who were impressed with the miracles but not yielded to the Lord. The prophets and Apostles, as well as the great leaders in church history, all had to put up with shallow people who followed the crowd but refused to obey the truth. We have them in churches today.

Our Lord's second witness was the witness of His miracles (John 5:36). You will remember that John selected seven of these “signs” to include in his Gospel as proof that Jesus is the Son of God (John 20:30–31). Jesus made it clear that His works were the works of the Father (John 5:17–20; 14:10). Even Nicodemus had to admit that our Lord's miracles identified Him as “sent from God” (John 3:2).

But the Bible also records miracles performed by ordinary men, such as Moses, Elijah, and Paul. Do these miracles prove that they are also sent of God? Yes, they do (see Heb. 2:3–4), but none of these men ever claimed to be the very Son of God. No servant of God able to perform God's mighty works would ever claim to be God Himself. The fact that Jesus made this claim, backed up by His mighty works and perfect life, is evidence that His claim is true.

Jesus indicated that the Father gave Him a specific ministry to finish while He was here on earth. “I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do” (John 17:4). He was not only on a divine timetable, but He followed a divine agenda. He had specific works to accomplish in the Father's will.

Since the Old Testament Law required the testimony of two or three witnesses (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6), the Lord met that requirement by giving three trustworthy witnesses.

The third and final witness our Lord summoned was *the Word of the Father* (John 5:37–47). The Jewish people highly revered the written Word of God, particularly the Law that was given through Moses. Moses heard God's voice and saw God's glory; but we have that same voice and glory in the inspired Word of God (see 2 Peter 1:12–21). The Old Testament Scriptures bear witness to Jesus Christ, yet the people who received and preserved that Word were blind to their own Messiah. Why?

For one thing, they did not permit that Word to generate faith in their hearts (John 5:38). John 5:39 is probably a statement of fact and not a command and could be rendered: "Ye search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life." The Jewish scribes sought to know the Word of God, but they did not know the God of the Word! They counted the very letters of the text, but they missed the spiritual truths that the text contained.

Because of my radio ministry, I often receive letters from people who disagree with my interpretations or applications of Scripture; and sometimes these letters are quite angry. (I will not quote here the language I have seen in letters from professed Christians!) It is unfortunate when our "study" of the Bible makes us arrogant and militant instead of humble and anxious to serve others, even those who disagree with us. The mark of true Bible study is not knowledge that puffs up, but love that builds up (1 Cor. 8:1).

So, there was something wrong with *the minds* of these Jewish leaders: they did not see Christ in their own Scriptures (see 2 Cor. 3:14–18; 4:3–6). But there was also something wrong with their *wills*: they would not trust in the Saviour. Because they did not have the Word in their hearts, they did not want Christ in their hearts. They were religious and self-righteous, but they were not saved.

These leaders had a third problem, and this was the lack of love in their *hearts*. "Ye have not the love of God in you" (John 5:42). This means the experience of God's love for them as well as their expression of love for God. They claimed to love God, but their attitude toward Jesus Christ proved that their love was counterfeit.

Their attitude toward God's Word hindered their faith, but so also did their attitude toward themselves and one another. The Pharisees enjoyed being honored by men (see Matt. 23:1–12) and they did not seek for the honor that comes from God alone. They did not honor the Son (John 5:23) because He did not honor them! Because they rejected the true Son of God who came in the Father's name, they would one day accept a false messiah, the Antichrist, who would come in his own name (John 5:43; and see 2 Thes. 2; Rev. 13). If we reject that which is true, we will ultimately receive that which is false.

Our Lord closed this penetrating sermon by warning the Jewish leaders that Moses, whom they honored, would be their judge, not their savior. The very Scriptures that they used to defend their religion would one day bear witness against them. The Jews *knew* what Moses wrote, but they did not really *believe* what he wrote. It is one thing to have the Word in our hands or our heads, but quite another thing to have it in our hearts. Jesus is the Word made flesh (John 1:14), and the written Word bears witness to the Incarnate Word. "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27).

The witness of John the Baptist, the witness of the divine miracles, and the witness of the Word of God all unite to declare that Jesus Christ is indeed One with the Father and the very Son of God.

Our Lord was not intimidated by the accusations of the religious leaders. If you check a harmony of the Gospels, you will see that after the events recorded in John 5, Jesus deliberately violated the Sabbath again! He permitted His disciples to pick grain on the Sabbath, and He healed a man with a withered hand (Matt. 12:1–14). These

events probably took place in Galilee, but the news would certainly reach the leaders in Jerusalem and Judea.

The healing of the man on the Sabbath would come up again (John 7:21–23). The leaders would persist in protecting tradition instead of understanding truth (see Mark 7:1–13). But before we judge them, perhaps we ought to examine our own lives and churches. Are we permitting religious tradition to blind us to the truth of God's Word? Are we so involved in "Bible study" that we fail to see Jesus Christ in the Word? Does our knowledge of the Bible give us a "big head" or a "burning heart"?

CHAPTER SIX

JESUS LOSES HIS CROWD

John 6

Since John's Gospel is selective (John 20:30–31), he does not record events in the life of Jesus that do not help him fulfill his purpose. Between the healing of the paralytic (John 5) and the feeding of the 5,000, you have many events taking place, some of which are mentioned in Luke 6:1–9:10 and Mark 3:1–6:30. During this period our Lord preached "the Sermon on the Mount" (Matt. 5–7) and gave the parables of the kingdom (Matt. 13).

The feeding of the 5,000 was a miracle of such magnitude that it is recorded in all four Gospels. A great multitude had been following Jesus for several days, listening to His teaching and beholding His miracles. Jesus had tried to "get away" to rest, but the needs of the crowd pressed on Him (Mark 6:31–34). Because of His compassion, He ministered to the multitude in three different ways.

Jesus Feeds the Multitude (John 6:1–14)

The problem, of course, was how to meet the needs of such a vast crowd of people. Four solutions were proposed.

First, the disciples suggested that Jesus send the people away (Mark 6:35–36). Get rid of the problem (see Matt. 15:23). But Jesus knew that the hungry people would faint on the way if somebody did not feed them. It was evening (Matt. 14:15), and that was no time for travel.

The second solution came from Philip in response to our Lord's "test question" (John 6:5): raise enough money to buy food for the people. Philip "counted the cost" and decided they would need the equivalent of 200 days' wages! And even that would not provide bread enough to satisfy the hunger of all the men, women, and children (Matt. 14:21). Too often, we think that money is the answer to every need. Of course, Jesus was simply testing the strength of Philip's faith.

The third solution came from Andrew, but he was not quite sure how the problem would be solved. He found a little boy who had a small lunch: two little fish and five barley cakes. Once again, Andrew is busy bringing somebody to Jesus (see John 1:40–42; 12:20–22). We do not know how Andrew met this lad, but we are glad he did! Though Andrew does not have a prominent place in the Gospels, he was apparently a “people person” who helped solve problems.

The fourth solution came from our Lord, and it was the true solution. He took the little boy's lunch, blessed it, broke it, handed it out to His disciples, and they fed the whole crowd! The miracle took place in the hands of the Saviour, not in the hands of the disciples. He multiplied the food; they only had the joyful privilege of passing it out. Not only were the people fed and satisfied, but the disciples salvaged twelve baskets of fragments for future use. The Lord wasted nothing.

The practical lesson is clear: whenever there is a need, give all that you have to Jesus and let Him do the rest. Begin with what you have, but be sure you give it all to Him. That little lad is to be commended for sharing his lunch with Christ, and his mother is to be commended for giving him something to give to Jesus. The gift of that little snack meant as much to Jesus as the pouring out of the expensive ointment (John 12:1ff).

But did Jesus really perform a miracle? Perhaps the generosity of the boy only embarrassed the other people so that they brought out their hidden lunches and shared them all around. Nonsense! Jesus knows the hearts of men (John 2:24; 6:61, 64, 70) and He declared that the people were hungry. Surely He would have known of the existence of hidden food! Furthermore, the people themselves declared that this was a miracle and even wanted to crown Him King! (John 6:14–16) Had this event been only the result of mass psychology, the crowd would not have responded that way. John would never have selected this as one of the “signs” if it were not an authentic miracle.

It is significant that twice John mentioned the fact that Jesus gave thanks (John 6:11, 23). Matthew, Mark, and Luke all state that Jesus looked up to heaven when He gave thanks. By that act, He reminded the hungry people that God is the source of all good and needful gifts. This is a good lesson for us: instead of complaining about what we do not have, we should give thanks to God for what we do have, and He will make it go farther.

Jesus Leaves the Multitude (John 6:15–21)

Jesus compelled the disciples to get into the boat (Matt. 14:22; Mark 6:45) because He knew they were in danger. The crowd was now aroused and there was a movement to make Him King. Of course, some of the disciples would have rejoiced at the opportunity to become famous and powerful! Judas would have become treasurer of the kingdom, and perhaps Peter would have been named prime minister! But this was not in the plan of God, and Jesus broke up the meeting immediately. Certainly the Roman government would have stepped in had a movement begun.

Did Jesus know that a storm was coming? Of course. Then why did He deliberately send His friends into danger? Quite the opposite is true: He was rescuing them from greater danger, the danger of being swept along by a fanatical crowd. But there was another reason for that storm: the Lord has to balance our lives; otherwise we will

become proud and then fall. The disciples had experienced great joy in being part of a thrilling miracle. Now they had to face a storm and learn to trust the Lord more. The feeding of the 5,000 was the lesson, but the storm was the examination after the lesson.

Sometimes we are caught in a storm because we have disobeyed the Lord. Jonah is a good example. But sometimes the storm comes because we have *obeyed* the Lord. When that happens, we can be sure that our Saviour will pray for us, come to us, and deliver us. In writing the account of this event years later, perhaps John saw in it a picture of Christ and His church. Christ is in heaven interceding for us, but we are in the midst of the storms of life, trying to reach the shore. One day, He will come for us and we shall reach the port safely, the storms all past.

Actually, there were several miracles involved in this event. Jesus walked on the water, and so did Peter (Matt. 14:28–32). Jesus stilled the storm, and instantly the boat was on the other shore. Of course, all of this happened at night so that only Jesus and His disciples knew what had occurred. Jesus had led His people into the green pastures (John 6:10), and now He brought them into the still waters (Ps. 23:2). What a wonderful Shepherd He is!

As you read the Gospel records, note that our Lord was never impressed by the great crowds. He knew that their motives were not pure and that most of them followed Him in order to watch His miracles of healing. “Bread and circuses” was Rome’s formula for keeping the people happy, and people today are satisfied with that kind of diet. Give them food and entertainment and they are happy. Rome set aside ninety-three days each year for public games at government expense. It was cheaper to entertain the crowds than to fight them or jail them.

We must never be deceived by the “popularity” of Jesus Christ among certain kinds of people today. Very few want Him as Saviour and Lord. Many want Him only as Healer or Provider, or the One who rescues them from problems they have made for themselves. “And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40).

Jesus Teaches the Multitude (John 6:22–71)

The purpose of the sign was that He might preach the sermon. Again, it was a ministry of “grace and truth” (John 1:17). In grace, our Lord fed the hungry people; but in truth, He gave them the Word of God. They wanted the food but they did not want the truth; and, in the end, most of them abandoned Jesus and refused to walk with Him. He lost His crowd with one sermon!

The next day began with a mystery: how did Jesus get to Capernaum? The crowd saw the disciples embark to go across the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum, and then the men were lost in the storm. The crowd also saw Jesus leave the place and go by Himself to a mountain. But the next morning, here were Jesus and His disciples *together* in Capernaum! Certainly He had not walked around the lake, and there was no evidence that He had taken another boat. Other boats had arrived, no doubt driven in by the storm; but Jesus had not been in any of them.

No doubt some of the people who had been fed simply went away to their homes, while others stayed to see what Jesus would do next. Our Lord’s sermon probably began outdoors, and then the discussion moved into the synagogue (John 6:59). It

would be impossible for a huge crowd to participate in the synagogue service, though the overflow could remain outside and hear what was being said.

This sermon on “the bread of life” is actually a dialogue between Christ and the people, especially the religious leaders (“the Jews”). We see four responses of the crowd to the Lord Jesus in John 6: seeking (vv. 22–40), murmuring (vv. 41–51), striving (vv. 52–59), and departing (vv. 60–71).

Seeking (vv. 22–40). The disciples may have been impressed that so many people stayed through a storm in order to seek their Master, but Jesus was not impressed. He knows the human heart. He knew that the people originally followed Him because of His miracles (John 6:2), but now their motive was to get fed! Even if they were attracted only by the miracles, at least there was still a possibility they might be saved. After all, that is where Nicodemus started (John 3:1–2). But now their interest had degenerated to the level of food.

Jesus pointed out that there are two kinds of food: food for the body, which is necessary but not the most important; and food for the inner man, the spirit, which is essential. What the people needed was not food but *life*, and life is a gift. Food only *sustains* life, but Jesus *gives* eternal life. The words of Isaiah come to mind: “Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?” (Isa. 55:2, nasb)

The people picked up the word *labor* and misinterpreted it to mean they had to *work* for salvation. They completely missed the word *give*. Steeped in legalistic religion, they thought they had to “do something” to merit eternal life. Jesus made it clear that only one “work” was necessary—to believe on the Saviour. When a person believes on Christ, he is not performing a good work that earns him salvation. There is certainly no credit in believing, for it is what God does *in response to our faith* that is important (see Eph. 2:8–10).

The crowd began by seeking Christ, but then started to seek a sign from Him. “For the Jews require a sign” (1 Cor. 1:22). The rabbis taught that, when Messiah came, He would duplicate the miracle of the manna (see Ex. 16). If Jesus was truly sent by God (see John 6:29, 38, 57), then let Him prove it by causing manna to fall from heaven. They wanted to “see and believe.” But faith that is based on signs alone, and not on the truth of the Word, can lead a person astray; for even Satan is able to perform “lying wonders” (2 Thes. 2:8–10). note also John 2:18–25; 4:48.

The quotation in John 6:31 is from Psalm 78:24, a psalm that records the unbelief and rebellion of the nation of Israel.

In His reply, our Lord sought to deepen the people’s understanding of the truth. It was *God*, not Moses, who gave the manna; so they must take their eyes off Moses and focus them on God. Also, God *gave* the manna in the past, but the Father is *now giving* the true bread in the person of Jesus Christ. The past event is finished, but the present spiritual experience goes on!

Then Jesus clearly identified what the bread is: He is the true Living Bread that came down from heaven. But He came, not only for Israel but for the whole world. And He came, not just to *sustain* life, but to *give* life! Seven times in this sermon, our Lord referred to His “coming down from heaven” (John 6:33, 38, 41–42, 50–51, 58), a statement that declared Him to be God. The Old Testament manna was but a type of the “true bread,” the Lord Jesus Christ.

This dialogue began with the crowd seeking Christ and then seeking a sign, but listeners soon began to seek the “true bread” that Jesus talked about. However, like the woman of Samaria, they were not ready for salvation (see John 4:15). She wanted the living water so she would not have to keep going to the well. The crowd wanted the bread so they would not have to toil to maintain life. People today still want Jesus Christ only for the benefits He is able to give.

In His reply to their impetuous request, Jesus used two key words that often appear in this sermon: *come* and *believe*. To come to Jesus means to believe on Him, and to believe on Him means to come to Him. Believing is not merely an intellectual thing, giving mental assent to some doctrine. It means to come to Christ and yield yourself to Him. At the close of His sermon, Jesus illustrated *coming* and *believing* by speaking about *eating* and *drinking*. To come to Christ and believe on Him means to receive Him within, just as you receive food and drink.

John 6:35 contains the first of seven great I AM statements recorded by John, statements that are found nowhere else in the Gospels. (For the other six, see John 8:12; 10:7–9, 11–14; 11:25–26; 14:6; 15:1, 5.) God revealed Himself to Moses by the name I AM (Jehovah) (Ex. 3:14). God is the self-existent One who “is, and ... was, and ... is to come” (Rev. 1:8). When Jesus used the name I AM, He was definitely claiming to be God.

John 6:37–40 contains Jesus' explanation of the process of personal salvation. These are among the most profound words He ever spoke, and we cannot hope to plumb their depths completely. He explained that salvation involves both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The Father *gives* men and women to the Son (John 6:37, 39; 17:2, 6, 9, 11–12, 24), but these men and women must *come* to Him, that is, *believe* on Him. He assured them that nobody who came to Him would ever be lost but would be raised at the last day. Even death cannot rob us of salvation! (In regard to the “last day,” see John 6:40, 44, 54. Jesus was referring to His return and the final events that climax God's program for mankind.)

From our human and limited perspective, we cannot see how divine sovereignty and human responsibility can work together; but from God's perspective, there is no conflict. When a church member asked Charles Spurgeon how he reconciled these two, he replied, “I never try to reconcile friends.” It is the Father's will that sinners be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9) and that those who trust Christ be secure in their salvation. Believers receive eternal life and Jesus can never lose them.

Murmuring (vv. 41–51). Our Lord's statement “For I came down from heaven” (John 6:38), disturbed the religious leaders, for they knew it was a claim of deity. They thought they knew Jesus, who He was and where He came from (see Matt. 13:53–58; John 7:40–43). Jesus, of course, was the *legal* son of Joseph but not his natural son, for He was born of a virgin (Luke 1:34–38). The leaders identified Jesus with Nazareth in Galilee, not Bethlehem in Judea; and they thought that Joseph was His natural father. Had they investigated the matter, they would have learned who Jesus really is.

Even in the days of Moses, the Jews were known for their murmuring (Ex. 15:24; 17:3; Num. 14:2). Perhaps the leaders and some of the crowd had now moved into the synagogue to continue the discussion. The main issue was, “Where did He come from?” Five times Jesus used the phrase “came down from heaven,” but they would not accept it.

Jesus further explained how the sinner can come to God: it is through the truth of the Word (John 6:44–45). The Father draws the sinner by His Word. Jesus quoted Isaiah 54:13 (or perhaps Jer. 31:33–34) to prove His point: “And they shall all be taught of God.” It is through the teaching of the Word that God draws people to the Saviour. (note John 5:24 and its emphasis on hearing the Word.) The sinner hears, learns, and comes as the Father draws him. A mystery? Yes! A blessed reality? Yes!

This was basically the same message He gave after He had healed the paralytic (see John 5:37–40). The crowd wanted to *see* something, but their real need was to *learn* something. It is by the Word that we “see” God and receive the faith to come to Christ and trust Him (Rom. 10:17).

When Jesus called Himself “the Living Bread,” He was not claiming to be exactly like the manna. *He was claiming to be even greater!* The manna only *sustained life* for the Jews, but Jesus *gives life* to the whole world. The Jews ate the daily manna and eventually died; but when you receive Jesus Christ within, you live forever. When God gave the manna, He gave only a gift; but when Jesus came, He gave Himself. There was no cost to God in sending the manna each day, but He gave His Son at great cost. The Jews had to eat the manna every day, but the sinner who trusts Christ *once* is given eternal life.

It is not difficult to see in the manna a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ. The manna was a mysterious thing to the Jews; in fact, the word *manna* means “What is it?” (see Ex. 16:15) Jesus was a mystery to those who saw Him. The manna came at night from heaven, and Jesus came to this earth when sinners were in moral and spiritual darkness. The manna was small (His humility), round (His eternity), and white (His purity). It was sweet to the taste (Ps. 34:8) and it met the needs of the people adequately.

The manna was given to a rebellious people; it was the gracious gift of God. All they had to do was stoop and pick it up. If they failed to pick it up, *they walked on it*. The Lord is not far from any sinner. All the sinner has to do is humble himself and take the gift that God offers.

Jesus closed this part of His message by referring to His *flesh*, a word that will be used six more times before the dialogue is concluded. John 6:51 is a declaration that the Son of God will give Himself as a sacrifice “for the life of the world.” The substitutionary death of Jesus Christ is a key doctrine in John’s Gospel. Jesus would die for the world (John 3:16; 6:51), for His sheep (John 10:11, 15), for the nation (John 11:50–52), and for His friends (John 15:12). Paul made it personal, and so should we: “Who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). We must not limit the work of Christ on the cross. He is the sacrifice not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2).

Striving (vv. 52–59). The word striving means “to fight and quarrel.” Being orthodox Jews, the listeners knew the divine prohibition against eating human flesh or any kind of blood (Gen. 9:3–4; Lev. 17:10–16; 19:26). Here we have another example in John’s Gospel of the people misunderstanding a spiritual truth by treating it literally (see John 2:19–21; 3:4; 4:11). All Jesus said was, “Just as you take food and drink within your body and it becomes a part of you, so you must receive Me within your innermost being so that I can give you life.”

Some interpreters tell us that Jesus was speaking about the Lord's Supper, and that we eat His flesh and drink His blood when we partake of the elements at the table, the bread and the cup. I do not believe that Jesus had the Communion (or eucharist) in mind when He spoke these words.

For one thing, why would He discuss the Lord's Supper with a group of disagreeable unbelievers? He had not even shared that truth with His own disciples! Why would He cast this precious pearl before the swine?

Second, He made it clear that He was not speaking in literal terms (John 6:63). He was using a human analogy to convey a spiritual truth, just as He did with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman.

Third, Jesus made it plain that this eating and drinking were *absolutely essential* for eternal life. He made no exceptions. If, then, He was speaking about a church ordinance (or sacrament), then everybody who has never shared in that experience is spiritually dead and is going to hell. This would include all the Old Testament saints, the thief on the cross, and a host of people who have trusted Christ in emergency situations (hospitals, accidents, foxholes, etc.). I personally cannot believe that our gracious God has excluded from salvation all who cannot participate in a church ceremony.

Another factor is the tense of the Greek verbs in John 6:50–51, and 53. It is the aorist tense which signifies a once-for-all action. The Communion service is a repeated thing; in fact, it is likely that the early church observed the Lord's Supper daily (Acts 2:46).

It is significant that the word *flesh* is never used in any of the reports of the Lord's Supper, either in the Gospels or in 1 Corinthians 11:23–34. The word used is "body."

If a person holds that our Lord was speaking about the Communion service, then he must believe that somehow the two elements, the bread and the fruit of the vine, turn into the very body and blood of Christ; for He said, "So he that eateth *Me*, even he shall live by *Me*" (John 6:57, italics mine). How does this "miracle" take place? What is the secret of accomplishing it? Why is it not apparent?

Our Lord's messages recorded in the Gospel of John are filled with symbolism and imagery. To take them literally is to make the same mistake the people made who first heard them.

Departing (vv. 60–71). Our Lord's teaching was not hard to understand but hard to accept once you understood it. The Jewish religious leaders both misunderstood His words and rejected them. They were "offended" by what He taught. (The Greek word is "scandalized.") They stumbled over the fact that He claimed to come down from heaven. They also stumbled over the idea that they had to eat His flesh and drink His blood in order to be saved. But if they stumbled over these two matters, what would they do if they saw Him ascend back into heaven? (John 6:62)

Jesus explained that His language was figurative and spiritual, not literal. There is no salvation in "flesh." In fact, the New Testament has nothing good to say about "the flesh." There is nothing good in it (Rom. 7:18) and we must not have confidence in it (Phil. 3:3).

How, then, do we "eat His flesh and drink His blood"? *Through the Word.* "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63). "And the Word became flesh" (John 1:14). Our Lord said the same thing: "He that heareth My word and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life" (John 5:24). The scribes who knew

Jeremiah 31:31–34 would have understood the concept of receiving God's Word into one's inner being.

The result of this message was the loss of most of our Lord's disciples. They went back to the old life, the old religion, and the old hopeless situation. Jesus Christ is "the way" (John 14:6), but they would not walk with Him. This was no surprise to the Lord, because He knows the hearts of all people.

When Jesus asked His 12 Apostles if they planned to desert Him too, it was Peter who spoke up and declared their faith. Where else could they go? "Thou hast the words of eternal life." Peter got the message! He knew that Jesus was speaking about *the Word* and not about literal flesh and blood.

Peter was one of several people who declared their belief that Jesus is the Son of God (see John 1:34, 49; 3:18; 5:25; 9:35; 10:36; 11:4, 27; 19:7; 20:31). The only mistake he made was to bear witness for the entire group. Peter was sure that *all* of the Apostles were believers, which shows how convincing Judas was. Even Peter did not know that Judas was an unbeliever!

The preaching of the Word of God always leads to a sifting of the hearts of the listeners. God draws sinners to the Saviour through the power of truth, His Word. Those who reject the Word will reject the Saviour. Those who receive the Word will receive the Saviour and experience the new birth, eternal life.

Do you feel your need because there is a spiritual hunger within? Are you willing to admit that need and come to the Saviour? If you will, He will save you and satisfy you *forever!*

CHAPTER SEVEN

FEAST FIGHT

John 7

The Feast of Tabernacles looked back to Israel's journey through the wilderness, and looked forward to the promised kingdom of Messiah. The Jews lived in booths made of branches to remind them of God's providential care of the nation for nearly forty years (Lev. 23:33–44).

Following the Feast of Trumpets and the solemn Day of Atonement, Tabernacles was a festive time for the people. The temple area was illumined by large candlesticks that reminded the people of the guiding pillar of fire; and each day the priests would carry water from the Pool of Siloam and pour it out from a golden vessel, reminding the Jews of the miraculous provision of water from the rock.

The feast may have been a jubilant time for the people, but it was a difficult time for Jesus, for it marked the beginning of open and militant opposition to Him and His ministry. Ever since He had healed the paralytic on the Sabbath Day, Jesus had been

targeted by the Jewish leaders who wanted to kill Him (John 7:1, 19–20, 25, 30, 32, 44; and note 8:37, 40). He remained in Galilee, where He would be safer, but He could not remain in Galilee and also observe the feast.

John 7 has three time divisions: before the feast (vv. 1–10), in the midst of the feast (vv. 11–36), and on the last day of the feast (vv. 37–52). The responses during each of those periods can be characterized by three words: disbelief, debate, and division.

Before the Feast: Disbelief (John 7:1–10)

Mary bore other children, with Joseph as their natural father (Matt. 13:55–56; Mark 6:1–6); so Jesus would have been their half brother. It seems incredible that His brothers could have lived with Him all those years and not realized the uniqueness of His person. Certainly they knew about His miracles (see John 7:3–4) since everybody else did. Having been in the closest contact with Him, they had the best opportunity to watch Him and test Him; yet they were still unbelievers.

Here were men going up to a religious feast, yet rejecting their own Messiah! How easy it is to follow tradition and miss eternal truth. The publicans and sinners were rejoicing at His message, but His own half brothers were making fun of Him.

These men certainly had the world's point of view: if you want to get a following, use your opportunities to do something spectacular. Jerusalem would be crowded with pilgrims and this would give Jesus the ideal "platform" to present Himself and win disciples. No doubt the brothers knew that the multitude of disciples had deserted Jesus (John 6:66). This was His opportunity to recoup His losses. Satan had offered a similar suggestion three years before (Matt. 4:1ff).

Jesus had already turned down the crowd's offer to make Him King (John 6:15), and He was not about to yield to them in any way. Celebrities might ride to success on the applause of the crowd, but God's servants know better. By doing miracles during the feast, at the "official city," Jesus could muster a crowd, reveal Himself as Messiah, and overcome the enemy. The suggestion, of course, came from hearts and minds blinded by unbelief. This unbelief had been prophesied in Psalm 69:8—"I am become a stranger unto My brethren, and an alien unto My mother's children." (Since Jesus was not Joseph's natural son, He could not say "My father's children.")

It was not the right time for Jesus to show Himself to the world (John 14:22ff). One day He shall return, and "every eye shall see Him" (Rev. 1:7). We have noticed that our Lord lived on a "divine timetable" that was marked out by the Father (John 2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; 17:1).

Jesus was exercising caution because He knew that the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Him. Though they were "religious" leaders, they were a part of "the world" that hated Jesus because He exposed their evil works. By His character and His ministry, He revealed the shallowness and emptiness of their futile religious system; He called the people back to the reality of life in God. History reveals that the "religious system" often persecutes the very prophets of God who are sent to save it!

Some manuscripts do not have the word *yet* in John 7:8, but its absence does not alter the thrust of the statement. Jesus was certainly not lying or being evasive; rather, He was exercising sensible caution. Suppose He told His brothers His plans, and they told somebody else? Could the information possibly get to the leaders? "I am going to

the feast when the right time comes," is what He said. After His family had gone, Jesus went to Jerusalem "under cover," so as not to call attention to Himself.

In our Lord's actions, we see a beautiful illustration of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The Father had a plan for His Son, and nothing could spoil that plan. Jesus did not tempt the Father by rushing to the feast, nor did He lag behind when the proper time had come for Him to attend the feast. It requires spiritual discernment to know God's timing.

In the Midst of the Feast: Debate (John 7:11–36)

Note that this public debate about the Lord Jesus involved three different groups of people. First, of course, were the Jewish leaders ("the Jews") who lived in Jerusalem and were attached to the temple ministry. This would include the Pharisees and the chief priests (most of whom were Sadducees) as well as the scribes. These men differed theologically, but they agreed on one thing: their opposition to Jesus Christ and their determination to get rid of Him. The exceptions would be Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (John 19:38–42).

The second group would be "the people" (John 7:12, 20, 31–32). This would be the festival crowd that had come to Jerusalem to worship. Many of them would not be influenced by the attitude of the religious leaders at Jerusalem. You will note in John 7:20 that "the people" were amazed that anybody would want to kill Jesus! They were not up to date on all the gossip in the city and had to learn the hard way that Jesus was considered a law-breaker by the officials.

The third group was composed of the Jews who resided in Jerusalem (John 7:25). They, of course, would have likely sided with the religious leaders.

The debate began before Jesus even arrived at the city, and it centered on *His character* (John 7:11–13). The religious leaders "kept seeking" Jesus, while the crowd kept arguing whether He was a good man or a deceiver. He would have to be one or the other, because a truly good man would not deceive anybody. Yes, Jesus is either what He claims to be, or He is a liar.

But when Jesus began to teach openly in the temple, the debate shifted to *His doctrine* (John 7:14–19). Character and doctrine go together, of course. It would be foolish to trust the teachings of a liar! The Jews were amazed at what He taught because He did not have any credentials from their approved rabbinical schools. But since He lacked this "proper accreditation," His enemies said that His teachings were nothing but private opinions and not worth much. It has often been said that Jesus taught with authority, while the scribes and Pharisees taught from authorities, quoting all the famous rabbis.

Jesus explained that His doctrine came from the Father. He had already made it clear that He and the Father were one in the works that He performed (John 5:17) and in the judgment that He executed (John 5:30). Now He claimed that His teachings also came from the Father, and He would make that astounding claim again (John 8:26, 38). When I teach the Word of God, I can claim authority for the Bible but not for all of my interpretations of the Bible. Jesus rightly could claim absolute authority for everything that He taught!

But does not *every* religious teacher make a similar claim? How, then, can we know that Jesus is teaching us the truth? *By obeying what He tells us to do.* God's Word proves itself true to those who will sincerely do it. The British preacher F.W. Robertson said that "obedience is the organ of spiritual knowledge." John 7:17 literally reads, "If any man is willing to do His [God's] will, he shall know." This explains why the Jewish leaders did not understand Jesus' teachings: they had stubborn wills and would not submit to Him (John 5:40).

Is our Lord suggesting here a "pragmatic test" for divine truth? Is He saying, "Try it! If it works, it must be true!" and thus suggesting that if it does not work it must be false? This kind of a test would lead to confusion, for almost any cultist could say, "I tried what the cult teaches, and it works!"

No, our Lord's statement goes much deeper. He was not suggesting a shallow "taste test" but rather the deep personal commitment of the person to truth. The Jews depended on education and authorities and received their doctrine secondhand, but Jesus insisted that we experience the authority of truth *personally*. The Jewish leaders were attempting to *kill Jesus*, yet at the same time they claimed to understand God's truth and obey it. This proves that an enlightened and educated mind is no guarantee of a pure heart or a sanctified will. Some of the world's worst criminals have been highly intelligent and well-educated people.

Satan offered Adam and Eve knowledge, but it was knowledge based on disobedience (Gen. 3:5). Jesus offered knowledge as the result of obedience: first the yoke of responsibility, then the joy of knowing God's truth. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan said it perfectly: "When men are wholly, completely consecrated to the will of God and want to do that above everything else, then they find out that Christ's teaching is divine, that it is the teaching of God."

If we really seek God's will, then we will not worry over who gets the glory. All truth is God's truth and God alone deserves the glory for what He has taught us. No teacher or preacher can take the credit for what only can come from God. If he does go after the glory, then it is proof that his teaching is self-generated and not received from God. This is the origin of many cults and church splits: somebody "invents" a doctrine, takes credit for it, and uses it to divide God's people.

The first "debate" was with the Jews: but the visitors to the city entered into the discussion (John 7:20). Jesus had boldly announced that the leaders wanted to kill Him because He had violated the Sabbath and then claimed to be God (see John 5:10–18). The orthodox Jews broke the Sabbath laws when they had their sons circumcised on the Sabbath, so why could He not heal a man on the Sabbath? "Why go ye about to kill Me?"

The visitors, of course, did not know that their leaders were out to kill Jesus; so they challenged His statement. But their reply contained a serious accusation—that Jesus had a demon. This was not a new accusation, for the leaders had said it before (Matt. 9:32ff; 10:25; 11:18–19; 12:24ff). "You must be crazy to think that anybody wants to kill You!"

Our Lord used the very Law of Moses to refute the enemy's argument; but He knew that they would not give in. Why? Because their standard of judgment was not honest. They evaluated things on the basis of superficial examination of the facts. They judged on the basis of "seems" and not "is." Unfortunately, too many people make that same

mistake today. John 7:24 is the opposite of verse 17, where Jesus called for sincere devotion to truth.

The residents of Jerusalem entered the conversation (John 7:25). They knew that the rulers wanted to kill Jesus, and they were amazed that He was teaching openly and getting away with it! Perhaps the rulers had been convinced that indeed He is the Messiah, sent from God! Then why were they not worshiping Him and leading others to worship Him?

Their question (John 7:25) suggested a negative answer: "No, the rulers do not believe that He is the Christ, do they?" They were able to defend their conclusion with logic:

1. Nobody knows where the Christ comes from.
2. We know where Jesus of Nazareth came from.
3. Conclusion: Jesus cannot be the Messiah.

Once again, the people could not see the truth because they were blinded by what they thought were dependable facts. Jesus had met this same kind of resistance in the synagogue in Capernaum (John 6:42ff). Even the learned teachers—the "expert builders"—would not be able to identify the Chief Cornerstone, even though they had studied the God-given "blueprints" for centuries! (Acts 4:11)

At this point, our Lord raised His voice so that everybody could hear (note also John 7:37). He was probably speaking in a tone revealing irony: "Yes, you think you know Me and where I came from! But really, you do not!" Then He explained why they did not know Him: *they did not know the Father!* This was a serious accusation to make against an orthodox Jew, for the Jews prided themselves in knowing the true God, the God of Israel.

But Jesus went even further: He boldly asserted that He not only knew the Father, but was sent by Him! He was once again claiming to be God! He was not simply *born* into this world like any other human; He was *sent* to earth by the Father. This means that He existed before He was born on the earth.

This was certainly a crisis hour in His ministry, and some of the leaders tried to have Him arrested; but "His hour was not yet come." Many of the pilgrims put their faith in Him. It was a faith based on miracles, but at least it was a beginning (see John 2:23; 6:2, 26). Nicodemus first became interested in Jesus because of His miracles (John 3:1–2), and eventually he openly professed faith in Christ.

The Pharisees and chief priests, who presided over the Jewish religious establishment, resented the fact that the people were trusting in Jesus. Apparently these "believers" were not afraid to tell what they had done (John 7:13, 32). This time, the rulers sent members of the temple guard to arrest Jesus, but it was Jesus who "arrested" them! He warned them that they had but "a little while" to hear the truth, believe, and be saved (see John 12:35ff). It was not Jesus who was in danger, but those who wanted to arrest Him!

As in previous messages, the people misunderstood what Jesus was saying. Within six months, Jesus would go back to the Father in heaven, and the unsaved Jews would not be able to follow Him. What a contrast between "where I am, there ye cannot come" (John 7:34) and "that where I am, there ye may be also"! (John 14:3)

Had these men been willing to do God's will, they would have known the truth. Soon it would be too late.

The End of the Feast: Division (John 7:37–52)

The last day of the feast would be the seventh day, a very special day on which the priests would march seven times around the altar, chanting Psalm 118:25. It would be the last time they would draw the water and pour it out. No doubt just as they were pouring out the water, symbolic of the water Moses drew from the rock, Jesus stood and shouted His great invitation to thirsty sinners.

It has been pointed out that this “great day,” the twenty-first of the seventh month, is the same date on which the Prophet Haggai made a special prediction about the temple (Hag. 2:1–9). While the ultimate fulfillment must await the return of Christ to this earth, certainly there was a partial fulfillment when Jesus came to the temple. Haggai 2:6–7 is quoted in Hebrews 12:26–29 as applying to the return of the Lord.

Jesus was referring to the experience of Israel recorded in Exodus 17:1–7. That water was but a picture of the Spirit of God. Believers would not only drink the living water, but they would become channels of living water to bless a thirsty world! The “artesian well” that He promised in John 4:14 has now become a flowing river! While there are no specific prophetic Scriptures that indicate “rivers of water” flowing from the believer, there are a number of verses that parallel this thought: Isaiah 12:3; 15; 32:2; 44:3; and 58:11; and Zechariah 14:8. Note that Zechariah 14:16ff speaks about the future Feast of Tabernacles, when the Lord is King.

Water for drinking is one of the symbols of the Holy Spirit in the Bible. (Water for washing is a symbol of the Word of God; see John 15:3 and Eph. 5:26.) Just as water satisfies thirst and produces fruitfulness, so the Spirit of God satisfies the inner person and enables us to bear fruit. At the feast, the Jews were reenacting a tradition that could never satisfy the heart. Jesus offered them living water and eternal satisfaction!

What was the result of this declaration and invitation? The people were divided: some defended Him and some wanted to arrest Him. Is He a “good man” or “a deceiver”? (John 7:12) Is He “the Christ”? (John 7:31) Is He the promised “Prophet”? (John 7:40; Deut. 18:15) If only they had honestly examined the evidence, they would have discovered that, indeed, He was the Christ, the Son of God. They identified Jesus with Galilee (John 1:45–46; 7:52) when in reality He was born in Bethlehem (see John 6:42 for similar reasoning).

The temple officers returned to the Jewish council meeting empty-handed. It certainly should have been relatively easy for them to arrest Jesus, yet they failed to do so. What stopped them? “Never man spoke like this Man!” was their defense. In other words, “This Jesus is more than a man! No mere man speaks as He does!” They were “arrested” by the Word of God, spoken by the Son of God.

Again, the leaders refused to face facts honestly but passed judgment on the basis of their prejudices and their superficial examination of the facts. It is much easier to label people (and *libel* people!) than to listen to the facts they present. “So some of the people have believed on Jesus! So what? These common people know nothing about the Law anyway! Have any *important* people—like ourselves—believed on Him? Of

course not!" They would use a similar argument to try to discredit the witness of the blind man that Jesus healed (John 9:34).

We should not be surprised when "the intelligentsia" refuses to trust Jesus Christ, or when religious leaders reject Him. God has hidden His truth from "the wise and prudent" and revealed it to "spiritual babes," the humble people who will yield to Him (Matt. 11:25–27). Paul was a very intelligent rabbi when God saved him, yet he had to be "knocked down" before he would acknowledge that Jesus Christ was the resurrected Son of God. Read 1 Corinthians 1:26–31 to learn Paul's explanation for the difficulty of winning "smart religious people" to the Saviour.

No doubt the rulers would have sent the guard out again, but Nicodemus spoke up. This man is found three times in John's Gospel, and each time he is identified as the one "who came to Jesus by night" (see John 3:1–2; 19:39). No doubt Nicodemus had been doing a great deal of thinking and studying since that first interview with Jesus, and he was not afraid to take his stand for truth.

Nicodemus was sure that the council was not giving Jesus an honest hearing. The rulers had already passed judgment and were trying to arrest Him before He had even been given a fair and lawful trial! Perhaps Nicodemus had in mind such Old Testament Scriptures as Exodus 23:1 and Deuteronomy 1:16–17; 19:15–21.

What did Nicodemus want them to consider about Jesus? His Word and His works. It was Jesus the Teacher and the miracle worker who had attracted Nicodemus' interest in the first place (John 3:2). In fact, Jesus had pointed to His works as proof of His deity (John 5:32); and He repeatedly urged the people to pay attention to His words. The two go together, for the miracles point to the messages, and the messages interpret the spiritual meaning of the miracles.

You can hear the sarcasm and disdain in the reply of the rulers: "Are you a lowly and despised Galilean too?" They refused to admit that Nicodemus was right in asking for a fair trial, but the only way they could answer him was by means of ridicule. This is an ancient debate trick: when you cannot answer the argument, attack the speaker.

They challenged Nicodemus to search the prophecies to see if he could find any statement that a prophet would come out of Galilee. Of course, Jonah was from Galilee; and Jesus said that Jonah was a picture of Himself in death, burial, and resurrection (Matt. 12:38–41). Perhaps Nicodemus read Isaiah 9:1–2 (see Matt. 4:12–16) and began to trace the great messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. If he did, then he became convinced that Jesus of Nazareth was the very Son of God.

You cannot help but feel sorry for the people described in this chapter, people who responded to Jesus in the wrong ways. His half brothers responded with disbelief; various people responded with debate; and the result was division. Had they willingly received the truth, and had they acted with sincere obedience, they would have ended up at the feet of Jesus, confessing Him as Messiah and Son of God.

But people *today* commit the same blunder and permit their prejudices and superficial evaluations to blind them to the truth.

Don't let it happen to you!

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONTRASTS AND CONFLICTS

John 8

Is the story of the woman taken in adultery a part of Scripture? If it is, where does it belong in the Gospel record? John 7:53–8:11 is not found in some of the ancient manuscripts; where it is found, it is not always in this location in John's Gospel. Most scholars seem to agree that the passage is a part of inspired Scripture ("a fragment of authentic Gospel material," says Dr. F.F. Bruce) regardless of where it is placed.

To many of us, the story fits right here! In fact, the development of the entire chapter can easily be seen to grow out of this striking event in the temple. Our Lord's declaration on His being the Light of the world (John 8:12) certainly fits, and so do His words about true and false judgment (John 8:15–16, 26). The repeated phrase "die in your sins" (John 8:21, 24) would clearly relate to the judgment of the woman; and the fact that the chapter ends with an attempt to stone Jesus shows a perfect parallel to the opening story. The transition from John 7:52 to 8:12 would be too abrupt without a transitional section.

Our Lord found Himself again in conflict with the Jewish religious leaders; but this time, they set a trap, hoping to get enough evidence to arrest Jesus and get Him out of the way. However, their plot failed; but a controversy followed. In this chapter we see a series of contrasts that reveal the graciousness of Christ and the wickedness of man.

Grace and Law (John 8:11)

The Feast of Tabernacles had ended, but Jesus took advantage of the opportunity to minister to the pilgrims in the temple. During the feast, word had quickly spread that Jesus was not only attending but openly teaching in the temple (see Luke 21:37). He taught in the court of the women at the place where the treasury was situated (John 8:20). The scribes and Pharisees knew where He would be, so they hatched their plot together.

They would not be likely to catch a couple in the "very act" of adultery; so we wonder if the man (who never was indicted!) was part of the scheme. The Law required that *both* guilty parties be stoned (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22) and not just the woman. It does seem suspicious that the man went free. The scribes and Pharisees handled the matter in a brutal fashion, even in the way they interrupted the Lord's teaching and pushed the woman into the midst of the crowd.

The Jewish leaders, of course, were trying to pin Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. If He said, "Yes, the woman must be stoned!" then what would happen to His reputation as the "friend of publicans and sinners"? The common people would no doubt have abandoned Him and would never have accepted His gracious message of forgiveness.

But, if He said, "No, the woman should not be stoned!" then He was openly breaking the Law and subject to arrest. On more than one occasion, the religious leaders had

tried to pit Jesus against Moses, and now they seemed to have the perfect challenge (see John 5:39–47; 6:32ff; 7:40ff).

Instead of passing judgment on the woman, Jesus passed judgment on the judges! No doubt He was indignant at the way they treated the woman. He was also concerned that such hypocrites should condemn another person and not judge themselves. We do not know what He wrote on the dirt floor of the temple. Was He simply reminding them that the Ten Commandments had been originally written “by the finger of God” (Ex. 31:18), and that He is God? Or was He perhaps reminding them of the warning in Jeremiah 17:13?

It was required by Jewish Law that the accusers cast the first stones (Deut. 17:7). Jesus was not asking that sinless men judge the woman, for He was the only sinless Person present. If our judges today had to be perfect, judicial benches would be empty. He was referring to *the particular sin of the woman*, a sin that can be committed in the heart as well as with the body (Matt. 5:27–30). Convicted by their own consciences, the accusers quietly left the scene, and Jesus was left alone with the woman. He forgave her and warned her to sin no more (John 5:14).

We must not misinterpret this event to mean that Jesus was “easy on sin” or that He contradicted the Law. For Jesus to forgive this woman meant that He had to one day die for her sins. Forgiveness is free but it is not cheap. Furthermore, Jesus perfectly fulfilled the Law so that no one could justly accuse Him of opposing its teachings or weakening its power. By applying the Law to the woman *and not to themselves*, the Jewish leaders were violating both the letter and the spirit of the Law—and they thought they were defending Moses!

The Law was given to reveal sin (Rom. 3:20), and we must be condemned by the Law before we can be cleansed by God's grace. Law and grace do not compete with each other; they complement each other. Nobody was ever saved by keeping the Law, but nobody was ever saved by grace who was not *first* indicted by the Law. There must be conviction before there can be conversion.

Nor is Christ's gracious forgiveness an excuse to sin. “Go, and sin no more!” was our Lord's counsel. “But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared” (Ps. 130:4). Certainly the experience of gracious forgiveness would motivate the penitent sinner to live a holy and obedient life to the glory of God.

Light and Darkness (John 8:12–20)

This second great I AM statement certainly fits into the context of the first eleven verses of John 8. Perhaps the sun was then appearing (John 8:2) so that Jesus was comparing Himself to the rising sun. But this would mean He was once again claiming to be God, for to the Jew, the sun was a symbol of Jehovah God (Ps. 84:11; Mal. 4:2). There is, for our universe, only one sun; and it is the center and the source of life. So there is but one God who is the center of all and the source of all life (John 1:4). “God is light” (1 John 1:5); and wherever the light shines, it reveals man's wickedness (Eph. 5:8–14).

Our Lord's I AM statement was also related to the Feast of Tabernacles, during which the huge candelabra were lighted in the temple at night to remind the people of the pillar of fire that had guided Israel in their wilderness journey. In fact, John has

combined three “wilderness images”: the manna (John 6), the water from the rock (John 7), and the pillar of fire (John 8).

To “follow” the Lord Jesus means to believe on Him, to trust Him; and the results are *life* and *light* for the believer. The unsaved are walking in darkness because they love darkness (John 3:17ff). One of the major messages in this Gospel is that the spiritual light is now shining, but people cannot comprehend it—and they try to put it out (John 1:4–5).

Not all of the Jewish leaders had left the group, and others had no doubt come along after the woman left. As usual, they debated with Jesus. This time, they accused Him of bearing witness to Himself by claiming to be the Light of the world; and Jewish courts would not permit a person to bear witness to himself.

But light *has to* bear witness to itself! The only people who cannot see the light are *blind* people!

I recall the first time I flew at night. I was fascinated by the changing textures of colored lights in the cities below me. When our plane left the New York area and headed out into the night, I was amazed that I could see pinpoints of light miles away. Then I understood why it was necessary to have blackouts during the war; for the enemy pilots could see the smallest evidence of light and thus find the target. Light bears witness to itself; it tells you it is there.

Perhaps the Pharisees were quoting our Lord's own words (see John 5:31ff); but He quickly refuted *their* argument. One of the key words in this section is *witness*; it is used seven times. Jesus made it clear that their witness was not dependable because their judgment was faulty. They judged on the basis of externals, mere human judgment, but He judged on the basis of spiritual knowledge. The way they judged the woman taken in adultery proved that they neither understood the Law nor their own sinful hearts.

Since they wanted to use the Law to condemn the woman and trap the Saviour, Jesus also used the Law to answer them. He quoted a principle found in Deuteronomy 17:6 and 19:15, as well as Numbers 35:30, that the testimony of two men was required to validate a judgment. Jesus had those two testimonies: *He* gave witness and so did *His Father*. We have seen from John 5:37–47 that the witness of the Father is found in the Word of God.

How tragic that these experts in the Law did not even know their own Messiah as He stood before them! They claimed to know the Law of God, but they did not know the God of the Law. They did not have His Word abiding in their hearts (John 5:38), nor did they experience His love (John 5:42). They did not know the Father, and therefore did not know the Son.

Jesus never really answered their question, “Where is Thy Father?” The word *father* is used twenty-one times in this chapter, so Jesus did not avoid the issue but faced it honestly. He knew that their “father” was not God—but the devil! These men were religious, and yet they were the children of the devil!

Their further attempts to arrest Jesus were again thwarted by the Father, for it was not yet our Lord's hour when He should give His life. When the servant of God is in the will of God, he can have courage and peace as he does his duty.

Life and Death (John 8:21–30)

Jesus had already mentioned His leaving them (John 7:34), but the Jews had misunderstood what He said. Once again, He warned them: He would leave them, they would not be able to follow Him, and they would die in their sins! They were wasting their God-given opportunities by arguing with Him instead of trusting Him; and one day soon, their opportunities would end.

Once again, the people misunderstood His teaching. They thought He was planning to kill Himself! Suicide was an abhorrent thing to a Jew, for the Jews were taught to honor all life. If Jesus committed suicide, then He would go to a place of judgment; and this, they reasoned, was why they could not follow Him.

Actually, just the opposite was true: it was *they* who were going to the place of judgment! Jesus was returning to His Father in heaven, and nobody can go there who has not trusted the Saviour. The reason Jesus and the Jewish leaders were going to different destinations was because they had different *origins*: Jesus came from heaven, but they belonged to the earth. Jesus was *in* the world, but He did not belong to the world (see John 17:14–16).

The true believer has his citizenship in heaven (Luke 10:20; Phil. 3:20–21). His affection and attention are fixed heavenward. But the unsaved belong to this world; in fact, Jesus called them “the children of this world” (Luke 16:8). Since they have not trusted Christ and had their sins forgiven, their destiny is to die in their sins. The Christian dies “in the Lord” because he lives “in the Lord” (Rev. 14:13); but the unbeliever dies in his sins because he lives in his sins.

It seems incredible that these religious “experts” should ask, “Who are You?” He had given them every evidence that He is the Son of God, yet they had deliberately rejected the evidence. Our Lord’s reply may be expressed, “I am exactly what I said!” In other words, “Why should I teach you *new* things, or give you *new* proof, when you have not honestly considered the witness I have already given?”

Jesus boldly made several claims to deity (John 8:26). He said He would judge, and judgment (to the Jews) belonged only to God. He claimed to be sent by God, and He claimed to have heard from God the things that He taught. How did the religious leaders respond to these clear affirmations of deity? They did not understand! God reveals His truth to the “babes” and not to the “wise and prudent” (Luke 10:21).

Now Jesus spoke about His own death, when He would be “lifted up” on the cross (John 3:14; 12:32). The word translated “lifted up” has a dual meaning: “lifted up in crucifixion,” and “lifted up in exaltation and glorification.” Jesus often combined the two, for He saw His crucifixion in terms of glory and not just suffering (John 12:23; 13:30–31; 17:1). This same combination of “suffering and glory” is repeated in Peter’s first letter.

It would be in His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension that Jesus would be revealed to the Jewish nation. This was the message Peter preached at Pentecost (Acts 2), not only the death of Jesus but also His resurrection and exaltation to glory. Even a Roman soldier, beholding the events at Golgotha would confess, “Truly this Man was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39). The early church, following the example of their Lord (Luke 24:25–27), would show from the Old Testament prophecies both the sufferings and the glory of the Messiah.

Jesus made two more stupendous claims: not only was He sent by the Father, but the Father was with Him because He always did what pleased the Father (John 8:29). No doubt, His enemies reacted violently to these words: but some of the listeners put

their faith in Him. Whether this was true saving faith or not (see John 2:23–25), we cannot tell; but our Lord's words to them would indicate that they knew what they were doing.

Salvation is a matter of life or death. People who live in their sins and reject the Saviour must die in their sins. There is no alternative. We either receive salvation by grace or experience condemnation under God's Law. We either walk in the light and have eternal life, or walk in the darkness and experience eternal death. There is a fourth contrast.

Freedom and Bondage (John 8:31–47)

What listeners are represented by the pronoun "they" in John 8:33? In the previous verses, Jesus addressed the "believers" mentioned in John 8:30, and He warned them that continuance in the Word—discipleship—was proof of true salvation. When we obey His Word, we grow in spiritual knowledge; and as we grow in spiritual knowledge, we grow in freedom from sin. Life leads to learning, and learning leads to liberty.

It is not likely that the pronoun *they* refers to these new believers, for they would probably not argue with their Saviour! If John 8:37 is any guide, "they" probably refers to the same unbelieving Jewish leaders who had opposed Jesus throughout this conversation (John 8:13, 19, 22, 25). As before, they did not understand His message. Jesus was speaking about true spiritual freedom, freedom from sin, but they were thinking about political freedom.

Their claim that Abraham's descendants had never been in bondage was certainly a false one that was refuted by the very record in the Old Testament Scriptures. The Jews had been enslaved by seven mighty nations, as recorded in the Book of Judges. The ten Northern tribes had been carried away captive by Assyria, and the two Southern tribes had gone into seventy years of captivity in Babylon. And at that very hour, the Jews were under the iron heel of Rome! How difficult it is for proud religious people to admit their failings and their needs!

Jesus explained that the difference between spiritual freedom and bondage is a matter of whether one is a son or a servant. The servant may live in the house, but he is not a part of the family; and he cannot be guaranteed a future. (Jesus may have had Isaac and Ishmael in mind here; see Gen. 21.) "Whosoever keeps on practicing sin [literal translation] is the servant of sin." These religious leaders would not only *die* in their sins (John 8:21, 24), but they were right then *living* in bondage to sin!

How can slaves of sin be set free? Only by the Son. How does He do it? Through the power of His Word. Note the emphasis on the Word in John 8:38–47, and He had already told them, "The truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). They would not "make room" for His Word in their hearts.

In the rest of this section, you see the debate centering around the word *father*. Jesus identified Himself with the Father in heaven, but He identified them with the father from hell, Satan. Of course, the Jews claimed Abraham as their father (Luke 3:8ff), but Jesus made a careful distinction between "Abraham's seed" (physical descendants) and "Abraham's children" (spiritual descendants because of personal faith; Gal. 3:6–14).

These Jewish leaders, who claimed to belong to Abraham, were very unlike Abraham. For one thing, they wanted to kill Jesus; Abraham was the "friend of God" and

fellowshipped with Him in love (Isa. 41:8). Abraham listened to God's truth and obeyed it, but these religious leaders rejected the truth.

Nature is determined by birth, and birth is determined by paternity. If God is your Father, then you share God's nature (2 Peter 1:1–4); but if Satan is your father, then you share in his evil nature. Our Lord did not say that *every* lost sinner is a “child of the devil,” though every lost sinner is certainly a child of wrath and disobedience (Eph. 2:1–3). Both here and in the Parable of the Tares (Matt. 13:24–32, 36–43), Jesus said that the Pharisees and other “counterfeit” believers were the children of the devil. Satan is an imitator (2 Cor. 11:13–15), and he gives his children a false righteousness that can never gain them entrance into heaven (Rom. 10:1–4).

What were the characteristics of these religious leaders who belonged to the devil? For one thing, they rejected the truth (John 8:40) and tried to kill Jesus because He spoke the truth. They did not love God (John 8:42) nor could they understand what Jesus taught (John 8:43, 47). Satan's children may be well versed in their religious traditions, but they have no understanding of the Word of God.

Satan is a liar and a murderer. He lied to our first parents (“Yea, hath God said?”) and engineered their deaths. Cain was a child of the devil (1 John 3:12), for he was both a liar and a murderer. He killed his brother Abel and then lied about it (Gen. 4). Is it any wonder that these religious leaders lied about Jesus, hired false witnesses, and then had Him killed?

The worst bondage is the kind that the prisoner himself does not recognize. He thinks he is free, yet he is really a slave. The Pharisees and other religious leaders thought that they were free, but they were actually enslaved in terrible spiritual bondage to sin and Satan. They would not face the truth, and yet it was the truth alone that could set them free.

Honor and Dishonor (John 8:48–59)

The leaders could not refute our Lord's statements, so they attacked His person. Some students think that the leaders' statement in John 8:41 — “We are not born of fornication” — was a slur on our Lord's own birth and character. After all, Mary was with child before she and Joseph were married. But the personal attacks in John 8:48 are quite obvious. For a Jew to be called a Samaritan was the grossest of insults, and then to be called a demon-possessed person only added further insult.

Note that Jesus did not even dignify the racial slur with an answer. (No doubt there was also in this the suggestion that, like the Samaritans, Jesus was a heretic.) They were dishonoring Him, but He was honoring the Father. You will recall that He made it clear that it was impossible to honor the Father without honoring the Son (John 5:23). They were seeking their own glory (see John 5:41–44), but He was seeking the glory that belongs to God alone. Tradition-centered religion, without Christ, is often a “mutual admiration society” for people who want the praise of men.

Jesus had warned them that they would die in their sins because of their unbelief, and now He invited them to trust His Word and “never see death” (John 8:51). He had said this before in His synagogue sermon (John 6:39–40, 44, 54). Once again, the leaders lacked the spiritual insight to understand what He was saying. Abraham was

dead, yet he was a godly man; and the faithful prophets were also dead. This kind of talk only convinced them the more that He had a demon! (John 7:20)

By claiming to be the Lord of death, He was claiming to be God (John 5:21–29). This was not an honor He made for Himself; the Father gave it to Him. In fact, Abraham (whom they claimed as their father) saw His day and rejoiced! Instead of rejoicing, they were revolting and trying to kill Him.

How did Abraham “see” our Lord’s day, that is, His life and ministry on earth? The same way he saw the future city: by faith (Heb. 11:10, 13–16). God did not give Abraham some special vision of our Lord’s life and ministry, but He did give him the spiritual perception to “see” these future events. Certainly Abraham saw the birth of the Messiah in the miraculous birth of his own son, Isaac. He certainly saw Calvary when he offered Isaac to God (Gen. 22). In the priestly ministry of Melchizedek (Gen. 14:17–24), Abraham could see the heavenly priesthood of the Lord. In the marriage of Isaac, Abraham could see a picture of the marriage of the Lamb (Gen. 24).

His statement found in John 8:58 can be translated, “Before Abraham came into being, I AM.” Again, this was another affirmation of His divine sonship; and the Jewish leaders received it as such. He had once again made Himself equal with God (John 5:18), and this was the sin of blasphemy, worthy of death (Lev. 24:16). Jesus was divinely protected and simply walked away. His hour had not yet come. We cannot help but admire His courage as He presented the truth and invited blind religious men to trust Him and be set free.

The most difficult people to win to the Saviour are those who do not realize that they have a need. They are under the condemnation of God, yet they trust their religion to save them. They are walking in the darkness and not following the light of life. They are sharing a “living death” because of their bondage to sin; and, in spite of their religious deeds, they are dishonoring the Father and the Son. These are the people who crucified Jesus Christ, and Jesus called them the children of the devil.

Whose child are you? Is God your Father because you have received Jesus Christ into your life? (John 1:12–13) Or is Satan your father because you are depending on a counterfeit righteousness, a “works righteousness,” not the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ?

If God is your Father, then heaven is your home. If He is not your Father, then hell is your destiny.

It is truly a matter of life or death!

CHAPTER NINE

THE BLIND MAN CALLS THEIR BLUFF

John 9

Our Lord performed miracles in order to meet human needs. But He also used those miracles as a “launching pad” for a message conveying spiritual truth. Finally, His miracles were His “credentials” to prove that He was indeed the Messiah. “The blind receive their sight” was one such messianic miracle (Matt. 11:5), and we see it demonstrated in this chapter. Jesus used this miracle as the basis for a short sermon on spiritual blindness (John 9:39–41) and a longer sermon on true and false shepherds (John 10:1–18).

I am told that in the United States somebody goes blind every twenty minutes. The man we meet in this chapter was *born* blind; he had never seen the beauty of God's creation or the faces of his loved ones. When Jesus arrived on the scene, everything changed, and the man was made to see. However, the greatest miracle was not the opening of his eyes but the opening of his heart to the Saviour. It cost him everything to confess Jesus as the Son of God, but he was willing to do it.

The easiest way to grasp the message of this chapter is to note the stages in this man's growing understanding of who Jesus is.

“A Man Called Jesus” (John 9:1–12)

About the only thing a blind man could do in that day was beg, and that is what this man was doing when Jesus passed by (John 9:8). No doubt there were many blind people who would have rejoiced to be healed, but Jesus selected this man (see Luke 4:25–27). Apparently the man and his parents were well known in the community. It was on the Sabbath when Jesus healed the man (John 9:14), so that once again He was upsetting and deliberately challenging the religious leaders (John 5:9ff).

The disciples did not look at the man as an object of mercy but rather as a subject for a theological discussion. It is much easier to discuss an abstract subject like “sin” than it is to minister to a concrete need in the life of a person. The disciples were sure that the man's congenital blindness was caused by sin, either his own or his parents', but Jesus disagreed with them.

In the final analysis, *all* physical problems are the result of our fall in Adam, for his disobedience brought sin and death into the world (Rom. 5:12ff). But afterward, to blame a specific disability on a specific sin committed by specific persons is certainly beyond any man's ability or authority. Only God knows why babies are born with handicaps, and only God can turn those handicaps into something that will bring good to the people and glory to His name.

Certainly both the man and his parents had at some time committed sin, but Jesus did not see their sin as the cause of the man's blindness. Nor did He suggest that God deliberately made the man blind so that, years later, Jesus could perform a miracle. Since there is no punctuation in the original manuscripts, we are free to read John 9:3–4 this way:

Neither has this man sinned nor his parents. But that the works of God should be made manifest in him, I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day.

Our Lord's method of healing was unique: He put clay on the man's eyes and told him to go wash. Once Jesus healed two blind men by merely touching their eyes (Matt. 9:27–31), and He healed another blind man by putting spittle on his eyes (Mark 8:22–

26). Though the healing power was the same, our Lord varied His methods lest people focus on the *manner* of healing and miss the *message* in the healing.

There were at least two reasons for our Lord's use of the clay. For one thing, it was a picture of the *Incarnation*. God made the first man out of the dust, and God sent His Son as a real Man. Note the emphasis on the meaning of "Siloam"—"sent." And relate this to John 9:4, "The works of Him that sent Me" (see also John 3:17, 34; 5:36; 7:29; 8:18, 42). Jesus gave a little illustration of His own coming to earth, sent by the Father.

The second reason for the clay was *irritation*; it encouraged the man to believe and obey! If you have ever had an irritation in your eyes, you know how quickly you seek *irrigation* to cleanse it out! You might compare this "irritation" to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit as He uses God's Law to bring the lost sinner under judgment.

But the illumination now led to a problem in *identification*: was this really the blind beggar, and who caused him to see? Throughout the rest of John 9, a growing conflict takes place around these two questions. The religious leaders did not want to face the fact that Jesus had healed the man, or even that the man had been healed!

Four times in this chapter people asked, "How were you healed?" (John 9:10, 15, 19, 26) First the neighbors asked the man, and then the Pharisees asked him. Not satisfied with his reply, the Pharisees then asked the man's parents and then gave the son one final interrogation. All of this looked very official and efficient, but it was really a most evasive maneuver on the part of both the people and the leaders. The Pharisees wanted to get rid of the evidence, and the people were afraid to speak the truth!

They were all asking the wrong question! They should not have asked "How?" but "Who?" (Simply rearrange the letters!) But we are so prone to ask "How?" We want to understand the mechanics of a miracle instead of simply trusting the Saviour, who alone can perform the miracle. Nicodemus wanted to know how he could reenter his mother's womb (John 3:4, 9). "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" (John 6:52) Understanding the process, even if we could, is no guarantee that we have experienced the miracle.

When asked to describe his experience, the man simply told what had happened. All he knew about the person who had done the miracle was that He was "a man called Jesus." He had not seen our Lord, of course; but he had heard His voice. Not only was the beggar ignorant of Jesus' identity, but he did not know where Jesus had gone. At this point, the man has been healed, but he has not been saved. The light had dawned, but it would grow brighter until he saw the face of the Lord and worshiped Him (see Prov. 4:18).

At least twelve times in the Gospel of John, Jesus is called "a man" (see John 4:29; 5:12; 8:40; 9:11, 24; 10:33; 11:47, 50; 18:14, 17, 29; 19:5). John's emphasis is that Jesus Christ is God, but the apostle balances it beautifully by reminding us that Jesus is also true man. The Incarnation was not an illusion (1 John 1:1–4).

"A Prophet" (John 9:13–23)

Since the Pharisees were the custodians of the faith, it was right that the healed man be brought to them for investigation. The fact that they studied this miracle in such detail is only further proof that Jesus did indeed heal the man. Since the man was *born* blind, the

miracle was even greater, for blindness caused by sickness or injury might suddenly go away. Our Lord's miracles can bear careful scrutiny by His enemies.

But Jesus' act of deliberately healing the man on the Sabbath Day caused the Pharisees great concern. It was illegal to work on the Sabbath; and by making the clay, applying the clay, and healing the man, Jesus had performed three unlawful "works." The Pharisees should have been praising God for a miracle; instead, they sought evidence to prosecute Jesus.

When people refuse to face evidence honestly, but in fear evade the issue (see John 9:22), then it is impossible to come to a united conclusion. Once again, Jesus was the cause of division (John 9:16; also see 7:12, 43). The religious leaders were judging on the basis of one thing: nobody who breaks the Sabbath could possibly be a true prophet of God. They were "one-issue" thinkers, not unlike some religious people today. The Pharisees did not realize that Jesus was offering the people something greater than the Sabbath—the true spiritual rest that comes from God (Matt. 11:28–30).

But the beggar was not intimidated by the threats of the Pharisees. When asked who he thought Jesus was, the man boldly said, "He is a prophet!" (note John 4:19 for a parallel.) Some of the Old Testament prophets, such as Moses, Elijah, and Elisha, did perform miracles. The Jewish people would look on their prophets as men of God who could do wonderful things by the power of God.

But the religious leaders did not want to see Jesus given that kind of high designation. "This man is not of God!" (John 9:16) Perhaps they could discredit the miracle. If so, then they could convince the people that Jesus had plotted the whole thing and was really deceiving the people. He had craftily "switched" beggars so that the sighted man was not the man who had been known as the blind beggar.

The best way to get that kind of evidence would be to interrogate the parents of the beggar, so they called them in and asked them two questions: (1) "Is this your son?" And (2) "If he is, how does he now see?" If they refused to answer either question, they were in trouble; or if they answered with replies contrary to what the leaders wanted, they were in trouble. What a dilemma!

They answered the first question honestly: he was their son and he had been born blind. They answered the second question evasively: they did not know how he was healed or who healed him. They then used the old-fashioned tactic called "passing the buck" by suggesting that the Pharisees ask the man himself. After all, he was of age!

What lay behind all of this questioning and these furtive replies? *The fear of people.* We met it at the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:13), and we shall meet it again at our Lord's last Passover (John 12:42). These people were seeking the honor of men and not the honor that comes from God (John 5:44). To be sure, it was a serious thing to be excommunicated from the synagogue, but it was far more serious to reject the truth and be lost forever. "The fear of man brings a snare" (Prov. 29:25,nasb). The Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus, and the parents were trying to avoid a trap; but all of them were only ensnaring themselves! The parents should have heeded the counsel of Isaiah 51:7 and 12.

The Pharisees could present a "good case" for their position. After all, they did have the Law of Moses as well as centuries of Jewish tradition. What they failed to understand was that Jesus Christ had fulfilled all of this ceremonial law and was now

bringing in something new. In Moses, you have preparation; but in Jesus Christ, you have consummation (see John 1:17).

“A Man of God” (John 9:24–34)

Anxious to settle the case, the Pharisees did call the man in; and this time, they put him under oath. “Give God the praise” is a form of Jewish “swearing in” at court (see Josh. 7:19).

But the “judges” prejudiced everybody from the start! “We know that this Man is a sinner!” They were warning the witness that he had better cooperate with the court, or he might be excommunicated. But the beggar was made of sturdier stuff than to be intimidated. He had experienced a miracle, and he was not afraid to tell them what had happened.

He did not debate the character of Jesus Christ, because that was beyond his knowledge and experience. But one thing he did know: now he could see. His testimony (John 9:25) reminds me of Psalm 27. Read that psalm in the light of this chapter, from the viewpoint of the healed beggar, and see how meaningful it becomes.

For the fourth time, the question is asked, “How did He open your eyes?” (see John 9:10, 15, 19, and 26) I can imagine the man getting quite impatient at this point. After all, he had been blind all his life, and there was so much now to see. He certainly did not want to spend much longer in a synagogue court, looking at angry faces and answering the same questions!

We admire the boldness of the man in asking those irate Pharisees if they wanted to follow Jesus! The man expected a negative answer, but he was courageous even to ask it. Unable to refute the evidence, the judges began to revile the witness; and once again Moses is brought into the picture (John 5:46). The Pharisees were cautious men who would consider themselves conservatives, when in reality they were “preservatives.” A true conservative takes the best of the past and uses it, but he is also aware of the new things that God is doing. The new grows out of the old (Matt. 13:52). A “preservative” simply embalms the past and preserves it. He is against change and resists the new things that God is doing. Had the Pharisees really understood Moses, they would have known who Jesus was and what He was doing.

The leaders were sure about Moses, but they were not sure about Jesus. They did not know where He came from. He had already told them that He had come from heaven, sent by the Father (John 6:33, 38, 41–42, 50–51). They were sure that He was the natural son of Mary and Joseph, and that He was from the city of Nazareth (John 6:42; 7:41–42). They were judging “after the flesh” (John 8:15) and not exercising spiritual discernment.

It seemed incredible to the healed man that the Pharisees would not know this Man who had opened his eyes! How many people were going around Jerusalem, opening the eyes of blind people? Instead of investigating the miracle, these religious leaders should have been investigating the One who did the miracle and learning from Him. The “experts” were rejecting the Stone that was sent to them (Acts 4:11).

The beggar then gave the “experts” a lesson in practical theology. Perhaps he had Psalm 66:18 in mind: “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” The

leaders called Jesus a sinner (John 9:24), yet Jesus was used of God to open the blind man's eyes.

He added another telling argument: Jesus healed a man *born* blind. Never, to their knowledge, had this occurred before. So, God not only heard Jesus, but He enabled Him to give the man sight. How, then, could Jesus be a sinner?

Religious bigots do not want to face either evidence or logic. Their minds are made up. Had the Pharisees honestly considered the facts, they would have seen that Jesus is the Son of God, and they could have trusted Him and been saved.

Again, the leaders reviled the man and told him he was born in sin. However, he would not *die* in his sins (see John 8:21, 24); because before this chapter ends, the beggar will come to faith in Jesus Christ. All of us are born in sin (Ps. 51:5), but we need not live in sin (Col. 3:6–7) or die in our sins. Faith in Jesus Christ redeems us from sin and gives us a life of joyful liberty.

The religious leaders officially excommunicated this man from the local synagogue. This meant that the man was cut off from friends and family and looked on by the Jews as a “publican and sinner.” But Jesus came for the “outcasts” and never let them down.

“The Son of God” (John 9:35–41)

The Good Shepherd always cares for His sheep. Jesus knew that the man had been excommunicated, so He found him and revealed Himself to him. Remember, the man knew our Lord's voice, but he had never seen His face.

The man now reached the climax of his knowledge of Jesus Christ and his faith in Him. It is not enough to believe that He is “a man called Jesus,” or even “a prophet” or “a man of God.” “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” (1 John 5:1). John wrote his Gospel to prove that Jesus is the Son of God, and to present to his readers the testimonies of people who met Jesus and affirmed that He is God's Son. This beggar is one such witness.

Jesus identified Himself as the Son of God (see John 9:35; also 5:25), and the beggar believed and was saved (John 9:38). “My sheep hear My voice” (John 10:27). He did not “see and believe”; he *heard* and believed. Not only did he trust the Saviour, but he worshiped Him. If Jesus Christ is not God, then why did He accept worship? Peter, Paul, and Barnabas certainly didn't accept worship (see Acts 10:25–26; 14:11–15).

John the Baptist affirmed that Jesus is the Son of God (John 1:34) and so did Nathanael (John 1:49). Jesus stated that He is the Son of God (John 5:25; 9:35), and Peter also affirmed it (John 6:69). Now the healed blind beggar has joined this group of witnesses.

Wherever Jesus went, some of the Pharisees tried to be present so they could catch Him in something He said or did. Seeing them, Jesus closed this episode by preaching a brief but penetrating sermon on spiritual blindness.

John 9:39 does not contradict John 3:16–17. The *reason* for our Lord's coming was salvation, but the *result* of His coming was condemnation of those who would not believe. The same sun that brings beauty out of the seeds also exposes the vermin hiding under the rocks. The religious leaders were blind and would not admit it; therefore, the light of truth only made them blinder. The beggar admitted his need, and

he received both physical and spiritual sight. No one is so blind as he who will not see, the one who thinks he has "all truth" and there is nothing more for him to learn (John 9:28, 34).

The listening Pharisees heard what Jesus said and it disturbed them. "Are we blind also?" they asked, expecting a negative answer. Jesus had already called them "blind leaders of the blind" (Matt. 15:14), so they had their answer. They were blinded by their pride, their self-righteousness, their tradition, and their false interpretation of the Word of God.

Our Lord's reply was a paradox. "If you were blind, you would be better off. But you claim to see. Therefore, you are guilty!" Blindness would at least be an excuse for not knowing what was going on. But they *did* know what was going on. Jesus had performed many miracles and the religious leaders ignored the evidence to make a right decision.

Jesus is the Light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5). The only people who cannot see the light are blind people and those who refuse to look, those who make themselves blind. The beggar was physically blind and spiritually blind, yet both his eyes and his heart were opened. Why? Because he listened to the Word, believed it, obeyed, and experienced the grace of God. The Pharisees had good physical vision, but they were blind spiritually. Had they listened to the Word and sincerely considered the evidence, they too would have believed on Jesus Christ and been born again.

In what sense did the Pharisees "see"? They saw the change in the blind beggar and could not deny that he had been healed. They saw the mighty works that Jesus performed. Even Nicodemus, one of their number, was impressed with the Lord's miracles (John 3:2). If they had examined the evidence with honesty, they would have seen the truth clearly. "If any man wills to do His [God's] will, he shall know of the doctrine" (John 7:17, literal translation). "And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40).

John 10 is actually a continuation of our Lord's ministry to the Pharisees. The healing of the blind beggar is the background (John 10:21). In fact, the word translated "cast out" in John 9:35 is translated "puts forth" in John 10:4. The beggar was cast out of the synagogue but taken by the Good Shepherd and added to His flock! The emphasis in John 10 is on Jesus Christ, the Good and True Shepherd, as opposed to the Pharisees who were false shepherds.

We never meet this healed beggar again, but surely the man followed Jesus closely and was among those who witnessed for Him. We hope that he was able to win his fearful parents to the Lord. While being excommunicated from the synagogue was certainly a painful experience for him, he certainly found in his fellowship with Jesus Christ much more spiritual help and encouragement than he could ever have found in the Jewish traditions.

Even today, there are people who must choose between Christ and family, or Christ and their traditional religion.

This blind beggar made the right choice, even though the cost was great.

"The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18).

CHAPTER TEN

THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP

John 10

Perhaps you remember the “Candid Camera” TV program that took place at an exclusive prep school where all of the students were well above average. The “Candid Camera” people posed as career consultants who were going to advise these brilliant young men concerning the careers that would be best suited to them, on the basis of “tests” and “interviews” that seemed (to the students) quite authentic.

One young man eagerly awaited the “counselor’s” verdict. Surely the adviser would tell the boy to be a college president or a bank president, or perhaps a research scientist. But, no, the “counselor” had other ideas. You should have seen the look on the boy’s face when the “counselor” said:

“Son, after evaluating your tests and interview, I’ve decided that the best job for you is—a shepherd.”

The student did not know whether to laugh or cry. After all, who in his right mind would want to be a shepherd? Why devote your life to “stupid sheep” who do not seem to have sense enough to find their way home?

John 10 focuses on the image of sheep, sheepfolds, and shepherds. It is a rural and Eastern image, to be sure; but it is an image that can say a great deal to us today, even in our urban industrialized world. Paul used this image when admonishing the spiritual leaders in the church at Ephesus (Acts 20:28ff). The truths that cluster around the image of the shepherd and the sheep are found throughout the Bible, and they are important to us today. The symbols that Jesus used help us understand who He is and what He wants to do for us.

Perhaps the easiest way to approach this somewhat complex chapter of John’s Gospel is to note the three declarations that Jesus made about Himself.

“I Am the Door” (John 10:1–10)

This sermon grew out of our Lord’s confrontation with Jewish leaders, following the excommunication of the beggar (John 9). He had briefly spoken to them about light and darkness, but now He changed the image to that of the shepherd and the sheep. Why? Because to the Jewish mind, a “shepherd” was any kind of leader, spiritual or political. People looked on the king and prophets as shepherds. Israel was privileged to be “the flock of the Lord” (Ps. 100:3). For background, read Isaiah 56:9–12; Jeremiah 23:1–4; 25:32–38; Ezekiel 34; and Zechariah 11.

Jesus opened His sermon with *a familiar illustration* (John 10:1–6), one that every listener would understand. The sheepfold was usually an enclosure made of rocks, with an opening for the door. The shepherd (or a porter) would guard the flock, or flocks, at night by lying across the opening. It was not unusual for several flocks to be sheltered together in the same fold. In the morning, the shepherds would come, call their sheep, and assemble their own flocks. Each sheep recognized his own master’s voice.

The true shepherd comes in through the door, and the porter recognizes him. The thieves and robbers could never enter through the door, so they have to climb over the wall and enter the fold through deception. But even if they did get in, they would never get the sheep to follow them, for the sheep follow only the voice of their own shepherd. The false shepherds can never *lead* the sheep, so they must *steal* them away.

It is clear that the listeners did not understand what Jesus said or why He said it. (The word translated "parable" means "a dark saying, a proverb." Our Lord's teaching in John 10 is not like the parables recorded in the other Gospels.) The occasion for this lesson was the excommunication of the beggar from the synagogue (John 9:34). The false shepherds did not care for this man; instead, they mistreated him and threw him out. But Jesus, the Shepherd, came to him and took him in (John 9:35–38).

It is unfortunate that John 10:1 is often used to teach that the sheepfold is heaven, and that those who try to get in by any way other than Christ are destined to fail. While the teaching is true (Acts 4:12), it is not based on this verse. Jesus made it clear that the fold is the nation of Israel (John 10:16). The Gentiles are the "other sheep" not of the fold of Israel.

When Jesus came to the nation of Israel, He came the appointed way, just as the Scriptures promised. Every true shepherd must be called of God and sent by God. If he truly speaks God's Word, the sheep will "hear his voice" and not be afraid to follow him. The true shepherd will love the sheep and care for them.

Since the people did not understand His symbolic language, Jesus followed the illustration with an *application* (John 10:7–10). Twice He said, "I am the Door." He is the Door of the sheepfold and makes it possible for the sheep to *leave* the fold (the religion of Judaism) and to *enter* His flock. The Pharisees *threw* the beggar out of the synagogue, but Jesus *led* him out of Judaism and into the flock of God!

But the Shepherd does not stop with leading the sheep out; He also leads them *in*. They become a part of the "one flock" (not "fold") which is His church. He is the Door of salvation (John 10:9). Those who trust Him enter into the Lord's flock and fold, and they have the wonderful privilege of going "in and out" and finding pasture. When you keep in mind that the shepherd actually was the "door" of the fold, this image becomes very real.

As the Door, Jesus delivers sinners from bondage and leads them into freedom. They have salvation! This word "saved" means "delivered safe and sound." It was used to say that a person had recovered from severe illness, come through a bad storm, survived a war, or was acquitted at court. Some modern preachers want to do away with an "old-fashioned" word like "saved," but Jesus used it!

Jesus was referring primarily to the religious leaders of that day (John 10:8). He was not condemning every prophet or servant of God who ever ministered before He came to earth. The statement "are thieves and robbers" (not "were") makes it clear that He had the present religious leaders in mind. They were not true shepherds nor did they have the approval of God on their ministry. They did not love the sheep, but instead exploited them and abused them. The beggar was a good example of what the "thieves and robbers" could do.

It is clear in the Gospel record that the religious rulers of Israel were interested only in providing for themselves and protecting themselves. The Pharisees were covetous (Luke 16:14) and even took advantage of the poor widows (Mark 12:40). They turned

God's temple into a den of thieves (Matt. 21:13), and they plotted to kill Jesus so that Rome would not take away their privileges (John 11:49–53).

The True Shepherd came to save the sheep, but the false shepherds take advantage of the sheep and exploit them. Behind these false shepherds is “the thief” (John 10:10), probably a reference to Satan. The thief wants to steal the sheep from the fold, slaughter them, and destroy them. We shall see later that the sheep are safe in the hands of the Shepherd and the Father (John 10:27–29).

When you go through “the Door,” you receive life and you are saved. As you go “in and out,” you enjoy *abundant* life in the rich pastures of the Lord. His sheep enjoy fullness and freedom. Jesus not only gave His life *for* us, but He gives His life *to* us right now!

The emphasis in this first section is on “the door.” Our Lord then shifted the emphasis to “the shepherd” and made a second declaration.

“I Am the Good Shepherd” (John 10:11–21)

This is the fourth of our Lord's I AM statements in John's Gospel (John 6:35; 8:12; 10:9). Certainly in making this statement, He is contrasting Himself to the false shepherds who were in charge of the Jewish religion of that day. He had already called them “thieves and robbers,” and now He would describe them as “hirelings.”

The word translated “good” means “intrinsically good, beautiful, fair.” It describes that which is the ideal, the model that others may safely imitate. Our Lord's goodness was inherent in His nature. To call Him “good” is the same as calling Him “God” (Mark 10:17–18).

Some of the greatest people named in the Bible were shepherds by occupation: Abel, the patriarchs, Moses, and David, to name a few. Even today in the Holy Land, you may see shepherds leading flocks and revealing how intimately they know each sheep, its individual traits, and its special needs. Keep in mind that Jewish shepherds did not tend the sheep in order to slaughter them, unless they were used for sacrifice. Shepherds tended them that the sheep might give wool, milk, and lambs.

Jesus pointed out four special ministries that He performs as the Good Shepherd.

He dies for the sheep (vv. 11–13). Under the old dispensation, the sheep died for the shepherd; but now the Good Shepherd dies for the sheep! Five times in this sermon, Jesus clearly affirmed the sacrificial nature of His death (John 10:11, 15, 17–18). He did not die as a martyr, killed by men; He died as a substitute, willingly laying down His life for us.

The fact that Jesus said that He died “for the sheep” must not be isolated from the rest of biblical teaching about the Cross. He also died for the nation Israel (John 11:50–52) and for the world (John 6:51). While the blood of Jesus Christ is *sufficient* for the salvation of the world, it is *efficient* only for those who will believe.

Jesus contrasted Himself to the hireling who watches over the sheep only because he is paid to do so. But when there is danger, the hireling runs away, while the true shepherd stays and cares for the flock. The key phrase is “whose own the sheep are not.” The Good Shepherd *purchases the sheep* and they are His because He died for them. They belong to Him, and He cares for them. By nature, sheep are stupid and prone to get into danger; and they need a shepherd to care for them.

Throughout the Bible, God's people are compared to sheep; and the comparison is a good one. Sheep are clean animals, unlike pigs and dogs (2 Peter 2:20–22). They are defenseless and need the care of the shepherd (Ps. 23). They are, to use Wesley's phrase, "prone to wander," and must often be searched for and brought back to the fold (Luke 15:3–7). Sheep are peaceful animals, useful to the shepherd. In these, and other ways, they picture those who have trusted Jesus Christ and are a part of God's flock.

The Pharisees, in contrast to good shepherds, had no loving concern for the beggar, so they put him out of the synagogue. Jesus found him and cared for him.

He knows His sheep (vv. 14–15). In the Gospel of John, the word *know* means much more than intellectual awareness. It speaks of an intimate relationship between God and His people (see John 17:3). The Eastern shepherd knows his sheep personally and therefore knows best how to minister to them.

To begin with, our Lord knows our names (see John 10:3). He knew Simon (John 1:42) and even gave him a new name. He called Zaccheus by name (Luke 19:5); and when He spoke Mary's name in the garden, she recognized her Shepherd (John 20:16). If you have ever had your identity "lost" in a maze of computer operations, then you can appreciate the comforting fact that the Good Shepherd knows each of His sheep by name.

He also knows our natures. While all sheep are alike in their essential nature, each sheep has its own distinctive characteristics; and the loving shepherd recognizes these traits. One sheep may be afraid of high places, another of dark shadows. A faithful shepherd will consider these special needs as he tends the flock.

Have you ever noticed how different the 12 Apostles were from one another? Peter was impulsive and outspoken, while Thomas was hesitant and doubting. Andrew was a "people person" who was always bringing somebody to Jesus, while Judas wanted to "use" people in order to get their money for himself. Jesus knew each of the men personally, and He knew exactly how to deal with them.

Because He knows our natures, He also knows our needs. Often, we do not even know our own needs! Psalm 23 is a beautiful poetic description of how the Good Shepherd cares for His sheep. In the pastures, by the waters, and even through the valleys, the sheep need not fear, because the shepherd is caring for them and meeting their needs. If you connect Psalm 23:1 and 6, you get the main theme of the poem: "I shall not want ... all the days of my life."

As the shepherd cares for the sheep, the sheep get to know their shepherd better. The Good Shepherd knows His sheep and His sheep know Him. They get to know Him better by listening to His voice (the Word) and experiencing His daily care. As the sheep follow the Shepherd, they learn to love and to trust Him. He loves "His own" (John 13:1) and He shows that love in the way He cares for them.

The Good Shepherd brings other sheep into the flock (v. 16). The "fold" is Judaism (John 10:1), but there is another fold—the Gentiles who are outside the covenants of Israel (Eph. 2:11ff). In our Lord's early ministry, He concentrated on the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:5–6; 15:24–27). The people converted at Pentecost were Jews and Jewish proselytes (Acts 2:5, 14), but the church was not to remain a "Jewish flock." Peter took the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10–11), and Paul carried the message to the Gentiles in the far reaches of the Roman Empire (Acts 13:1ff).

The phrase “one fold” should read “one flock.” There is but one flock, the people of God who belong to the Good Shepherd. God has His people all over this world (see Acts 18:1–11), and He will call them and gather them together.

The missionary message of the Gospel of John is obvious: “For God so loved the world” (John 3:16). Jesus Himself defied custom and witnessed to a Samaritan woman. He refused to defend the exclusivist approach of the Jewish religious leaders. He died for a lost world, and His desire is that His people reach a lost world with the message of eternal life.

The Good Shepherd takes up His life again (vv. 17–21). His voluntary death was followed by His victorious resurrection. From the human point of view, it appeared that Jesus was executed; but from the divine point of view, He laid down His life willingly. When Jesus cried on the cross, “It is finished!” He then voluntarily yielded up His spirit to the Father (John 19:30). Three days later, He voluntarily took up His life again and arose from the dead. The Father gave Him this authority in love.

Sometimes the Scriptures teach that it was the Father who raised the Son (Acts 2:32; Rom. 6:4; Heb. 13:20). Here, the Son stated that He had authority to take up His life again. Both are true, for the Father and the Son worked together in perfect harmony (John 5:17, 19). In a previous sermon, Jesus had hinted that He had power to raise Himself from the dead (John 5:26). Of course, this was a claim that the Jews would protest; because it was tantamount to saying “I am God!”

How did the listeners respond to this message? “There was a division therefore again among the Jews” (John 10:19). Note that word *again* (John 7:43; 9:16). The old accusation that Jesus was a demoniac was hurled at Him again (John 7:20; 8:48, 52). People will do almost anything to avoid facing the truth!

Since Jesus Christ is “the Door,” we would expect a division, because a door shuts some people in and others out! He is the Good Shepherd, and the shepherd must separate the sheep from the goats. It is impossible to be neutral about Jesus Christ; for, what we believe about Him is a matter of life or death (John 8:24).

His third declaration was the most startling of all.

“I Am the Son of God” (John 10:22–42)

The events in this section occurred about two and a half months after those described in John 10:1–21. John put them together because in both messages, Jesus used the imagery of the shepherd and the sheep.

The encounter (vv. 22–24). The “Feast of the Dedication” (Hanukkah, “the feast of lights”) takes place in December, near the time of the Christian Christmas celebration. The feast commemorates the rededication of the temple by Judas Maccabeus in 164 b.c., after it had been desecrated by the Romans. This historical fact may bear a relationship to the words of Jesus in John 10:36, for He had been set apart (dedicated) by the Father and sent into the world. The Jewish leaders were celebrating a great event in history yet passing by a great opportunity right in their own temple!

The leaders surrounded Jesus in the temple so that He had to stop and listen to them. They had decided that it was time for a “showdown” and they did not want Him to evade the issue any longer. “How long are You going to hold us in suspense?” they kept saying to Him. “Tell us plainly—are You the Messiah?”

The explanation (vv. 25–42). Jesus reminded them of what He had already taught them. He emphasized the witness of His *words* (“I told you”) and His *works* (see John 5:17ff, and 7:14ff for similar replies).

But our Lord went much deeper in His explanation this time, for He revealed to the Jewish leaders *why* they did not understand His words or grasp the significance of His works: they were not His sheep. From the human standpoint, we become His sheep by believing; but from the divine standpoint, we believe because we are His sheep. There is a mystery here that we cannot fathom or explain, but we can accept it and rejoice (Rom. 11:33–36). God has His sheep and He knows who they are. They will hear His voice and respond.

The lost sinner who hears God's Word knows nothing about divine election. He hears only that Christ died for the sins of the world, and that he may receive the gift of eternal life by trusting the Saviour. When He trusts the Saviour, he becomes a member of God's family and a sheep in the flock. Then he learns that he was “chosen ... in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). He also learns that each saved sinner is the Father's “love gift” to His Son (see John 10:29; 17:2, 6, 9, 11–12, 24).

In the Bible, divine election and human responsibility are perfectly balanced; and what God has joined together, we must not put asunder.

Jesus went on to explain that His sheep are secure in His hand and in the Father's hand. “They shall never perish” is His promise (John 3:16; 6:39; 17:12; 18:9). The false shepherds bring destruction (John 10:10, same Greek word); but the Good Shepherd sees to it that His sheep shall never perish.

The security of God's sheep is assured here in several ways. First, by definition—we have “eternal life,” and that cannot be conditional and still be eternal. Second, this life is a gift, not something that we earn or merit. If we were not saved by our own good works, but by His grace, then we cannot be lost by our “bad works” (Rom. 11:6). But most important, Jesus gave us His promise that His sheep do not perish, and that His promise cannot be broken.

It is important to keep in mind that Jesus was talking about sheep—true believers—and not counterfeits. The dog and the pig will go back into sin (2 Peter 2:20–22); but the sheep, being a clean animal, will follow the Shepherd into the green pastures. The false professor will talk about his faith and even his works, but he will never make it into heaven (Matt. 7:13–29). Most of us know people who professed to be saved and then went back into sin, but their doing so only proved that they never really trusted Christ to begin with. Jesus did not promise security to anyone but His true sheep.

As you review our Lord's teaching about His ministry as the Good Shepherd, you note that He has a threefold relationship to His sheep. He has a *loving* relationship because He died for the sheep, as well as a *living* relationship because He cares for the sheep. It is also a *lasting* relationship, for He keeps His sheep and not a one is lost.

Our Lord made a statement that He knew would startle His enemies and give them more reason to oppose Him (John 10:30). It was the “plain answer” that the religious leaders had asked for. “I and My Father are One” is as clear a statement of His deity as you will find anywhere in Scripture. This was even stronger than His statement that He had come down from heaven (John 6) or that He existed before Abraham ever lived (John 8:58).

The word *One* does not suggest that the Father and the Son are identical persons. Rather, it means that they are one in essence: the Father is God and the Son is God, but the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father. He is speaking about unity, not identity. (See John 17:21–24 for similar language.)

The Jewish leaders understood clearly what He was saying! Some modern liberal theologians would water down our Lord's statement, but the people who heard it knew exactly what He was saying: "I am God!" (note John 10:33.) To speak this way, of course, was blasphemy; and according to Jewish belief, blasphemy had to be punished by being put to death (see Lev. 24:16; Num. 15:30ff; Deut. 21:22).

Our Lord used Psalm 82:6 to refute their accusation and halt their actions. The picture in Psalm 82 is that of a court, where God has assembled the judges of the earth, to warn them that they too will one day be judged. The Hebrew word *elohim* can be translated as "god" or as "judges," as in Exodus 21:6 and 22:8–9. It is also one of the Old Testament names for God. The Jewish rulers certainly knew their own language and they knew that Jesus was speaking the truth. If God called human judges "gods," then why should they stone Him for applying the same title to Himself?

John 10:36 is crucial because it gives a double affirmation of the deity of Christ. First, the Father sanctified (set apart) the Son and sent Him into the world, and second, Jesus stated boldly, "I am the Son of God" (see John 5:25). He gave them the "plain answer" they asked for, but they would not believe it!

Could they have believed? Jesus *invited* them, urged them, to believe, if only on the basis of His miracles (John 10:37–38). If they would believe the miracles, then they would know the Father, and that would open the way for them to know the Son and believe on Him. It was simply a matter of examining the evidence honestly and being willing to accept the truth.

Once again, they tried to arrest Him (see John 7:44; 8:59), but He escaped and left the area completely. He did not return to Jerusalem until "Palm Sunday," when He presented Himself as Israel's King.

John the Baptist had ministered at Bethabara (John 1:28), but we are not sure where this was. It was on the other side of the Jordan River, perhaps eighteen to twenty miles from Jerusalem. Some maps put it almost directly across from Jerusalem, just east of Jericho.

Why did Jesus go there? For one thing, it was a safe retreat; the Jewish religious leaders were not likely to follow Him there. Also, it was a good place to prepare for His final week of public ministry when He would lay down His life for the sheep. As He remembered His own baptism by John, and all that He had experienced at that time (Matt. 3:13–17; John 1:20–34), it must have fortified Him for the suffering that He knew He must endure.

The common people continued to seek Jesus, and He continued to minister to them. It is worth noting that John the Baptist's witness was still bearing fruit long after he was dead! His witness to Jesus Christ led many to trust the Saviour. John was not a miracle worker, but he was a faithful witness who pointed to Jesus Christ. "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Have you responded personally to our Lord's three great declarations recorded in this chapter?

He is the Door. Have you "entered in" by faith so that you are saved?

He is the Good Shepherd. Have you heard His voice and trusted Him? After all, He laid down His life for you!

He is the Son of God. Do you believe that? Have you given yourself to Him and received eternal life?

Remember His stern warning: "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE LAST MIRACLE—THE LAST ENEMY

John 11

The raising of Lazarus from the dead was not our Lord's last miracle before the Cross, but it was certainly His greatest and the one that aroused the most response both from His friends and His enemies. John selected this miracle as the seventh in the series recorded in his book because it was really the climactic miracle of our Lord's earthly ministry. He had raised others from the dead, but Lazarus had been in the grave four days. It was a miracle that could not be denied or avoided by the Jewish leaders.

If Jesus Christ can do nothing about death, then whatever else He can do amounts to nothing. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19). Death is man's last enemy (1 Cor. 15:26), but Jesus Christ has defeated this horrible enemy totally and permanently.

The emphasis in John 11 is on faith; you find some form of the word *believe* at least eight times in this account. Another theme is "the glory of God" (John 11:4, 40). In what Jesus said and did, He sought to strengthen the faith of three groups of people.

The Disciples (John 11:1–16)

We sometimes think of the disciples as "supersaints," but such was not the case. They often failed their Lord, and He was constantly seeking to increase their faith. After all, one day He would leave them and they would have the responsibility of carrying on the ministry. If their faith was weak, their work could never be strong.

Jesus was at Bethabara, about twenty miles from Bethany (John 1:28; 10:40). One day, a messenger arrived with the sad news that our Lord's dear friend Lazarus was sick. If the man had traveled quickly, without any delay, he could have made the trip in one day. Jesus sent him back the next day with the encouraging message recorded in John 11:4. Then Jesus waited two more days before He left for Bethany; and by the time He and His disciples arrived, Lazarus had been dead for four days. This means that Lazarus had died *the very day* the messenger left to contact Jesus!

The schedule of events would look something like this, allowing one day for travel:

- Day 1— The messenger comes to Jesus (Lazarus dies).
- Day 2— The messenger returns to Bethany.
- Day 3— Jesus waits another day, then departs.
- Day 4— Jesus arrives in Bethany.

When the messenger arrived back home, he would find Lazarus already dead. What would his message convey to the grieving sisters now that their brother was already dead and buried? Jesus was urging them to believe His word no matter how discouraging the circumstances might appear.

No doubt the disciples were perplexed about several matters. First of all, if Jesus loved Lazarus so much, why did He permit him to get sick? Even more, why did He delay to go to the sisters? For that matter, could He not have healed Lazarus at a distance, as He did the nobleman's son? (John 4:43–54) The record makes it clear that there was a strong love relationship between Jesus and this family (John 11:3, 5, 36); yet our Lord's behavior seems to contradict this love.

God's love for His own is not a pampering love; it is a perfecting love. The fact that He loves us, and we love Him is no guarantee that we will be sheltered from the problems and pains of life. After all, the Father loves His Son: and yet the Father permitted His beloved Son to drink the cup of sorrow and experience the shame and pain of the Cross. We must never think that love and suffering are incompatible. Certainly they unite in Jesus Christ.

Jesus could have prevented Lazarus' sickness or even healed it from where He was; but He chose not to. He saw in this sickness an opportunity to glorify the Father. It is not important that we Christians are comfortable, but it is important that we glorify God in all that we do.

In their "prayer" to Jesus, the two sisters did not tell Him what to do. They simply informed Him that there was a need, and they reminded Him of His love for Lazarus. They knew that it was dangerous for Jesus to return to Judea because the Jewish leaders were out to destroy Him. Perhaps they hoped that He would "speak the word" and their brother would be restored to health.

Our Lord's message to the sisters did not say that their brother would not die. It promised only that death would not be the *ultimate* result, for the ultimate result would be the glory of God. (Note that once again, Jesus called Himself "the Son of God.") He wanted them to lay hold of this promise; in fact, He reminded Martha of this message when she balked at having the tomb opened (John 11:40).

When we find ourselves confronted by disease, disappointment, delay, and even death, our only encouragement is the Word of God. We must live by faith and not by sight. Their situation seemed hopeless, yet the sisters knew that Jesus was the Master of every situation. The promise in Psalm 50:15 finds a parallel here: "And call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me."

What about our Lord's delay? He was not waiting for Lazarus to die, for he was already dead. Jesus lived on a divine timetable (John 11:9) and He was waiting for the Father to tell Him when to go to Bethany. The fact that the man had been dead four days gave greater authenticity to the miracle and greater opportunity for people to believe, including His own disciples (see John 11:15).

When our Lord announced that He was returning to Judea, His disciples were alarmed, because they knew how dangerous it would be. (Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem.) But Jesus was willing to lay down His life for His friends (John 15:13). He knew that His return to Judea and the miracle of raising Lazarus would precipitate His own arrest and death.

The Lord calmed their fears by reminding them that He was on the Father's schedule, and that nothing could harm them. As we have seen, this is an important theme in the Gospel of John (John 2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; 17:1). But the disciples not only misunderstood the schedule, they also misunderstood the reason for the visit. They thought that, if Lazarus was sleeping, he was getting better! It was another example of their inability to grasp spiritual truth. "If he is sleeping, he must be improving—so let's not bother to go to Bethany!"

Then He told them openly that Lazarus was dead. (Death for the believer is compared to sleep. See Acts 7:60; 1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thes. 4:13–18.) He did not say He was glad that His friend died, but that He was glad He had not been there; for now He could reveal to His disciples His mighty power. The result would be glory to God and the strengthening of their faith.

If Thomas' attitude was any indication, the faith of the disciples certainly needed strengthening! The name Thomas means "twin" in the Aramaic language; the Greek equivalent is Didymus. We do not know whose twin he was, but there are times when *all of us* seem to be his twin when we consider our unbelief and depressed feelings! It was Thomas who demanded evidence before he would accept the truth of our Lord's resurrection (John 20:24–28).

Thomas was a doubting man, but we must confess that he was a devoted man: he was willing to go with Jesus into danger and risk his own life. We may not admire his faith, but we can certainly applaud his loyalty and courage.

The Sisters (John 11:17–40)

Jesus was concerned not only about the faith of His own disciples, but also about the faith of Mary and Martha (John 11:26, 40). Each experience of suffering and trial ought to increase our faith, but this kind of spiritual growth is not automatic. We must respond positively to the ministry of the Word and the Spirit of God. Jesus had sent a promise to the two sisters (John 11:4), and now He would discover how they had received it.

The event recorded in Luke 10:38–42 makes it clear that Mary and Martha were quite different in their personalities. Martha was the worker, the active one, while Mary was the contemplative one who sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to His word. Jesus did not condemn Martha's service, but He did rebuke her for being "torn apart" by so many things. She needed to have priorities and center her activities on the things that God would approve. As an old Wesley hymn puts it, we need to have a balanced life:

Faithful to my Lord's commands,
I still would choose the better part:
Serve with careful Martha's hands
And loving Mary's heart.

We would expect Martha to rush out to meet Jesus while Mary sat in the house, weeping with her friends. Since Mary later echoed Martha's words of greeting (John 11:32), it is likely that the sisters often said these words to each other as they waited for Jesus to arrive. While there may have been a tinge of disappointment in the statement, there was also evidence of faith, for nobody ever died in the presence of Jesus Christ. "If" is such a big word! How futile it is to imagine what might have been, if—!

Martha was quick to affirm her faith in Jesus Christ (John 11:22), and Jesus responded to that faith by promising her that her brother would rise again. He was thinking of the immediate situation, but she interpreted His words to mean the future resurrection in the last day (Dan. 12:2–3; John 5:28–29). Here is another instance in John's Gospel of people lacking spiritual perception and being unable to understand the words of Jesus.

Our Lord's reply is the fifth of the I AM statements. It is important to note that Jesus did not deny what Martha said about the future resurrection. The resurrection of the human body is a cardinal doctrine in the orthodox Jewish faith. But in His great I AM statement, our Lord completely transformed the doctrine of the resurrection and, in so doing, brought great comfort to Martha's heart.

To begin with, He brought the doctrine of the resurrection out of the shadows and into the light. The Old Testament revelation about death and resurrection is not clear or complete; it is, as it were, "in the shadows." In fact, there are some passages in Psalms and Ecclesiastes that almost make one believe that death is the end and there is no hope beyond the grave. False teachers like to use these passages to support their heretical teachings, but they ignore (or misinterpret) the clear teachings found in the New Testament. After all, it was not David or Solomon who "brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10), but Jesus Christ!

By His teaching, His miracles, and His own resurrection, Jesus clearly taught the resurrection of the human body. He has declared once for all that death is real, that there is life after death, and that the body will one day be raised by the power of God.

He transformed this doctrine in a second way: He took it out of a book and put it into a person, Himself. "I am the resurrection and the life"! (John 11:25) While we thank God for what the Bible teaches (and all Martha had was the Old Testament), we realize that we are saved by the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and not by a doctrine written in a book. When we know Him by faith, we need not fear the shadow of death.

When you are sick, you want a doctor and not a medical book or a formula. When you are being sued, you want a lawyer and not a law book. Likewise, when you face your last enemy, death, you want the Saviour and not a doctrine written in a book. In Jesus Christ, every doctrine is made personal (1 Cor. 1:30). When you belong to Him, you have all that you ever will need in life, death, time, or eternity!

But perhaps the greatest transformation Jesus performed was to move the doctrine of the resurrection out of the future and into the present. Martha was looking to the future, knowing that Lazarus would rise again and she would see him. Her friends were looking to the past and saying, "He could have prevented Lazarus from dying!" (John 11:37) But Jesus tried to center their attention on the *present*: wherever He is, God's resurrection power is available *now* (Rom. 6:4; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:10).

Jesus affirmed that believers would one day be raised from the dead (John 11:25). Then He immediately revealed the added truth that some believers would never die

(and it is a double negative, "never never die!") (John 11:26). How is this possible? The answer is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, 18. When Jesus Christ returns in the air to take His people home, those who are alive at His coming shall never die. They shall be changed and caught up to meet Him in the air!

Martha did not hesitate to affirm her faith. She used three different titles for Jesus: Lord, Christ (Messiah), and Son of God. The words "I believe" are in the perfect tense, indicating a fixed and settled faith. "I have believed and I will continue to believe!"

Our Lord dealt with Martha's faith; now He had to help Mary. Why did Martha call Mary "secretly"? Possibly because of the danger involved: they knew that the Jewish leaders were out to arrest Jesus. When Mary arose to go to meet Jesus, her friends misunderstood her actions and thought she was going to the tomb to weep. They wanted to weep with her, so they followed along. Imagine their surprise when they met Jesus!

Mary is found three times in the Gospel record, and each time she is at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39; John 11:32; 12:3). She sat at His feet and listened to His word; she fell at His feet and poured out her sorrow; and she came to His feet to give Him her praise and worship. Mary's only recorded words in the Gospels are given in John 11:32, and they echo what Martha had already said (John 11:21).

Mary did not say much because she was overcome with sorrow and began to weep. Her friends joined in the weeping, as Jewish people are accustomed to do. The word used means "a loud weeping, a lamentation." Our Lord's response was to groan within and "be moved with indignation." At what was He indignant? At the ravages of sin in the world that He had created. Death is an enemy, and Satan uses the fear of death as a terrible weapon (Heb. 2:14–18). No wonder Jesus was indignant!

The mystery of our Lord's incarnation is seen by His question in John 11:34. Jesus knew that Lazarus had died (John 11:11), but He had to ask where he was buried. Our Lord never used His divine powers when normal human means would suffice.

"Jesus wept" is the shortest and yet the deepest verse in Scripture. His was a silent weeping (the Greek word is used nowhere else in the New Testament) and not the loud lamentation of the mourners. But why did He weep at all? After all, He knew that He would raise Lazarus from the dead (John 11:11).

Our Lord's weeping reveals the humanity of the Saviour. He has entered into all of our experiences and knows how we feel. In fact, being the perfect God-Man, Jesus experienced these things in a deeper way than we do. His tears also assure us of His sympathy; He is indeed "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3). Today, He is our merciful and faithful High Priest, and we may come to the throne of grace and find all the gracious help that we need (Heb. 4:14–16).

We see in His tears the tragedy of sin but also the glory of heaven. Perhaps Jesus was weeping *for* Lazarus, as well as *with* the sisters, because He knew He was calling His friend from heaven and back into a wicked world where he would one day have to die again. Jesus had come down from heaven; He knew what Lazarus was leaving behind.

The spectators saw in His tears an evidence of His love. But some of them said, "If Jesus loved Lazarus so much, why did He not prevent his death?" Perhaps they were thinking, "Jesus is weeping because He was unable to do anything. They are tears of deep regret." In other words, *nobody present really expected a miracle!* For this reason,

nobody could accuse Jesus of “plotting” this event and being in collusion with the two sisters and their friends. Even the disciples did not believe that Jesus would raise Lazarus from the dead!

The one person who declared her faith was Martha (John 11:27), and she failed at the last minute. “Open the tomb? By now he smells!” Jesus gently reminded her of the message He had sent at least three days before (John 11:4), and He urged her to believe it. True faith relies on God’s promises and thereby releases God’s power. Martha relented, and the stone was rolled away.

The Jews (John 11:41–57)

The emphasis from this point on was on the faith of the spectators, the people who had come to comfort Mary and Martha. Jesus paused to pray (John 11:41; also see 6:11) and thanked the Father that the prayer had already been heard. When had He prayed? Probably when He received the message that His friend was sick (John 11:4). The Father then told Him what the plan was, and Jesus obeyed the Father’s will. His prayer now was for the sake of the unbelieving spectators, that they might know that God had sent Him.

A quaint Puritan writer said that if Jesus had not named Lazarus when He shouted, He would have emptied the whole cemetery! Jesus called *Lazarus* and raised him from the dead. Since Lazarus was bound, he could not walk to the door of the tomb; so God’s power must have carried him along. It was an unquestioned miracle that even the most hostile spectator could not deny.

The experience of Lazarus is a good illustration of what happens to a sinner when he trusts the Saviour (Eph. 2:1–10). Lazarus was dead, and all sinners are dead. He was decayed, because death and decay go together. All lost people are spiritually dead, but some are more “decayed” than others. No one can be “more dead” than another.

Lazarus was raised from the dead by the power of God, and all who trust Christ have been given new life and lifted out of the graveyard of sin (see John 5:24). Lazarus was set free from the graveclothes (see Col. 3:1ff) and given new liberty. You find him seated with Christ at the table (John 12:2), and all believers are “seated with Christ” in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6), enjoying spiritual food and fellowship.

Because of the great change in Lazarus, many people desired to see him; and his “living witness” was used by God to bring people to salvation (John 12:9–11). There are no recorded words of Lazarus in the Gospels, but his daily walk is enough to convince people that Jesus is the Son of God. Because of his effective witness, Lazarus was persecuted by the religious leaders who wanted to kill him and get rid of the evidence.

As with the previous miracles, the people were divided in their response. Some did believe and on “Palm Sunday” gave witness of the miracle Jesus had performed (John 12:17–18). But others immediately went to the religious leaders and reported what had happened in Bethany. These “informers” were so near the kingdom, yet there is no evidence that they believed. If the heart will not yield to truth, then the grace of God cannot bring salvation. These people could have experienced a spiritual resurrection in their own lives!

It was necessary that the Jewish council (Sanhedrin) meet and discuss what to do with Jesus. They were not seeking after truth; they were seeking for ways to protect

their own selfish interests. If He gathered too many followers, He might get the attention of the Roman authorities; and this could hurt the Jewish cause.

The high priest, Caiaphas, was a Sadducee, not a Pharisee (Acts 23:6–10); but the two factions could always get together to fight a common enemy. Unknown to himself and to the council, Caiaphas uttered a divine prophecy: Jesus would die for the nation so that the nation would not perish. “For the transgression of My people was He stricken” (Isa. 53:8). True to his vision of a worldwide family of God, John added his inspired explanation: Jesus would die not only for the Jews, but for all of God’s children who would be gathered together in one heavenly family. (note John 4:42 and 10:16.)

The official decision that day was that Jesus must die (see Matt. 12:14; Luke 19:47; John 5:18; 7:1, 19–20, 25). The leaders thought that *they* were in control of the situation, but it was God who was working out His predetermined plan (Acts 2:23). Originally, they wanted to wait until after the Passover, but God had decreed otherwise.

Jesus withdrew to Ephraim, about fifteen miles north of Jerusalem; and there He remained in quiet retirement with His disciples. The crowd was gathering in Jerusalem for the Passover feast, and the pilgrims were wondering if Jesus would attend the feast even though He was in danger. He was now on the “wanted” list, because the council had made it known that anyone who knew where Jesus was must report it to the officials.

John 11 reveals the deity of Jesus Christ and the utter depravity of the human heart. The rich man in hades had argued, “If one went unto them from the dead, they will repent” (Luke 16:30). Lazarus came back from the dead, and the officials wanted to kill him! Miracles certainly reveal the power of God, but of themselves they cannot communicate the grace of God.

The stage had been set for the greatest drama in history, during which man would do his worst and God would give His best.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CHRIST AND THE CRISIS

John 12

John 12 records the second major crisis in the ministry of our Lord as seen by John the apostle. The first occurred when many of His disciples would no longer walk with Him (John 6:66), even though He is “the way” (John 14:6). In this chapter, John tells us that many would not believe in Him (John 12:37ff), even though He is “the truth.” The third crisis will come in John 19: even though He is “the life,” the leaders crucified Him.

John opened his book by telling us that Jesus “came unto His own [world], and His own [people] received Him not” (John 1:11). In the first twelve chapters, John presented one witness after another, and one proof after another, to convince us that Jesus is

indeed the Christ, the Son of God. All of this evidence was seen firsthand by the leaders of the nation, and yet they rejected His claims. Having been rejected by "His own" nation, Jesus then retired with "His own" disciples (John 13:1) whom He loved to the uttermost.

We see in John 12, the Lord Jesus Christ as He relates to four different groups of people, and there are lessons that we can learn as we study this section.

Jesus and His Friends (John 12:1–11)

Our Lord knew that the Jewish leaders were out to arrest Him and kill Him (John 11:53, 57), but He still returned to Bethany, only two miles from the very citadel of His enemies. Why? So that He might spend a quiet time with His dear friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. True to their personalities, Martha busily served and Mary worshiped at the feet of Jesus (see Luke 10:38–42).

The account of Mary's anointing of her Lord is found also in Matthew 26:6–13 and Mark 14:3–9. But it must not be confused with the account given in Luke 7:36–50, where a former harlot anointed Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee. Mary was a virtuous woman, and she anointed Jesus in the house of Simon the (former) leper (Mark 14:3). The Luke 7 event took place in Galilee, while the account we are now considering occurred in Judea. The fact that there are two "Simons" involved should not surprise us, for Simon was a common name in that day.

When you combine all three accounts, you learn that Mary anointed both His head and His feet. It was an act of pure love on her part, for she knew her Lord was about to endure suffering and death. Because she sat at Jesus' feet and listened to Him speak, she knew what He was going to do. It is significant that Mary of Bethany was not one of the women who went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus (Mark 16:1).

In a sense, Mary was showing her devotion to Jesus *before* it was too late. She was "giving the roses" while He was yet alive, and not bringing them to the funeral! Her act of love and worship was public, spontaneous, sacrificial, lavish, personal, and unembarrassed. Jesus called it "a good work" (Matt. 26:10; Mark 14:6) and both commended her and defended her.

It would have required a year's wages from a common laborer to purchase that ointment. Like David, Mary would not give to the Lord that which cost her nothing (2 Sam. 24:24). Her beautiful act of worship brought a fragrance to the very house in which they were dining, and the blessing of her deed has spread around the world (Matt. 26:13; Mark 14:9). Little did Mary realize that night that her love for Christ would be a blessing to believers around the world for centuries to come!

When she came to the feet of Jesus, Mary took the place of a slave. When she undid her hair (something Jewish women did not do in public), she humbled herself and laid her glory at His feet (see 1 Cor. 11:15). Of course, she was misunderstood and criticized; but that is what usually happens when somebody gives his or her best to the Lord.

It was Judas who started the criticism, and, sad to say, the other disciples took it up. They did not know that Judas was a devil (John 12:4), and they admired him for his concern for the poor. After all, he was the treasurer; and especially at Passover season,

he would want to share with those who were less fortunate (see John 13:21–30). Until the very end, the disciples believed that Judas was a devoted follower of the Lord.

John 12:4 records Judas' first words found anywhere in the four Gospels. His last words are found in Matthew 27:4. Judas was a thief and was in the habit of stealing money from the money box that he carried. (The Greek word translated "bag" meant originally a small case in which mouthpieces were kept for wind instruments. Then it came to mean any small box, and especially a money box. The Greek version of the Old Testament uses this word in 2 Chron. 24:8–10 for King Joash's money chest.) No doubt Judas had already decided to abandon Jesus, and he wanted to get what he could out of what he considered a bad situation. Perhaps he had hoped that Jesus would defeat Rome and set up the kingdom; in which case, Judas would have been treasurer of the kingdom!

What Mary did was a blessing to Jesus and a blessing to her own life. She was also a blessing to the home, filling it with fragrance (see Phil. 4:18); and today, she is a blessing to the church around the world. Her one act of devotion in the little village of Bethany still sends "ripples of blessing."

But not so Judas! We call our daughters "Mary," but no parent would call a son "Judas." His very name is listed in the dictionary as a synonym for treachery. Mary and Judas are seen in contrast in Proverbs 10:7—"The memory of the just is blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot." "A good name is better than precious ointment," says Ecclesiastes 7:1; and Mary had both.

Matthew 26:14 gives the impression that immediately after this rebuke, Judas went to the priests and bargained to deliver Jesus into their hands. But it is likely that the events recorded in Matthew 21–25 took place first. No doubt the Lord's rebuke of Judas at Bethany played an important part in his decision actually to betray Jesus. Also, the fact that Jesus once again openly announced His death would motivate Judas to escape while the opportunity was there.

As we look at this event, we see some "representative people" who are examples to us. Martha represents *work* as she served the dinner she had prepared for the Lord. This was just as much a "fragrant offering" as was Mary's ointment (see Heb. 13:16). Mary represents *worship*, and Lazarus represents *witness* (John 11:9–11). People went to Bethany just to be able to see this man who had been raised from the dead!

As mentioned we have no recorded words from Lazarus in the New Testament, but his miraculous life was an effective witness for Jesus Christ. (In contrast, John the Baptist did no miracles, yet his words brought people to Jesus. See John 10:40–42.) We today ought to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4) because we have been "raised from the dead" (Eph. 2:1–10; Col. 3:1ff). Actually, the Christian life ought to be a beautiful balance of worship, work, and witness.

But the fact that Lazarus was a walking miracle put him into a place of danger: the Jewish leaders wanted to kill *him* as well as Jesus! Our Lord was right when He called them children of the devil, for they were murderers indeed (John 8:42–44). They threw the healed blind man out of the synagogue rather than permit him to bear witness to Christ every Sabbath, and they tried to put Lazarus back into the tomb because he was leading people to faith in Christ. If you will not accept the evidence, you must try to get rid of it!

This quiet evening of fellowship—in spite of the cruel way the disciples treated Mary—must have brought special encouragement and strength to the Saviour's heart as He faced the demands of that last week before the Cross. We should examine our own hearts and homes to ask whether we are bringing joy to His heart by our worship, work, and witness.

Jesus and the Passover Pilgrims (John 12:12–19)

John shifted the scene from a quiet dinner in Bethany to a noisy public parade in Jerusalem. All four Gospels record this event and their accounts should be compared. This was the only “public demonstration” that our Lord allowed while He was ministering on earth. His purpose was to fulfill the Old Testament prophecy (Zech. 9:9). The result was a growing animosity on the part of the religious leaders, leading eventually to the crucifixion of the Saviour.

There were three different groups in the crowd that day: (1) the Passover visitors from outside Judea (John 12:12, 18); (2) the local people who had witnessed the raising of Lazarus (John 12:17); and (3) the religious leaders who were greatly concerned about what Jesus might do at the feast (John 12:19). At each of the different feasts, the people were in keen expectation, wondering if Jesus would be there and what He would do. It looked as though Jesus was actually seeking to incite a revolution and establish Himself as King, but that was not what He had in mind.

What did this event mean to Jesus? For one thing, it was a part of His obedience to the Father's will. The Prophet Zechariah (Zech. 9:9) prophesied that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem in that manner, and He fulfilled the prophecy. “Daughter of Zion” is another name for the city of Jerusalem (Jer. 4:31; Lam. 2:4, 8, 10). Certainly Jesus was openly announcing to the people that He indeed is the King of Israel (John 1:49), the promised Messiah. No doubt many of the pilgrims hoped that *now* He would defeat the Romans and set the nation of Israel free.

What did this demonstration mean to the Romans? Nothing is recorded about the Roman viewpoint, but it is certain that they kept a close watch that day. During the annual Passover feast, it was not uncommon for some of the Jewish nationalists to try to arouse the people; and perhaps they thought this parade was that kind of an event. I imagine that some of the Roman soldiers must have smiled at the “Triumphal Entry,” because it was nothing like their own “Roman triumph” celebrations in the city of Rome.

Whenever a Roman general was victorious on foreign soil, killing at least 5,000 of the enemy, and gaining new territory, he was given a “Roman triumph” when he returned to the city. It was the Roman equivalent of the American “ticker-tape parade,” only with much more splendor. The victor would be permitted to display the trophies he had won and the enemy leaders he had captured. The parade ended at the arena where some of the captives entertained the people by fighting wild beasts. Compared to a “Roman triumph,” our Lord's entry into Jerusalem was nothing.

What did the “Triumphal Entry” mean to the people of Israel? The pilgrims welcomed Jesus, spread their garments before Him, and waved palm branches as symbols of peace and victory (Rev. 7:9). They quoted from Psalm 118:26, which is a messianic psalm; and they proclaimed Him the “King of Israel.” But while they were doing this, Jesus was weeping! (Luke 19:37–44)

The name *Jerusalem* means “city of peace” or “foundation of peace”; and the people were hoping that Jesus would bring them the peace that they needed. However, He wept because He saw what lay ahead of the nation—war, suffering, destruction, and a scattered people. At His birth, the angels announced “peace on earth” (Luke 2:13–14); but in His ministry Jesus announced “war on earth” (Luke 12:51ff). It is significant that the crowds shouted “peace in heaven” (Luke 19:38), because that is the only place where there is peace today!

The nation had wasted its opportunities; their leaders did not know the time of God's visitation. They were ignorant of their own Scriptures. The next time Israel sees the King, the scene will be radically different! (Rev. 19:11ff) He will come in glory, not in humility; and the armies of heaven will accompany Him. It will be a scene of victory as He comes to defeat His enemies and establish His kingdom.

It is a repeated theme in Scripture that there can be no glory unless first there is suffering. Jesus knew that He must die on the cross before He could enter into His glory (Luke 24:26). The Jewish theologians were not clear in their minds concerning the sufferings of the Messiah and the glorious kingdom that the prophets announced. Some teachers held that there were two Messiahs, one who would suffer and one who would reign. Even our Lord's own disciples were not clear as to what was going on (see John 11:16).

How did the Jewish leaders respond to the “Triumphal Entry” of the Lord? As they watched the great crowd gather and honor Jesus, the Pharisees were quite sure that Jesus had won the day. They were anticipating some kind of general revolt during the Passover season. Perhaps Jesus would perform a great miracle and in that way capture the minds and hearts of the restless people. How little they really understood the mind and heart of the Master! What they did not realize was that Jesus was “forcing their hand” so that the Sanhedrin would act *during the feast*. The Lamb of God had to give His life when the Passover lambs were being slain.

The statement, “Behold, the world is gone after Him!” (John 12:19) was both an exaggeration and a prophecy. In the next section, we meet some visitors from outside Israel.

Jesus and the Gentile Visitors (John 12:20–36)

Following His entry into Jerusalem, our Lord cleansed the temple for the second time. He quoted Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer’? But ye have made it a den of thieves” (Mark 11:17). Perhaps these Greeks heard that word and were encouraged by it.

One of John's major themes is that Jesus is the Saviour of the world, not simply the Redeemer of Israel. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). “For God so loved the world” (John 3:16). The Samaritans rightly identified Him as “the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42). He gave His life for the world and He gives life *to* the world (John 6:33). He is the Light of the world (John 8:12). The universal emphasis of John's Gospel is too obvious to miss. Jesus will bring the “other sheep” who are outside the Jewish fold (John 10:16; and see 11:51–52).

The original text indicates that these Greeks “were accustomed to come and worship at the feast.” They were not curious visitors or one-time investigators. No doubt they

were "God-fearers," Gentiles who attended the Jewish synagogue and sought the truth, but who had not yet become proselytes. Gentiles came to see Jesus when He was a young child (Matt. 2), and now Gentiles came to see Him just before His death.

These men "kept asking" Philip for the privilege of an interview with Jesus. Philip finally told Andrew (who was often bringing people to Jesus), and Andrew gave the request to the Lord. No doubt there were many people who wanted private interviews with the Lord, but they were afraid of the Pharisees (John 9:22). Being from out of the country, the Gentile visitors either did not know about the danger, or did not fear the consequences.

We can commend these Greeks for wanting to see Jesus. The Jews would say, "We would see a sign!" (Matt. 12:38; 1 Cor. 1:22) but these men said, "We would see [have an interview with] Jesus." There is no record that Jesus did talk with these men, but the message that He gave in response contains truths that all of us need.

The central theme of this message is the glory of God (John 12:23, 28). We would have expected Jesus to say, "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be crucified." But Jesus saw beyond the cross to the glory that would follow (see Luke 24:26; Heb. 12:2). In fact, the glory of God is an important theme in the remaining chapters of John's Gospel (see John 13:31-32; 14:13; 17:1, 4-5, 22, 24).

Jesus used the image of a seed to illustrate the great spiritual truth that there can be no glory without suffering, no fruitful life without death, no victory without surrender. Of itself, a seed is weak and useless; but when it is planted, it "dies" and becomes fruitful. There is both beauty and bounty when a seed "dies" and fulfills its purpose. If a seed could talk, it would no doubt complain about being put into the cold, dark earth. But the only way it can achieve its goal is by being planted.

God's children are like seeds. They are small and insignificant, but they have life in them, God's life. However, that life can never be fulfilled unless we yield ourselves to God and permit Him to "plant us." We must die to self so that we may live unto God (Rom. 6; Gal. 2:20). The only way to have a fruitful life is to follow Jesus Christ in death, burial, and resurrection.

In these words, Jesus challenges us today to surrender our lives to Him. Note the contrasts: loneliness or fruitfulness; losing your life or keeping your life; serving self or serving Christ; pleasing self or receiving God's honor.

I read about some Christians who visited a remote mission station to see how the ministry was going. As they watched the dedicated missionary team at work, they were impressed with their ministry, but admitted that they missed "civilization."

"You certainly have buried yourself out here!" one of the visitors exclaimed.

"We haven't buried ourselves," the missionary replied. "We were planted!"

Our Lord knew that He was facing suffering and death, and His humanity responded to this ordeal. His soul was troubled, not because He was questioning the Father's will, but because He was fully conscious of all that the Cross involved. Note that Jesus did not say, "What shall I do?" because He knew what He was ordained to do. He said, "What shall I say?" In the hour of suffering and surrender, there are only two prayers we can pray, either "Father, save me!" or "Father, glorify Thy name!"

In one of my radio messages, I made the statement, "God does not expect us to be comfortable, but He does expect us to be conformable." No sooner had the program

ended than my office phone rang and an anonymous listener wanted to argue with me about that statement.

"Conformable to what?" the voice thundered. "Haven't you read Romans 12:2—'Be not conformed to this world'?"

"Sure I've read Romans 12:2," I replied. "Have you read Romans 8:29? God has predestined us 'to be conformed to the image of His Son.'"

After a long pause (I was glad he was paying the phone bill), he grunted and said, "OK."

Comfortable or conformable: that is the question. If we are looking for comfortable lives, then we will protect our plans and desires, save our lives, and never be planted. But if we yield our lives and let God plant us, we will never be alone but will have the joy of being fruitful to the glory of God. "If any man [Jew or Greek] serve Me, let him follow Me." This is the equivalent of Matthew 10:39 and Mark 8:36.

The prayer, "Father, glorify Thy name!" received a reply from heaven! God the Father spoke to His Son and gave Him a double assurance: the Son's past life and ministry had glorified the Father, and the Son's future suffering and death would glorify the Father. It is significant that the Father spoke to the Son at the beginning of the Son's ministry (Matt. 3:17), as the Son began His journey to Jerusalem (Matt. 17:5), and now as the Son entered the last days before the Cross. God always gives that word of assurance to those who willingly suffer for His sake.

The people heard a sound but did not know the message that had been conveyed. Yet if the voice was for their sakes and they could not understand it, what good was it? In that the voice assured Jesus, who was to die for their sakes, the voice was for their good. They heard Him pray and they heard a sound from heaven in response to that prayer. That should have convinced them that Jesus was in touch with the Father. We might translate John 12:30, "That voice came more for your sake than for Mine."

Jesus then openly spoke about the Cross. It was an hour of judgment for the world and for Satan, the prince of the world. The death of Jesus Christ would seem like a victory for the wicked world, but it would really be a judgment of the world. On the cross, Jesus would defeat Satan and his world system (Gal. 6:14). Even though he is permitted to go to and fro on the earth, Satan is a defeated enemy. As we serve the Lord, we overcome the wicked one (Luke 10:17–19). One day Satan shall be cast out of heaven (Rev. 12:10), and eventually he will be judged and imprisoned forever (Rev. 20:10).

We have met the phrase "lifted up" before (John 3:14; 8:28). Its basic meaning is *crucifixion* (note John 12:33), but it also carries the idea of *glorification*. "Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up, and greatly exalted" (Isa. 52:13, nasb). The Son of man was *glorified* by being *crucified*!

The phrase "all men" does not suggest universal salvation. It means "all people without distinction," that is, Jews and Gentiles. He does not force them; He draws them (see John 6:44–45). He was "lifted up" that men might find the way (John 12:32), know the truth (John 8:28), and receive the life (John 3:14). The cross reminds us that God loves a whole world and that the task of the church is to take the Gospel to the whole world.

The people did not understand what He was teaching. They knew that "Son of man" was a title for Messiah, but they could not understand why Messiah would be crucified!

Did not the Old Testament teach that the Messiah would live forever? (See Pss. 72:17; 89:36; 110:4; Isa. 9:7.)

But that was no time to be discussing the fine points of theology! It was an hour of crisis (see John 12:31, where the Greek word *krisis* means judgment) and an hour of opportunity. The light was shining and they had better take advantage of their opportunity to be saved! We have met this image of light and darkness before (John 1:4–9; 3:17–20; 8:12; 9:39–41). By a simple step of faith, these people could have passed out of spiritual darkness and into the light of salvation.

This marked the end of our Lord's public ministry as far as John's record is concerned. Jesus departed and hid Himself. It was judgment on the nation that saw His miracles, heard His messages, and scrutinized His ministry, and yet refused to believe on Him.

Jesus and Unbelieving Jews (John 12:37–49)

The key word in this section is *believe*; it is used eight times. First, John explained the unbelief of the people. They *would not* believe (John 12:37–38, with a quotation from Isa. 53:1); they *could not* believe (John 12:39); and they *should not* believe (John 12:40–41, with a quotation from Isa. 6:9–10).

In spite of all the clear evidence that was presented to them, the nation would not believe. The “arm of the Lord” had been revealed to them in great power, yet they closed their eyes to the truth. They had heard the message (“report”) and seen the miracles, and yet would not believe.

When a person starts to resist the light, something begins to change within him; and he comes to the place where he cannot believe. There is “judicial blindness” that God permits to come over the eyes of people who do not take the truth seriously. (This quotation is found in a number of places in the New Testament. See Matt. 13:14–15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; Acts 28:25–27; Rom. 11:8.) It is a serious thing to treat God's truth lightly, for a person could well miss his opportunity to be saved. “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near” (Isa. 55:6).

There were those who would not believe, and there were those who would not openly confess Christ even though they had believed (John 12:42–43). Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea belonged to this group initially, but eventually came out openly in their confession of Christ (John 19:38ff). In the early church, there were numbers of Pharisees (Acts 15:5) and even priests (Acts 6:7). It was the old struggle between the glory of God and the praise of men (John 12:25–26). It was a costly thing to be excommunicated (John 9:22), and these “secret believers” wanted the best of both worlds. note John 5:44 in this regard.

In John 12:44–50 we have our Lord's last message before He “hid Himself” from the people. Again, the emphasis was on faith. A number of the basic themes in John's Gospel run through this message: God sent the Son; to see the Son means to see the Father; Jesus is the Light of the world; His words are the very words of God; faith in Him brings salvation; to reject Him is to face eternal judgment. In fact, the very Word that He spoke will judge those who have rejected it and Him!

It is an awesome thought that the unbeliever will face at the judgment every bit of Scripture he has ever read or heard. The very Word that he rejects becomes his judge! Why? Because the written Word points to the Living Word, Jesus Christ (John 1:14).

Many people reject the truth simply because of the fear of man (John 12:42–43). Among those who will be in hell are “the fearful” (Rev. 21:8). Better to fear God and go to heaven than to fear men and go to hell!

The word *judge* is repeated four times in the closing words of this message, and a solemn word it is. Jesus did not come to judge; He came to save (John 3:18; 8:15). But if the sinner will not trust the Saviour, the Saviour must become the Judge. The sinner is actually passing judgment on himself, not on the Lord!

As you have studied these twelve chapters of the Gospel of John, you have seen Jesus Christ in His life, His ministry, His miracles, His message, and His desire to save lost sinners.

You have considered the evidence. Have you come to the conviction that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God, the Saviour of the world?

Have *you* trusted Him and received everlasting life?

“While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light” (John 12:36, nkjv).

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE SOVEREIGN SERVANT

John 13:1–35

Three times in my ministry I have had to deliver “farewell messages” to congregations I had served, and it is not an easy thing to do. I may not have succeeded, but my purpose was always to prepare them for the future. This included warning as well as instruction. They would call a new pastor and enter into a new phase of ministry, and I wanted them to be at their best.

John 13–17 is our Lord’s “farewell message” to His beloved disciples, climaxing with His intercessory prayer for them and for us. Other farewell addresses in Scripture were delivered by Moses (Deut. 31–33), Joshua (Josh. 23–24), and Paul (Acts 20). However, Jesus added a significant “action section” to His message when He washed His disciples’ feet. It was an object lesson they would never forget.

In this passage, we see our Lord in a fourfold relationship: to His Heavenly Father (John 13:1–5), to Simon Peter (John 13:6–11), to all of the disciples (John 13:12–17), and to Judas (John 13:18–35). In each of these sections of John’s Gospel, you will discover a special message, a spiritual truth to help you in your own Christian life.

Humility: Jesus and the Father (John 13:1–5)

Jesus had entered Jerusalem on Sunday, and on Monday had cleansed the temple. Tuesday was a day of conflict as the religious leaders sought to trip Him up and get evidence to arrest Him. These events are recorded in Matthew 21–25. Wednesday was probably a day of rest, but on Thursday He met in the Upper Room with His disciples in order to observe Passover.

The emphasis in John 13:1–3 is on *what our Lord knew*, and in John 13:4–5 on *what our Lord did*.

Jesus knew that “His hour was come.” More than any of the Gospel writers, John emphasized the fact that Jesus lived on a “heavenly timetable” as He did the Father’s will. Note the development of this theme:

2:4—“Mine hour is not yet come.”

7:30—“His hour was not yet come.”

8:20—“His hour was not yet come.”

12:23—“The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified.”

13:1—“Jesus knew that His hour was come.”

17:1—“Father, the hour is come.”

What was this divinely appointed “hour”? It was the time when He would be glorified through His death, resurrection, and ascension. From the human point of view, it meant suffering; but from the divine point of view, it meant glory. He would soon leave this world and return to the Father who sent Him, Jesus having finished His work on earth (John 17:4). When the servant of God is in the will of God, he is immortal until his work is done. They could not even arrest Jesus, let alone kill Him, until the right hour had arrived.

Jesus also knew that Judas would betray Him. Judas is mentioned eight times in John’s Gospel, more than in any of the other Gospels. Satan had entered into Judas (Luke 22:3), and now he would give him the necessary thought to bring about the arrest and crucifixion of the Son of God. The word translated “put” in John 13:2 literally means “to throw.” It reminds us of the fiery darts of the wicked one (Eph. 6:16). Judas was an unbeliever (John 6:64–71), so he did not have a “shield of faith” to use to ward off Satan’s attacks.

Finally, Jesus knew that the Father had given Him all things (John 13:3). This statement parallels John 3:35, and it also reminds us of Matthew 11:27. Even in His humiliation, our Lord had all things through His Father. He was poor and yet He was rich. Because Jesus knew who He was, where He came from, what He had, and where He was going, He was complete master of the situation. You and I as believers know that we have been born of God, that we are one day going to God, and that in Christ we have all things; therefore, we ought to be able to follow our Lord’s example and serve others.

What Jesus knew helped determine *what Jesus did* (John 13:4–5). The disciples must have been shocked when they saw their Master rise from supper, lay aside His outer garments, wrap a towel around His waist, take a basin of water, and wash their feet. Jewish servants did not wash their masters’ feet, though Gentile slaves might do it. It was a menial task, and yet Jesus did it! As a special mark of affection, a host or hostess might wash a guest’s feet, but it was not standard operating procedure in most homes.

Jesus knew that there was a competitive spirit in the hearts of His disciples. In fact, within a few minutes, the men were disputing over which of them was the greatest (Luke 22:24–30). He gave them an unforgettable lesson in humility, and by His actions rebuked their selfishness and pride. The more you think about this scene, the more profound it becomes. It is certainly an illustration of what Paul wrote years later in Philippians 2:1–16. Peter must have recalled the event when he wrote his first epistle and urged his readers to “be clothed with humility” (1 Peter 5:5).

Too often we confuse “the poor in spirit” (Matt. 5:3) with the “poor-spirited,” and true humility with timidity and inferiority. The British literary giant Samuel Johnson was once asked to prepare a funeral sermon for a girl who had died, and he asked what her special virtues were. He was told that she was kind to her inferiors. Johnson replied that this was commendable, but that it would be difficult to determine who her inferiors were!

The Father had put all things into the Son's hands, *yet Jesus picked up a towel and a basin!* His humility was not born of poverty, but of riches. He was rich, yet He became poor (2 Cor. 8:9). A Malay proverb says, “The fuller the ear is of rice-grain, the lower it bends.”

It is remarkable how the Gospel of John reveals the humility of our Lord even while magnifying His deity: “The Son can do nothing of Himself” (John 5:19, 30). “For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will” (John 6:38). “My doctrine is not Mine” (John 7:16). “And I seek not Mine own glory” (John 8:50). “The word which ye hear is not Mine” (John 14:24). His ultimate expression of humility was His death on the cross.

Jesus was the Sovereign, yet He took the place of a servant. He had all things in His hands, yet He picked up a towel. He was Lord and Master, yet He served His followers. It has well been said that humility is not thinking meanly of yourself; it is simply not thinking of yourself at all. True humility grows out of our relationship with the Father. If our desire is to know and do the Father's will so that we might glorify His name, then we will experience the joy of following Christ's example and serving others.

We today, just like the disciples that night, desperately need this lesson on humility. The church is filled with a worldly spirit of competition and criticism as believers vie with one another to see who is the greatest. We are growing in knowledge, but not in grace (see 2 Peter 3:18). “Humility is the only soil in which the graces root,” wrote Andrew Murray. “The lack of humility is the sufficient explanation of every defect and failure.”

Jesus served His disciples because of His humility and because of His love. Contrast John 13:1 with 1:11 and 3:16: Jesus came “unto His own [world], and His own [people] received him not.” “For God so loved the world.” In the Upper Room, Jesus ministered in love to His own disciples, and they received Him and what He had to say. The Greek text says, “He loved them to the uttermost.”

Holiness: Jesus and Peter (John 13:6–11)

As Peter watched the Lord wash his friends' feet, he became more and more disturbed and could not understand what He was doing. As you read the life of Christ in the Gospels, you cannot help but notice how Peter often spoke impulsively out of his ignorance and had to be corrected by Jesus. Peter opposed Jesus going to the cross (Matt. 16:21–23), and he tried to manage our Lord's affairs at the Transfiguration (Matt.

17:1–8). He expressed the faith of the disciples (John 6:66–71) without realizing that one of the number was a traitor.

The word translated “wash” in John 13:5–6, 8, 12, and 14 is *nipto* and means “to wash a part of the body.” But the word translated “washed” in John 13:10 is *louo* and means “to bathe all over.” The distinction is important, for Jesus was trying to teach His disciples the importance of a holy walk.

When the sinner trusts the Saviour, he is “bathed all over” and his sins are washed away and forgiven (see 1 Cor. 6:9–11; Titus 3:3–7; and Rev. 1:5). “And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb. 10:17). However, as the believer walks in this world, it is easy to become defiled. He does not need to be bathed all over again; he simply needs to have that defilement cleansed away. God promises to cleanse us when we confess our sins to Him (1 John 1:9).

But why is it so important that we “keep our feet clean”? Because if we are defiled, we cannot have communion with our Lord. “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me” (John 13:8). The word translated “part” is *meros*, and it carries the meaning here of “participation, having a share in someone or something.” When God “bathes us all over” in salvation, He brings about our *union* with Christ; and that is a settled relationship that cannot change. (The verb *wash* in John 13:10 is in the perfect tense. It is settled once and for all.) However, our *communion* with Christ depends on our keeping ourselves “unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). If we permit unconfessed sin in our lives, we hinder our walk with the Lord; and that is when we need to have our feet washed.

This basic truth of Christian living is beautifully illustrated in the Old Testament priesthood. When the priest was consecrated, he was bathed all over (Ex. 29:4), and that experience was never repeated. However, during his daily ministry, he became defiled; so it was necessary that he wash his hands and feet at the brass laver in the courtyard (Ex. 30:18–21). Only then could he enter the holy place and trim the lamps, eat the holy bread, or burn the incense.

The Lord cleanses us through the blood of Christ, that is, His work on the cross (1 John 1:5–10), and through the application of His Word to our lives (Ps. 119:9; John 15:3; Eph. 5:25–26). The “water of the Word” can keep our hearts and minds clean so that we will avoid the pollutions of this world. But if we do sin, we have a loving Advocate in glory who will hear our prayers of confession and forgive us (1 John 2:1–2).

Peter did not understand what his Lord was doing; but instead of waiting for an explanation, he impulsively tried to tell the Lord what to do. There is a strong double negative in John 13:8. The Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest translated Peter's statement, “You shall by no means wash my feet, no, never” (wuest). Peter really meant it! Then when he discovered that to refuse the Lord would mean to lose the Lord's fellowship, he went in the opposite direction and asked for a complete bath!

We can learn an important lesson from Peter: don't question the Lord's will or work, and don't try to change it. He knows what He is doing. Peter had a difficult time accepting Christ's ministry to him *because Peter was not yet ready to minister to the other disciples*. It takes humility and grace to serve others, but it also takes humility and grace to allow others to serve us. The beautiful thing about a submissive spirit is that it can both give and receive to the glory of God.

John was careful to point out that Peter and Judas were in a different relationship with Jesus. Yes, Jesus washed Judas' feet! But it did Judas no good because he had

not been bathed all over. Some people teach that Judas was a saved man who sinned away his salvation, but that is not what Jesus said. Our Lord made it very clear that Judas had never been cleansed from his sins and was an unbeliever (John 6:64–71).

It is a wonderful thing to deepen your fellowship with the Lord. The important thing is to be honest with Him and with ourselves and keep our feet clean.

Happiness: Jesus and the Disciples (John 13:12–17)

John 13:17 is the key—“If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” The sequence is important: humbleness, holiness, then happiness. Aristotle defined happiness as “good fortune joined to virtue ... a life that is both agreeable and secure.” That might do for a philosopher, but it will never do for a Christian believer! Happiness is the by-product of a life that is lived in the will of God. When we humbly serve others, walk in God's paths of holiness, and do what He tells us, then we will enjoy happiness.

Jesus asked the disciples if they understood what He had done, and it is not likely that they did. So, He explained it: He had given them a lesson in humble service, an example for them to follow. The world thinks that happiness is the result of others serving us, but real joy comes when we serve others in the name of Christ. The world is constantly pursuing happiness, but that is like chasing a shadow: it is always just beyond your reach.

Jesus was their Master, so He had every right to command their service. Instead, He served them! He gave them an example of true Christian ministry. On more than one occasion during the previous three years, He had taught them lessons about humility and service; but now He had demonstrated the lesson to them. Perhaps the disciples remembered His lesson about the child (Matt. 18:1–6), or the rebuke He gave James and John when they asked for thrones (Matt. 20:20–28). Now it was all starting to fall into place.

The servant (slave) is not greater than his master; so, if the master becomes a slave, where does that put the slave? *On the same level as the master!* By becoming a servant, our Lord did not push us down: He lifted us up! He dignified sacrifice and service. You must keep in mind that the Romans had no use for humility, and the Greeks despised manual labor. Jesus combined these two when He washed the disciples' feet.

The world asks, “How many people work for you?” but the Lord asks, “For how many people do you work?” When I was ministering at a conference in Kenya, an African believer shared one of their proverbs with me: “The chief is servant of all.” How true it is that we need leaders who will serve and servants who will lead. G.K. Chesterton said that a really great man is one who makes others feel great, and Jesus did this with His disciples *by teaching them to serve*.

However, it is not enough just to *know* this truth; we must put it into practice. James 1:22–27 makes it clear that the blessing comes in the *doing* of the Word, not the hearing. Wuest translates the last phrase in James 1:25, “This man shall be prospered spiritually in his doing.” Even studying this section in John's Gospel can stir us emotionally or enlighten us intellectually; but it cannot bless us spiritually until we do what Jesus told us to do. This is the only way to lasting happiness.

Be sure to keep these lessons in their proper sequence: humbleness, holiness, happiness. Submit to the Father, keep your life clean, and serve others. This is God's formula for true spiritual joy.

Hypocrisy: Jesus and Judas (John 13:18–35)

A dark shadow now fell across the scene as Jesus dealt with Judas, the traitor. It is important to note that Judas was not a true believer; he was a hypocrite. He had never believed in Jesus (John 6:64–71), he had not been bathed all over (John 13:10–11), and he had not been among the chosen ones whom the Father gave to the Son (John 13:18 and 17:12). How close a person can come to salvation and yet be lost forever! Judas was even the treasurer of the group (John 12:6) and was certainly held in high regard by his fellow disciples.

At that hour, Jesus had two great concerns: to fulfill the Word of God (John 13:18–30) and to magnify the glory of God (John 13:31–35).

The Scripture Jesus quoted was Psalm 41:9—“Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.” When David wrote the psalm, he was probably referring to his counselor Ahithophel, who turned traitor and joined Absalom's rebellion (see 2 Sam. 15–17). It is significant that both Judas and Ahithophel committed suicide by hanging themselves (2 Sam. 17:23; Matt. 27:3–10; Acts 1:18). However, Judas did not commit suicide in order to fulfill biblical prophecy, for that would make God the author of his sin. Judas was responsible for his own decisions, and those decisions fulfilled God's Word.

Jesus was concerned that Judas' treachery would not weaken His disciples' faith. This is why He related it to the Word of God: when the disciples saw all of this fulfilled, it would make their faith stronger (see John 8:28). Judas had been disloyal, but He expected them to be loyal to Him and His cause. After all, He was God the Son sent by God the Father. They were Christ's chosen representatives; to receive them would be the same as receiving the Father and the Son. What a privilege, to be ambassadors of the King!

The remarkable thing is that the others at the table with Jesus did not know that Judas was an unbeliever and a traitor. Up to the very hour of his treachery, Judas was protected by the Saviour whom he betrayed. Had Jesus openly revealed what He knew about Judas, it is likely that the men would have turned on him. Remember what Peter did to Malchus when soldiers came to take Jesus!

From the very beginning, Jesus knew what Judas would do (John 6:64), but He did not compel him to do it. Judas was exposed to the same spiritual privileges as the other disciples, yet they did him no good. The same sun that melts the ice only hardens the clay. In spite of all that our Lord said about money, and all of His warning about covetousness, Judas continued to be a thief and steal from the treasury. In spite of all our Lord's warning about unbelief, Judas persisted in his rejection. *Jesus even washed Judas' feet!* Yet his hard heart did not yield.

Jesus had spoken before about a traitor (John 6:70), but the disciples did not take it to heart. Now when He spoke openly about it at the table, His disciples were perplexed.

Peter signaled to John, who was the closest to Jesus at the table, and asked him to find out who the traitor was. The Lord's reply to John was certainly not heard by all the

men; in fact, they were carrying on discussions among themselves about who the traitor might be (Luke 22:23). When Jesus gave the bread to Judas, it was interpreted as an act of love and honor. In fact, Judas was seated at the place of honor, so our Lord's actions were seen in that light: He was bestowing a special honor on Judas. No wonder, after Judas left the room, the disciples got into an argument over who was the greatest (Luke 22:24–30).

John was no doubt stunned by this revelation, but before he could say or do anything, Jesus had sent Judas on his way. Even though Satan had entered Judas, it was Jesus who was in charge. He lived on the timetable given to Him by the Father, and He wanted to fulfill what was written in the Word. Since Judas was the treasurer, it was logical for the disciples to conclude that he had been sent on a special mission by the Lord. Judas had hypocritically expressed an interest in the poor (John 12:4–6), so perhaps he was on an errand of mercy to help the poor.

Keep in mind that Judas knew what he was doing and that he did it deliberately. He had already met with the Jewish religious leaders and agreed to lead them to Jesus in such a way that there would not be any public disturbance (Luke 21:37–22:6). He heard Jesus say, "Woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born!" (Matt. 26:24) Yet, he persisted in his unbelief and treachery.

John's little phrase "and it was night" carries a tremendous impact when you remember that *light* and *darkness* are important spiritual images in his Gospel. Jesus is the Light of the world (John 8:12), but Judas rejected Jesus and went out into darkness; and for Judas, *it is still night!* Those who do evil hate the light (John 3:18–21). Our Lord's warning in John 12:25–26 went unheeded by Judas—and it goes unheeded by lost sinners today, people who will go where Judas went unless they repent and trust the Saviour.

The instant Judas was gone, the atmosphere was cleared, and Jesus began to instruct His disciples and prepare them for His crucifixion and His ultimate return to heaven. It was after Judas' departure that He instituted the Lord's Supper, something that Judas as an unbeliever certainly could not share. Judas was out in the night, controlled by the prince of darkness, Satan; but Jesus was in the light, sharing love and truth with His beloved disciples. What a contrast!

The theme now changes to the glory of God (John 13:31–35). From the human perspective, the death of Christ was a dastardly deed involving unspeakable suffering and humiliation; but from the divine perspective it was the revelation of the glory of God. "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified" (John 12:23). Twelve times in this Gospel, the title "Son of man" appears, and this one in John 13:31 is the final instance. Daniel 7:13 identifies this title as messianic, and Jesus sometimes used it this way (Matt. 26:64).

What did it mean for Jesus to glorify the Father? He tells us in His prayer: "I have glorified Thee on the earth; I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do" (John 17:4). This is the way all of us glorify God, by faithfully doing what He calls us to do. In our Lord's case, the Father's will was that the Son die for lost sinners, be raised from the dead, and then ascend to heaven. The Son glorified the Father and the Father glorified the Son (John 17:1, 5).

There would come a time when the Son would be glorified in these disciples (John 17:10), but they could not follow Him at that time. Peter boasted that he would follow the Lord even to death (Luke 22:33), but unfortunately ended up denying Him three times.

Jesus had said to the Jews on two occasions that they would seek Him but not be able to find Him or follow Him (John 7:33–36; 8:21–24). Note that He did not tell His disciples that they would not be able to find Him, but He did say that to the unbelieving Jews. One day the believing disciples would go to be with Him (John 14:1–3), and they would also see Him after His resurrection. But during this time of His suffering and death, it was important that they not try to follow Him.

I have heard eloquent sermons about the sin of Peter who “followed afar off” (Luke 22:54), and the emphasis was that he should have followed nearer. The simple fact is that he should not have followed at all! The statement in John 13:33 is proof enough, and when you add Matthew 26:31 (quoted from Zech. 13:7) and our Lord's words in John 18:8, the evidence is conclusive. Because Peter disregarded this warning, he got into trouble.

The disciples' responsibility was to love one another just as Christ had loved them. They would certainly need this love in the hours to follow, when their Master would be taken from them and their brave spokesman, Peter, would fail Him and them. In fact, all of them would fail, and the only thing that would bring them together would be their love for Christ and for each other.

The word *love* is used only twelve times in John 1–12, but in John 13–21 it is used forty-four times! It is a key word in Christ's farewell sermon to His disciples, as well as a burden in His High Priestly Prayer (John 17:26). The word *new* does not mean “new in time,” because love has been important to God's people even from Old Testament times (see Lev. 19:18). It means “new in experience, fresh.” It is the opposite of “worn out.” Love would take on a new meaning and power because of the death of Christ on the cross (John 15:13). With the coming of the Holy Spirit, love would have a new power in their lives.

This section begins and ends with love: Jesus' love for His own (John 13:1) and the disciples' love for one another. It is love that is the true evidence that we belong to Jesus Christ. The church leader Tertullian (a.d. 155–220) quoted the pagans as saying of the Christians, “See how they love one another?” And how do we evidence that love? By doing what Jesus did: laying down our lives for the brethren (1 John 3:16). And the way to start is by getting down and washing one another's feet in sacrificial service.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

HEART TROUBLE

John 13:36–14:31

This section opens and closes with our Lord's loving admonition, "Let not your heart be troubled" (John 14:1, 27). We are not surprised that the Apostles were troubled. After all, Jesus had announced that one of them was a traitor, and then He warned Peter that he was going to deny his Lord three times. Self-confident Peter was certain that he could not only follow his Lord, but even die with Him and for Him. Alas, Peter did not know his own heart, nor do we really know *our* hearts, except for one thing: our hearts easily become troubled.

Perhaps the heaviest blow of all was the realization that Jesus was going to leave them (John 13:33). Where was He going? Could they go with Him? How could they get where He was going? These were some of the perplexing questions that tumbled around in their minds and hearts and were tossed back and forth in their conversation at the table.

How did Jesus calm their troubled hearts? By giving them six wonderful assurances to lay hold of, assurances that we today may claim and thus enjoy untroubled hearts. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you may claim every single one of these assurances.

You Are Going to Heaven (John 13:36–14:6)

Jesus did not rebuke Peter for asking Him where He was going, but His reply was somewhat cryptic. One day Peter would "follow" Jesus to the cross (John 21:18–19; 2 Peter 1:12–15), and then he would follow Him to heaven. Tradition tells us that Peter was crucified, though he asked to be crucified head-downward because he did not feel worthy to die as his Master died.

Just as Peter was beginning to feel like a hero, Jesus announced that he himself would soon become a casualty. The message not only shocked Peter, but it also stunned the rest of the disciples. After all, if brave Peter denied the Lord, what hope was there for the rest of them? It was then that Jesus gave His message to calm their troubled hearts.

According to Jesus, heaven is a real place. It is not a product of religious imagination or the result of a psyched-up mentality, looking for "pie in the sky by and by." Heaven is the place where God dwells and where Jesus sits today at the right hand of the Father. Heaven is described as a kingdom (2 Peter 1:11), an inheritance (1 Peter 1:4), a country (Heb. 11:16), a city (Heb. 11:16), and a home (John 14:2).

The word *Father* is used fifty-three times in John 13–17. Heaven is "My Father's house," according to the Son of God. It is "home" for God's children! Some years ago, a London newspaper held a contest to determine the best definition of "home." The winning entry was, "Home is the place where you are treated the best and complain the most." The poet Robert Frost said that home is the place that, when you arrive there, they have to take you in. A good definition!

The Greek word *monē* is translated "mansions" in John 14:2 and "abode" in John 14:23. It simply means "rooms, abiding places," so we must not think in terms of manor houses. It is unfortunate that some unbiblical songs have perpetuated the error that faithful Christians will have lovely mansions in glory, while worldly saints will have to be content with little cottages or even shacks. Jesus Christ is now preparing places for all true believers, and each place will be beautiful. When He was here on earth, Jesus was

a carpenter (Mark 6:3). Now that He has returned to glory, He is building a church on earth and a home for that church in heaven.

John 14:3 is a clear promise of our Lord's return for His people. Some will go to heaven through the valley of the shadow of death, but those who are alive when Jesus returns will *never* see death (John 11:25–26). They will be changed to be like Christ and will go to heaven (1 Thes. 4:13–18).

Since heaven is the Father's house, it must be a place of love and joy. When the Apostle John tried to describe heaven, he almost ran out of symbols and comparisons! (Rev. 21–22) Finally, he listed the things that would not be there: death, sorrow, crying, pain, night, etc. What a wonderful home it will be—and we will enjoy it forever!

Thomas' question revealed his keen desire to be with Jesus (see John 11:16), and this meant that he had to know where the Master was going and how he himself would get there. The Lord made it clear that He was going to the Father, and that He was the only way to the Father. Heaven is a real place, a loving place, and an exclusive place. Not everybody is going to heaven, but rather only those who have trusted Jesus Christ (see Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:4–6).

Jesus does not simply teach the way or point the way; *He is the way*. In fact, "the Way" was one of the early names for the Christian faith (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). Our Lord's statement, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me," wipes away any other proposed way to heaven—good works, religious ceremonies, costly gifts, etc. There is only one way, and that way is Jesus Christ.

How would this assurance of going to heaven help to calm the disciples' troubled hearts? Dr. James M. Gray put it beautifully in a song he wrote years ago: "Who could mind the journey, when the road leads home?" The assurance of a heavenly home at the end of life's road enables us to bear joyfully with the obstacles and battles along the way. It was this assurance that even encouraged our Lord, "who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross" (Heb. 12:2). Paul had this truth in mind when he wrote, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

You Know the Father Right Now (John 14:7–11)

We do not have to wait until we enter heaven to get to know the Father. We can know Him today and receive from Him the spiritual resources we need to keep going when the days are difficult.

What does it mean to "know the Father"? The word *know* is used 141 times in John's Gospel, but it does not always carry the same meaning. In fact, there are four different "levels" of *knowing* according to John. The lowest level is simply knowing a fact. The next level is to understand the truth behind that fact. However, you can know the fact and know the truth behind it and still be lost in your sins. The third level introduces *relationship*; "to know" means "to believe in a person and become related to him or her." This is the way "know" is used in John 17:3. In fact, in Scripture, "to know" is used of the most intimate relationship between man and wife (Gen. 4:1).

The fourth use of "know" means "to have a deeper relationship with a person, a deeper communion." It was this level Paul was referring to when he wrote, "That I may

know Him" (Phil. 3:10). Jesus will describe this deeper relationship in John 14:19–23, so we will save any further comment until we deal with that section.

When Jesus said that knowing Him and seeing Him was the same as knowing and seeing the Father, He was claiming to be God. From now on, they would understand more and more about the Father, even though Jesus was leaving them.

I appreciate Philip's desire to know the Father. He had come a long way since that day Jesus found him and called him (John 1:43–45). The burning desire of every believer ought to be to know God better. We read and study the Word of God so that we might better know the God of the Word.

The Greek construction of the question in John 14:10 indicates that the Lord expected a yes answer from Philip: he *did* believe that Jesus was in the Father and the Father in Him. That being the case, Philip should have realized that the words of Jesus, as well as His works, came from the Father and revealed the Father. Believers today have not seen the Lord Jesus in the flesh (1 Peter 1:8), but we do see Him and His works in the Word. The emphasis throughout John's Gospel is that you cannot separate Christ's words and works, for both come from the Father and reveal the Father.

The "believe" in John 14:10 is singular, for Jesus was addressing Philip; but in John 14:11, it is plural and He addresses all of the disciples. The tense of both is "go on believing." Let your faith grow!

Four hundred years before Christ was born, the Greek philosopher Plato wrote, "To find out the Father and Maker of all this universe is a hard task, and when we have found Him, to speak of Him to all men is impossible." But Plato was wrong! We *can* know the Father and Maker of the universe, for Jesus Christ revealed Him to us. Why should our hearts be troubled when the Creator and Governor of the universe is *our own Father*?

The very Lord of heaven and earth is our Father (Luke 10:21). There is no need for us to have troubled hearts, for He is in control.

You Have the Privilege of Prayer (John 14:12–15)

"Why pray when you can worry?" asks a plaque that I have seen in many homes. One of the best remedies for a troubled heart is prayer.

"O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear;
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer."

However, if God is going to answer our prayers and give us peace in our hearts, there are certain conditions that we must meet. In fact, the meeting of these conditions is a blessing in itself!

We must pray in faith (v. 12). This is a promise for us to claim, and the claiming of it demands faith. The double "verily" assures us that this is a solemn announcement. The fact that Jesus did return to the Father is an encouragement, for there He is interceding for us. He will have more to say about this intercessory work later in His discourse.

The “greater works [things]” would apply initially to the Apostles who were given the power to perform special miracles as the credentials of their office (Rom. 15:18–19; Heb. 2:3–4). These miracles were not greater in *quality*, for “the servant is not greater than his lord” (John 13:16), but rather in scope and quantity. Peter preached one sermon and 3,000 sinners were converted in one day! The fact that ordinary people performed these signs made them even more wonderful and brought great glory to God (Acts 5:13–16).

Of course, it is not the believer *himself* who does these “greater things”; it is God working in and through the believer: “The Lord working with them” (Mark 16:20). “For it is God which worketh in you” (Phil. 2:13). Faith and works must always go together, for it is faith that releases the power of God in our lives.

Both love and obedience are part of effective prayer. “If I regard [see and approve] iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Ps. 66:18).

We do not obey the Lord simply because we want our prayers answered, somewhat like the attitude of a child just before Christmas. We obey Him because we love Him; and the more we obey Him, the more we experience His love. To “keep” His commandments means to value them, treasure them, guard them, and do them. “I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12).

Believing prayer is wonderful medicine to soothe a troubled heart. Meditate on Philippians 4:6–7—and then put it into practice!

We must pray in Christ's name (vv. 13–14). This is not a “magic formula” that we automatically attach to our prayer requests, guaranteeing that God will answer. To ask anything of the Father, in the name of Jesus, means that we ask what Jesus would ask, what would please Him, and what would bring Him glory by furthering His work. When a friend says to you, “You may use my name!” he is handing you a great privilege as well as a tremendous responsibility.

The “whatsoever” in John 14:13 is qualified by all that God has revealed in His Word about prayer; likewise, the “anything” in John 14:14. God is not giving us *carte blanche*; “in My name” is the controlling element. To know God's name means to know His nature, what He is, and what He wants to do. God answers prayer in order to honor His name; therefore, prayer must be in His will (1 John 5:14–15). The first request in “The Lord's Prayer” is, “Hallowed be Thy name” (Matt. 6:9). Any request that does not glorify God's name should not be asked in His name.

We must pray in loving obedience (v. 15). When you love someone, you honor his or her name; and you would never use that name in a demeaning manner. *Love* is an important theme in the Gospel of John; it is used as a verb or noun a total of fifty-six times.

We Have the Holy Spirit (John 14:16–18)

Jesus had a great deal to say about the Holy Spirit in His Upper Room message, for apart from the help of the Spirit of God, we cannot live the Christian life as God would have us live it. We must know who the Holy Spirit is, what He does, and how He does it.

The Holy Spirit is given two special names by our Lord: “another Comforter” and “the Spirit of truth.” The Greek word translated “Comforter” is *parakletos* and it is used only

by John (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 1 John 2:1). It means "called alongside to assist." The Holy Spirit does not work instead of us, or in spite of us, but in us and through us.

Our English word *comfort* comes from two Latin words meaning "with strength." We usually think of "comfort" as soothing someone, consoling him or her; and to some extent this is true. But true comfort strengthens us to face life bravely and keep on going. It does not rob us of responsibility or make it easy for us to give up. Some translations call the Holy Spirit "the Encourager," and this is a good choice of words. *Parakletos* is translated "Advocate" in 1 John 2:1. An "advocate" is one who represents you at court and stands at your side to plead your case.

As "the Spirit of Truth," the Holy Spirit is related to Jesus, the Truth, and the Word of God, which of itself is the truth (John 14:6; 17:17). The Spirit inspired the Word and also illumines the Word so we may understand it. Later on in this message, Jesus will explain the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. Since He is the "Spirit of Truth," the Holy Spirit cannot lie or be associated with lies. He never leads us to do anything contrary to the Word of God, for again God's Word is truth.

If we want the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, we must seek to glorify Christ; and we must make much of the Word of God. When you compare Ephesians 5:18–6:9 with Colossians 3:16–4:1, you will see that both passages describe the same kind of Christian life—joyful, thankful, and submissive. To be filled with the Spirit is the same as to be controlled by the Word. The Spirit of Truth uses the Word of truth to guide us into the will and the work of God.

The Holy Spirit abides in the believer. He is a gift from the Father in answer to the prayer of the Son. During His earthly ministry, Jesus had guided, guarded, and taught His disciples; but now He was going to leave them. The Spirit of God would come to them *and dwell in them*, taking the place of their Master. Jesus called the Spirit "another Comforter," and the Greek word translated "another" means "another of the same kind." The Spirit of God is not different from the Son of God, for both are God. The Spirit of God had dwelt *with* the disciples in the person of Jesus Christ. Now He would dwell *in* them.

Of course, the Spirit of God had been on earth before. He empowered men and women in the Old Testament to accomplish God's work. However, during the Old Testament Age, the Spirit of God would come on people and then leave them. God's Spirit departed from King Saul (1 Sam. 16:14; 18:12); and David, when confessing his sin, asked that the Spirit not be taken from him (Ps. 51:11). When the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost, He was given to God's people to remain with them forever. Even though we may grieve the Spirit, He will not leave us.

The way we treat the Holy Spirit is the way we treat the Lord Jesus Christ. The believer's body is the temple of the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19–20), so what he or she does with that body affects the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Spirit wrote the Word of God, and the way we treat the Bible is the way we treat the Spirit of God and the Son of God.

The world cannot receive the Spirit because the world lives "by sight" and not by faith. Furthermore, the world does not know Jesus Christ; and you cannot have knowledge of the Spirit apart from the Son. The presence of the Spirit in this world is actually an indictment against the world, for the world rejected Jesus Christ.

The word translated "comfortless" in John 14:18 means "orphans." We are not alone, abandoned, helpless, and hopeless! Wherever we go, the Spirit is with us, so why

should we feel like orphans? There is no need to have a troubled heart when you have the very Spirit of God dwelling within you!

We Enjoy the Father's Love (John 14:19–24)

“The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us” (Rom. 5:5). Orphans feel unwanted and unloved, but our Father shares His love with us. Jesus explained a threefold manifestation of God's love.

There was a past manifestation to the disciples (vv. 19–20). John 14:19 focuses on His resurrection and post-resurrection appearances to His disciples and other believers. The last time the world saw Jesus was when Joseph and Nicodemus took Him from the cross and buried Him. The next time the world sees Him, He will come in power and great glory to judge lost sinners.

John 14:20 centers especially on the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost and the oneness of the believers with their Lord. Jesus returned to heaven as the exalted Head of the church (Eph. 1:19–23); then He sent the Spirit so that the members of the body would be joined to their Head in a living union. Believers today, of course, did not see Jesus after His resurrection or in His ascension, but we are united to Him by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

There is a present manifestation of Himself to believers (vv. 21, 23–24). Note the repetition of the word *love*. If we treasure His Word and obey it, then the Father and the Son will share Their love with us and make Their home in us. The word translated “abode” in John 14:23 means “make our home” and is related to “mansions” in John 14:2.

When the sinner trusts Christ, he is born again and the Spirit immediately enters his body and bears witness that he is a child of God. The Spirit is resident and will not depart. But as the believer yields to the Father, loves the Word, prays, and obeys, there is a deeper relationship with the Father, Son, and Spirit. Salvation means we are going to heaven, but submission means that heaven comes to us!

This truth is illustrated in the experiences of Abraham and Lot, recorded in Genesis 18 and 19. When Jesus and the two angels visited Abraham's tent, they felt right at home. They even enjoyed a meal, and Jesus had a private talk with Abraham. But our Lord did not go to Sodom to visit Lot, because He did not feel at home there. Instead, He sent the two angels.

Our experience with God ought to go deeper and deeper, and it will as we yield to the Spirit of Truth and permit Him to teach us and guide us. If we love God and obey Him, He will manifest His love to us in a deeper way each day.

There will be a future manifestation when Jesus Christ returns (v. 19). Judas (not Iscariot) recalled that Jesus had said He would not manifest Himself to the world (John 14:22). But this seemed to contradict other statements He had made, such as recorded in Matthew 24:30. His question was, “What has come to pass that You are no longer going to reveal Yourself to the world?” Has there been a change in the divine plan?

Jesus had been rejected by His own people, so He could not manifest Himself to them. In fact, it was an act of mercy that He did not manifest Himself to the world, because that would have meant judgment. He has revealed Himself to His church and

left the church in the world to be a witness of God's love. He is patiently waiting, still giving lost sinners opportunity to repent and be saved (2 Peter 3:1–10). One day He will return (Rev. 1:7) and the world will behold Him.

One of the best ways to ease a troubled heart is to bathe it in the love of God. When you feel like an "orphan," let the Spirit of God reveal God's love to you in a deeper way. Charles Spurgeon said, "Little faith will take your soul to heaven, but great faith will bring heaven to your soul." Your heart can become a "heaven on earth" as you commune with the Lord and worship Him.

You Have His Gift of Peace (John 14:25–31)

Shalom—peace—is a precious word to the Jewish people. It means much more than just the absence of war or distress. *Shalom* means wholeness, completeness, health, security, even prosperity in the best sense. When you are enjoying God's peace, there is joy and contentment. But God's peace is not like the "peace" that the world offers.

The world bases its peace on its *resources*, while God's peace depends on *relationships*. To be right with God means to enjoy the peace of God. The world depends on personal ability, but the Christian depends on spiritual adequacy in Christ. In the world, peace is something you hope for or work for; but to the Christian, peace is God's wonderful gift, received by faith. Unsaved people enjoy peace when there is an absence of trouble; Christians enjoy peace *in spite of trials* because of the presence of power, the Holy Spirit.

People in the world walk by sight and depend on the externals, but Christians walk by faith and depend on the eternal. The Spirit of God teaches us the Word and guides us (not drags us!) into the truth. He also reminds us of what He has taught us so that we can depend on God's Word in the difficult times of life. The Spirit uses the Word to give us His peace (John 14:27), His love (John 15:9–10), and His joy (John 15:11). If that does not calm a troubled heart, nothing will!

Again, Jesus assured them that they would see Him again (John 14:28). Why rejoice because He returned to the Father? Because His return made possible His wonderful intercessory ministry on our behalf, our great High Priest in heaven (Heb. 2:17–18; 4:14–16). We have the Spirit within us, the Saviour above us, and the Word before us! What tremendous resources for peace!

In John 14:30–31, the Lord named two of our great spiritual enemies—the world and the devil. Jesus overcame the world and the devil (John 12:31), and the devil has no claim on Him. There is no point in Jesus Christ where the devil can get a foothold. Since we are "in Christ," Satan can get no foothold in the believer's life, unless we permit it. Neither Satan nor the world can trouble our hearts if we are yielded to the "peace of God" through the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus said "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28), He was not denying His own deity or His equality with God, for then He would have been contradicting Himself (John 10:30). When Jesus was here on earth, He was necessarily limited by having a human body. He voluntarily laid aside the independent exercise of His divine attributes and submitted Himself to the Father. In that sense, the Father was greater than the Son. Of course, when the Son returned to heaven, all He had laid aside was restored once again (John 17:1, 5).

Jesus showed His love for the Father (and for the world) by voluntarily going to the cross. He did not hide or flee. He willingly laid down His life. He and the disciples may have left the Upper Room at this point (John 14:31) so that what Jesus said from that point on was spoken on the way to the Garden. Or, they may have arisen from the table and lingered awhile as He instructed them. We can easily imagine the allegory of the vine being given as they walked that night through the vineyards.

His own perfect peace assures us that He alone can give true peace. Jesus was always the Master of the situation, and He enables us to take control of our lives as we surrender to Him and receive His legacy of peace.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

RELATIONSHIPS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

John 15:1–17

This is the seventh and last of the “I AM” statements of Christ recorded in the Gospel of John. However, Jesus did not stop with this image, but went on to use the picture of “the friend.” These two pictures of the believer—branches and friends—reveal both our privileges and our responsibilities. As *branches*, we have the privilege of sharing His life, and the responsibility of abiding. As *friends*, we have the privilege of knowing His will, and the responsibility of obeying.

Branches—We Must Abide (John 15:1–11)

The cultivation of vineyards was important to the life and economy of Israel. A golden vine adorned Herod's temple. When our Lord used this image, He was not introducing something new; it was familiar to every Jew. There are four elements in this allegory that we must understand to benefit from His teaching.

The vine. There are actually three different vines found in Scripture. The *past* vine was the nation of Israel (see Ps. 80:8–19; Isa. 5:1–7; Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 19:10–14; and Hosea 10:1). In an act of wonderful grace, God “transplanted” Israel into Canaan and gave the nation every possible benefit. “What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?” God asked (Isa. 5:4). If ever a nation had everything it needed to succeed, it was Israel.

But the vine produced wild grapes! Instead of practicing justice, it practiced oppression; instead of producing righteousness, it produced unrighteousness and cries of distress from the victims. God had to deal with the nation Israel and chasten it, but even that did not produce lasting results. When God's own Son came to the vineyard, they cast Him out and killed Him (Matt. 21:33–46).

There is also a *future* vine, “the vine of the earth” described in Revelation 14:14–20. This is the Gentile world system ripening for God’s judgment. Believers are branches in “the vine of heaven,” but the unsaved are branches in “the vine of the earth.” The unsaved depend on this world for their sustenance and satisfaction, while believers depend on Jesus Christ. The “vine of the earth” will be cut down and destroyed when Jesus Christ returns.

The *present* Vine is our Lord Jesus Christ, and, of course, the vine includes the branches. He is the “true Vine,” that is, “the original of which all other vines are a copy.” As Christians, we do not live on substitutes! The symbolism of the Vine and branches is similar to that of the Head and the body: we have a living relationship to Christ and belong to Him.

When we lived in Chicago, we had a small grape arbor in our backyard; but what we cultivated was nothing like what is even today cultivated in the Holy Land. Ours was a very fragile plant and it was easy to break off a branch. The vines I saw in the Holy Land were large and strong, and it was next to impossible for anyone to break off a mature branch *without injuring the vine itself*. Our union with Christ is a *living* union, so we may bear fruit; a *loving* union, so that we may enjoy Him; and a *lasting* union, so that we need not be afraid.

The branches. Of itself, a branch is weak and useless. It is good for either bearing or burning, but not for building (read Ezek. 15). The branch cannot produce its own life; it must draw that life from the vine. It is our communion with Christ through the Spirit that makes possible the bearing of the fruit.

Many of the images of Christ and the believer given in Scripture emphasize this important concept of *union and communion*: the body and its members (1 Cor. 12), the bride and the Bridegroom (Eph. 5:25–33), the sheep and the Shepherd (John 10). A member of the body cut off from the body would die. The marriage creates the union, but it takes daily love and devotion to maintain the communion. The shepherd brings the sheep into the flock, but the sheep must follow the shepherd in order to have protection and provision.

The sooner we as believers discover that we are but branches, the better we will relate to the Lord; for we will know our own weakness and confess our need for His strength.

The key word is *abide*; it is used eleven times in John 15:1–11 (“continue” in John 15:9 and “remain” in John 15:11). What does it mean to “abide”? It means to keep in fellowship with Christ so that His life can work in and through us to produce fruit. This certainly involves the Word of God and the confession of sin so that nothing hinders our communion with Him (John 15:3). It also involves obeying Him because we love Him (John 15:9–10).

How can we tell when we are “abiding in Christ”? Is there a special feeling? No, but there are special evidences that appear and they are unmistakably clear. For one thing, when you are abiding in Christ, you produce fruit (John 15:2). What that “fruit” is, we will discuss later. Also, you experience the Father’s “pruning” so that you will bear more fruit (John 15:2). The believer who is abiding in Christ has his prayers answered (John 15:7) and experiences a deepening love for Christ and for other believers (John 15:9, 12–13). He also experiences joy (John 15:11).

This abiding relationship is natural to the branch and the vine, but it must be cultivated in the Christian life. It is not automatic. Abiding in Christ demands worship, meditation on God's Word, prayer, sacrifice, and service—but what a joyful experience it is! Once you have begun to cultivate this deeper communion with Christ, you have no desire to return to the shallow life of the careless Christian.

The vinedresser. The vinedresser is in charge of caring for the vines, and Jesus said that this is the work of His Father. It is He who “purges” or prunes the branches so they will produce more fruit. Note the progression here: no fruit (John 15:2), fruit, more fruit, much fruit (John 15:5, 8). Many Christians pray that God will make them more fruitful, but they do not enjoy the pruning process that follows!

The vinedresser prunes the branches in two ways: he cuts away dead wood that can breed disease and insects, and he cuts away living tissue so that the life of the vine will not be so dissipated that the quality of the crop will be jeopardized. In fact, the vinedresser will even cut away whole bunches of grapes so that the rest of the crop will be of higher quality. God wants both quantity and quality.

This pruning process is the most important part of the whole enterprise, and the people who do it must be carefully trained or they can destroy an entire crop. Some vineyards invest two or three years in training the “pruners” so they know where to cut, how much to cut, and even at what angle to make the cut.

The greatest judgment God could bring to a believer would be to let him alone, let him have his own way. Because God loves us, He “prunes” us and encourages us to bear more fruit for His glory. If the branches could speak, they would confess that the pruning process hurts; but they would also rejoice that they will be able to produce more and better fruit.

Your Heavenly Father is never nearer to you than when He is pruning you. Sometimes He cuts away the dead wood that might cause trouble; but often He cuts off the living tissue that is robbing you of spiritual vigor. Pruning does not simply mean spiritual surgery that removes what is bad. It can also mean cutting away the good and the better so that we might enjoy the best. Yes, pruning hurts, but it also helps. We may not enjoy it, but we need it.

How does the Father prune us? Sometimes He simply uses the Word to convict and cleanse us. (The word translated “purge” in John 15:2 is the same as “clean” in John 13:10. See Eph. 5:26–27.) Sometimes He must chasten us (Heb. 12:1–11). At the time, it hurts when He removes something precious from us; but as the “spiritual crop” is produced, we see that the Father knew what He was doing.

The more we abide in Christ, the more fruit we bear; and the more fruit we bear, the more the Father has to prune us so that the quality keeps up with the quantity. Left to itself, the branch might produce many clusters, but they will be inferior in quality. God is glorified by a bigger crop that is also a *better* crop.

The fruit. The word *results* is often heard in conversations among Christian workers, but this is not actually a Bible concept. A machine can produce results, and so can a robot, but it takes a *living organism* to produce fruit. It takes time and cultivation to produce fruit; a good crop does not come overnight.

We must remember that the branches do not eat the fruit: others do. We are not producing fruit to please ourselves but to serve others. We should be the kind of people

who “feed” others by our words and our works. “The lips of the righteous feed many” (Prov. 10:21).

Several different kinds of spiritual fruit are named in the Bible. We bear fruit when we win others to Christ (Rom. 1:13). We are a part of the harvest (John 4:35–38). As we grow in holiness and obedience, we are bearing fruit (Rom. 6:22). Paul considered Christian giving to be fruit from a dedicated life (Rom. 15:28). “The fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22–23) is the kind of Christian character that glorifies God and makes Christ real to others. Even our good works, our service, grow out of our abiding life (Col. 1:10). The praise that comes from our hearts and lips is actually fruit to the glory of God (Heb. 13:15).

Many of these things could be counterfeited by the flesh, but the deception would eventually be detected, for real spiritual fruit has in it *the seeds for more fruit*. Man-made results are dead and cannot reproduce themselves, but Spirit-produced fruit will go on reproducing from one life to another. There will be fruit—more fruit—much fruit.

A true branch, united with the vine, will always bear fruit. Not every branch bears a bumper crop, just as not every field has a bumper harvest (Matt. 13:8, 23), but there is always fruit where there is life. If there is no fruit, the branch is worthless and it is cast away and burned. I do not believe our Lord is teaching here that true believers can lose their salvation, for this would contradict what He taught in John 6:37 and 10:27–30. It is unwise to build a theological doctrine on a parable or allegory. Jesus was teaching one main truth—the fruitful life of the believer—and we must not press the details too much. Just as an unfruitful branch is useless, so an unfruitful believer is useless; and both must be dealt with. It is a tragic thing for a once-fruitful believer to backslide and lose his privilege of fellowship and service. If anything, John 15:6 describes divine discipline rather than eternal destiny. “There is [for believers] a sin unto death” (1 John 5:16).

Our Lord had spoken about peace (John 14:27); now He mentions love and joy (John 15:9–11). Love, joy, and peace are the first three “fruit of the Spirit” named in Galatians 5:22–23. Our abiding in Christ certainly ought to produce His love, joy, and peace in our hearts. Because we love Him, we keep His commandments; and, as we keep His commandments, we abide in His love and experience it in a deeper way.

Several times in John's Gospel you will find Jesus speaking about the Father's love for Him. We so emphasize God's love for the world and the church that we forget that the Father loves the Son. Because the Father does love the Son, He has put all things into the Son's hand (John 3:35) and has revealed all things to the Son (John 5:20). The Father loved the Son before the foundation of the world (John 17:24); He loved the Son when the Son died on the cross (John 10:17). The amazing thing is believers today can experience personally that same love! Jesus prayed “that the love with which Thou hast loved Me may be in them [the disciples and believers today]” (John 17:26).

As branches in the Vine, we have the privilege of abiding and the responsibility of bearing fruit. Now we turn to the second picture, that of *friends*.

Friends—We Must Obey (John 15:12–17)

Most of us have many acquaintances but very few friends, and even some of our friends may prove unfriendly or even unfaithful. What about Judas? “Yes, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me”

(Ps. 41:9). Even a devoted friend may fail us when we need him most. Peter, James, and John went to sleep in the Garden when they should have been praying; and Peter even denied the Lord three times. Our friendship to each other and to the Lord is not perfect, but His friendship to us is perfect.

However, we must not interpret this word *friend* in a limited way, because the Greek word means “a friend at court.” It describes that “inner circle” around a king or emperor. (In John 3:29, it refers to the “best man” at a wedding.) The “friends of the king” would be close to him and know his secrets, but they would also be subject to him and have to obey his commands. There is thus no conflict between being a friend and being a servant.

The perfect illustration of this in Scripture is Abraham, “the friend of God” (2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; James 2:23), who was also the servant of God (Gen. 26:24). In Genesis 18, our Lord and two angels came to visit Abraham as they were on their way to investigate the sin of Sodom. Even though Abraham was nearly 100 years old, he interrupted his noonday rest, greeted the visitors, saw to their comfort, and fed them a lovely meal. In the first fifteen verses of this chapter, Abraham is on the move; and twice he refers to himself as a servant (Gen. 18:3, 5). Note that this old man “hastened” and “ran” and encouraged others to perform their work quickly, a perfect example of a servant. Nor did Abraham sit and eat with them. Like a true servant, he stood nearby, ready to do their bidding.

In the last half of the chapter, the atmosphere changes, and Abraham is quietly standing still, communing with the Lord. He is still a servant, but now he is being a friend. “Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do?” the Lord asked. As a friend of God, Abraham shared God’s secrets.

It is this kind of a relationship that Jesus described when He called His disciples “friends.” It was certainly a relationship of *love*, both for Him and for each other. The “friends of the King” could not compete with each other for attention or promotion. They were a part of the “inner circle,” not to promote themselves, but to serve their King. What a rebuke this must have been to the selfish disciples who often argued over who was the greatest!

How is it possible for Jesus to *command* us to love one another? Can true love be commanded? You must keep in mind that Christian love is not basically a “feeling”; it is an act of the will. The proof of our love is not in our feelings but in our actions, even to the extent of laying down our lives for Christ and for one another (1 John 3:16). Jesus laid down His life for both His friends and His enemies! (Rom. 5:10) While the emotions are certainly involved, real Christian love is an act of the will. It means treating others the way God treats us.

So, our friendship with Christ involves love and obedience. But it also involves knowledge: He “lets us in on” His plans. Indeed, He is our Master (John 13:13, 16), but He does not treat us as servants. He treats us as friends, *if* we do what He commands. Abraham was God’s friend because he obeyed God (Gen. 18:19). If we have friendship with the world, we then experience enmity with God (James 4:1–4). Lot in Sodom was not called God’s friend, even though Lot was a saved man (2 Peter 2:7). God told Abraham what He planned to do to the cities of the plain, and Abraham was able to intercede for Lot and his family.

It is interesting to note that, in John's Gospel, it was the servants who knew what was going on! The servants at the wedding feast in Cana knew where the wine came from (John 2:9), and the nobleman's servants knew when the son was healed (John 4:51–53).

One of the greatest privileges we have as His friends is that of learning to know God better and “getting in on” God's secrets. I can never forget the impact on my own heart when I heard Dr. Oswald Sanders say to the Back to the Bible staff, “Each of us is as close to God as we choose to be.” We are His friends, and we ought to be near the throne, listening to His Word, enjoying His intimacy, and obeying His commandments.

One day while he was a fugitive, David was near Bethlehem, his home city, and he longed for a drink of water from the well by the gate. Three of his mighty men were close enough to David to hear his sigh, and they risked their lives to bring their king the water that he wanted (2 Sam. 23:15–17). That is what it means to be a friend of the king.

In John 14:16, Jesus reminded the men that they had this privileged position only because of His grace. They did not choose Him; He chose them! He chose them out of the world (John 14:19) and ordained them to do His will. Again, we find this important word *fruit*. As branches, we share His life and bear fruit; and as friends, we share His love and bear fruit. As branches, we are pruned by the Father; as friends, we are instructed by the Son, and His Word controls our lives.

The word *ordained* simply means “appointed.” It refers to the act of setting someone apart for special service. We have graciously been chosen and set apart by the Lord in order to go into the world and bear fruit. He has sent us into the world (John 17:18) as His personal ambassadors to tell others about the King and His great salvation. When we witness to others and win them to Christ, this is bringing forth fruit to the glory of God.

As I mentioned before, the evidence of true sonship, discipleship (John 15:8), and friendship (John 15:15) is *fruit*. “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:20). Where there is true fruit, it remains; man-made “results” eventually disappear. Fruit has in it the seed for more fruit, so the process goes on and on. Whatever is born of the Spirit of God has the mark of eternity on it, and it will last.

Once again, Jesus brought up the privilege of prayer. The friends of the king certainly speak to their sovereign and share their burdens and needs with him. In the days of monarchies, it was considered a very special honor to be invited to speak to the king or queen; yet the friends of Jesus Christ can speak to Him at any time. The throne of grace is always available to them.

John 15:15–16 summarize for us what it means to be a friend of the King of kings. It is a humbling experience, for He chose us and we did not choose Him. We must keep this in mind lest we become proud and presumptuous. It means that we keep our ears open and listen to what He says to us. “Hast thou heard the secret of God?” (Job 15:8) “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant” (Ps. 25:14). We must be attentive and alert.

But the purpose for all of this is that we might obey Him and get His work done. The King has tasks that must be performed; and if we love Him, we will obey His commands. We will seek to bear fruit that will please Him and glorify the Father. Our joy should be to please Him.

Jesus closed this part of His message by reminding them (and us) of the most important commandment of all: love one another. There are dozens of “one another” statements in the New Testament, but all of them are summarized in “love one another.” Jesus had already given this commandment to the Eleven (John 13:34–35), and now He has repeated it twice (John 15:12, 17). It will be stated in one way or another many more times in the New Testament letters, especially by John in his first epistle. The friends of the King must not only love Him, but also one another. What joy it brings to His heart when He sees His friends loving one another and working together to obey His commands.

This study began in the vineyard and ended in the throne room! The next study will take us to the battlefield where we experience the hatred of the lost world. If we are not abiding as branches and obeying as friends, we will never be able to face the opposition of the world. If we do not love one another, how can we ever hope to love lost men and women in the world? If we are not marching together as the friends of the King, we will never present a united front to the enemy.

“Without Me, ye can do nothing” (John 15:5).

We are not simply handicapped or hindered. We are hopelessly paralyzed! We can do *nothing!*

But if we abide in Him, if we stay close to the throne, we can do *anything* that He commands us to do!

What a privilege—and what a responsibility!

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WHAT IN THE WORLD IS THE SPIRIT DOING?

John 15:18–16:16

This long section—John 15:18–16:16—is tied together by two important themes: the opposition of the world against the church, and the ministry of the Spirit to and through the church. Our Lord had been talking about love (John 15:9–13, 17), but now He is talking about *hatred*; and He used the word seven times. It seems incredible that anyone would hate Jesus Christ and His people, but that is exactly what the situation is today; *and some of that hatred comes from religious people*. In a few hours, the religious leaders of Israel would be condemning their Messiah and crying out for His blood.

Our Lord had openly taught His disciples that one day persecution would come. He mentioned it in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:10–12, 44) and in His “commissioning sermon” when He sent out the disciples to minister (Matt. 10:16–23). In His sermon denouncing the Pharisees, Jesus openly said that they would persecute and kill God’s

servants (Matt. 23:34–35); and there was a similar warning given in His prophetic message on Mt. Olivet (Mark 13:9–13).

Throughout the Gospel of John, it is evident that the religious establishment not only opposed Jesus, but even sought to kill Him (John 5:16; 7:19, 25; 8:37, 59; 9:22; also note 11:8). As He continued His ministry, there was a tide of resentment, then hatred, and then open opposition against Him. So, the disciples should not have been surprised when Jesus brought up the subject of persecution, for they had heard Him warn them and they had seen Him face men's hatred during His ministry.

Until the Lord returns, or until we die, we must live in this hostile world and face continued opposition. How can we do it? What is the secret of victory? It is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit of God in our lives. This is the key section in the Upper Room message about the Holy Spirit and His ministry.

Before we study this passage and see the threefold ministry of the Spirit to the church in the world, we must pause to remind ourselves just who the Holy Spirit is. The Holy Spirit of God is a Person; Jesus referred to the Spirit as "He" and not "it." The Holy Spirit has a mind (Rom. 8:27), a will (1 Cor. 12:11), and emotional feelings (Gal. 5:22–23).

In John 15:26 all three Persons of the Godhead are mentioned: Jesus the Son will send the Spirit from the Father. Because the Holy Spirit is a Person, and is God, it means that the Christian has God indwelling his body! If we did not have the Holy Spirit within, we would not be able to serve the Lord in this present evil world. We are to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), worship in the Spirit (Phil. 3:3), and witness in the Spirit (Acts 1:8).

Christians can stand and withstand in the midst of the world's hatred because of the special ministries of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit as Comforter Encourages the Church (John 15:18–16:4)

We should begin by clarifying what Jesus means by "the world," because the term is used in Scripture in at least three different ways. It can mean *the created world* ("the world was made by Him"—John 1:10), the world of *humanity* ("For God so loved the world"—John 3:16), or *society apart from God and opposed to God*. We sometimes use the phrase "the world system" to define this special meaning.

For example, when you listen to the radio news, you may hear the announcer say, "And now the news from the world of sports!" Obviously, "the world of sports" is not a special country or planet where everybody lives who is connected in some way with sports. "The world of sports" refers to all the organizations, people, plans, activities, philosophies, etc. that are a part of sports. Some of these things are visible and some are invisible, but all of them are organized around one thing—sports.

"The world" from a Christian point of view involves all the people, plans, organizations, activities, philosophies, values, etc. that belong to society without God. Some of these things may be very cultural; others may be very corrupt; but all of them have their origins in the heart and mind of sinful man and promote what sinful man wants to enjoy and accomplish. As Christians, we must be careful not to love the world (1 John 2:15–17) or be conformed to the world (Rom. 12:1–2).

Jesus pulls no punches when He tells His disciples that their situation in the world will be serious and even dangerous. Note the progress in the world's opposition: hatred (John 15:18–19), persecution (John 15:20), excommunication, and even death (John 16:2). You can trace these stages of resistance as you read the Book of Acts.

Why does the world system, including the “religious world,” hate the Christian, the one who believes on Jesus Christ and seeks to follow Him? Jesus gave several reasons.

We are identified with Christ (vv. 18, 20). If they hated Him, they will also hate those of us who are identified with Him. In John 15:20, Jesus quoted the statement He had made earlier (John 13:16), and the logic of it is clear. He is the Master; we are the servants. He is greater than we are, so He must receive the praise and glory. But the world will not give Him praise and glory! The world hates Him, and therefore the world must hate us. If with all of His greatness and perfection, Jesus does not escape persecution, what hope is there for us with our imperfections?

This principle is seen in some of the other images of the relationship between Christ and His own. He is the Shepherd and we are the sheep; and when they attack the Shepherd, it affects the sheep (Matt. 26:31). He is the Master (Teacher) and we are the disciples, the learners. But it is encouraging to know that when God's people are persecuted, our Lord enters into their suffering, for He is the Head of the body and we are the members. “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?” (Acts 9:4) Anything that the enemy can do to us has already been done to Jesus Christ, and He is “with us” as we suffer.

We do not belong to the world (v. 19). When we trusted Christ, we moved into a new spiritual position: we are now “in Christ” and “out of the world.” To be sure, we are *in* the world physically, but not *of* the world spiritually. Now that we are “partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb. 3:1) we are no longer interested in the treasures or pleasures of sin in this world. This does not mean that we are isolated from reality or insulated from the world's needs, so “heavenly minded that we are no earthly good.” Rather, it means that we look at the things of earth from heaven's point of view.

The world system functions on the basis of conformity. As long as a person follows the fads and fashions and accepts the values of the world, he or she will “get along.” But the Christian refuses to be “conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2). The believer is a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17) and no longer wants to live the “old life” (1 Peter 4:1–4). We are the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13–16), but a dark world does not want light and a decaying world does not want salt! In other words, the believer is not just “out of step”; he is out of place! (See John 17:14, 16, and 1 John 4:5.)

The world is spiritually ignorant and blind (v. 21). If you had asked the religious leaders in Jerusalem if they knew the God they were seeking to defend, they would have said, “Of course we know Him! Israel has known the true God for centuries!” But Jesus said that they *did not* know the Father and, therefore, they could not know the Son (see John 16:3). The religious leaders knew a great deal about Jehovah God and could quote chapter and verse to defend their doctrines, but they did not personally know God.

This was not a new theme for our Lord to discuss, because He had mentioned it before to the religious leaders who opposed Him. “Ye neither know Me, nor My Father; if ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also” (John 8:19). “Yet ye have not

known Him; but I know Him" (John 8:55). Jesus had taught them the Word and had demonstrated His deity in miraculous signs and a godly walk; and yet the religious leaders of the nation were blind to His identity: "The world knew Him not" (John 1:10).

The religious world today claims to know God, but it does not want to bow the knee to Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the only Saviour of the world. Satan has blinded their minds (2 Cor. 4:3–4) and sin has blinded their hearts (Eph. 4:17–19). Like Saul of Tarsus, they are so convinced that their "religion" and "righteousness" are satisfactory that *in the name of that religion* they persecute God's people!

The world will not be honest about its own sin (vv. 22–24; 16:1–4). Once again, Jesus emphasized His words and His works. We have seen this emphasis throughout the Gospel of John (3:2; 5:36–38; 10:24–27; 14:10–11). The people had no excuse ("cloak") for their sin. They had seen His works and heard His word, but they would not admit the truth. All of the evidence had been presented, but they were not honest enough to receive it and act on it.

This statement is parallel to what Jesus told the Pharisees after He had healed the blind man (John 9:39–41). They had to admit that Jesus had healed the man born blind, but they would not follow the evidence to its logical conclusion and put *their* trust in Him. Jesus told them that they were the ones who were blind! But since they admitted that they had seen a miracle, this made their sin even worse. They were not sinning in ignorance; they were sinning against a flood of light. Why? Because that light revealed their own sin and they did not want to face their sin honestly. Their attitude was similar to that described in 2 Peter 3:5—"For this they *willingly* are ignorant" (italics mine).

How does the Holy Spirit encourage believers when they are experiencing the hatred and opposition of the world? It is primarily through the Word of God. For one thing, the Spirit reminds us that this opposition is clearly expressed by various writers in the Scriptures. In John 15:25, Jesus quoted Psalms 35:19 and 69:4. The Word assured Him that the hatred of the world was not because of anything He had done to deliberately incite such opposition. We today can turn to passages like Philippians 1:28–30; 2 Timothy 2:9–12; Hebrews 12:3–4; and 1 Peter 4:12ff. We also have the encouraging words of our Lord found in the Gospels.

The Spirit also witnesses to us and through us during times of persecution (John 15:26–27). He reminds us that what we are experiencing is "the fellowship of His [Christ's] sufferings" (Phil. 3:10) and that it is a privilege to bear reproach for His name. (Read *carefully* 1 Peter 4:12–19.)

Times of persecution have always been for the church times of proclamation and witness. We must be "ready always to give an answer" when unsaved people attack us (1 Peter 3:15). The Spirit witnesses to us so that we can witness to the world (Mark 13:11). Apart from the power of the Spirit of God, we cannot give a clear witness for Christ (Acts 1:8).

There is no reason for the believer to stumble ("be offended," John 16:1) when the world stokes up the furnace of persecution. He should expect persecution, if only because his Lord told him it was coming. (Note especially John 13:19 and 14:29 where the Lord warned His disciples in advance.) Furthermore, they must not stumble when this persecution comes from religious people who actually think they are serving God. The word translated "service" in John 16:2 means "priestly service." This statement is

certainly a description of Saul of Tarsus, who thought he was serving God by destroying the church (see Acts 7:57–8:3; 22:3–4; and 26:9–12).

It is tragic when “religious” people persecute and murder in the name of God. While it is true that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church” (Tertullian), it is also true that their blood is the stain on the pages of history.

The Spirit as Reprover Witnesses through the Church (John 16:5–11)

For three years, Jesus had been with them to protect them from attack; but now He was about to leave them. He had told them this earlier in the evening (John 13:33), and Peter had asked Him where He was going (John 13:36). However, Peter’s question revealed more concern about *himself* than about the Lord Jesus! Also, his question centered on the immediate, not the ultimate. It was necessary for Jesus to explain why it was important *for them* that He return to the Father.

The major reason, of course, is that the Holy Spirit might come to empower the church for life and witness. Also, the ascended Saviour would be able to intercede for His people at the heavenly throne of grace. With all of their faults, the disciples dearly loved their Master; and it was difficult for them to grasp these new truths.

It is important to note that the Spirit comes *to the church* and not to the world. This means that He works in and through the church. The Holy Spirit does not minister in a vacuum. Just as the Son of God had to have a body in order to do His work on earth, so the Spirit of God needs a body to accomplish His ministries; and that body is the church. Our bodies are His tools and temples, and He wants to use us to glorify Christ and to witness to a lost world.

Sometimes we hear people pray, “Lord, send Your Spirit to speak to the lost! May the Spirit go from heart to heart.” Such praying is no doubt sincere, but is it biblical? The Spirit does not “float” in some ghostly way up and down the rows of a church building, seeking to win the lost. The Holy Spirit works through the people in whom He lives. When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, He empowered Peter to preach; and the preaching of the Word brought conviction to those who heard.

The key word here is *reprove* (John 16:8). It is a legal word that means “to bring to light, to expose, to refute, to convict and convince.” It could be translated “pronounce the verdict.” The world may think that it is judging Christians, but it is the Christians who are passing judgment on the world as they witness to Jesus Christ! Believers are the witnesses, the Holy Spirit is the “prosecuting attorney,” and the unsaved are the guilty prisoners. However, the purpose of this indictment is not to condemn but to bring salvation.

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of one particular sin, the sin of *unbelief*. The law of God and the conscience of man will convict the sinner of his *sins* (plural) specifically; but it is the work of the Spirit, through the witness of the believers, to expose the unbelief of the lost world. After all, it is unbelief that condemns the lost sinner (John 3:18–21), not the committing of individual sins. A person could “clean up his life” and quit his or her bad habits and still be lost and go to hell.

The Spirit also convicts the sinner of *righteousness*, not *unrighteousness*. Whose righteousness? The righteousness of Jesus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God. The world would not receive the Son of God (John 1:10), so He has returned to the Father. When

He was here on earth, He was accused by men of being a blasphemer, a lawbreaker, a deceiver, and even a demoniac. The Spirit of God reveals the Saviour in the Word and in this way glorifies Him (John 16:13–14). The Spirit also reveals Christ in the lives of believers. The world cannot receive or see the Spirit of God, but they can see what He does as they watch the lives of dedicated believers.

The Spirit convicts the lost sinner of *judgment*. Do not confuse this statement with Acts 24:25 (“of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come”). Jesus was referring to His judgment of Satan that was effected by His death on the cross (John 12:31). Satan is the prince of this world, but he is a defeated prince. Satan has already been judged and the verdict announced. All that must take place is the executing of the sentence, and that will occur when Jesus returns.

When a lost sinner is truly under conviction, he will see the folly and evil of unbelief; he will confess that he does not measure up to the righteousness of Christ; and he will realize that he is under condemnation because he belongs to the world and the devil (Eph. 2:1–3). The only person who can rescue him from such a horrible situation is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. There can be no conversion without conviction, and there can be no conviction apart from the Spirit of God using the Word of God and the witness of the child of God.

Witnessing is a great privilege, but it is also a serious responsibility. It is a matter of life or death! How we need to depend on the Holy Spirit to guide us to the right persons, give us the right words, and enable us patiently to glorify Jesus Christ.

The Spirit as Teacher Guides the Church (John 16:12–15)

Our Lord was always careful to give His disciples the right amount of truth at the best time. This is always the mark of a great teacher. The Holy Spirit is our Teacher today, and He follows that same principle: He teaches us the truths we need to know, when we need them, and when we are ready to receive them.

When you compare John 14:26 with 16:13, you see the wonderful way that God arranged for the writing of the New Testament Scriptures. The Spirit would remind them of what Jesus had taught them; this gives us the four Gospels. The Spirit would also “guide” them into all truth; and this would result in the epistles. “He will show you things to come” refers to the prophetic Scriptures, especially the Book of Revelation.

It is essential that we see that the work of the Spirit of God is never divorced from Jesus Christ or the Word of God. “He shall testify of Me” (John 15:26); “He shall glorify Me” (John 16:14). People who claim that the Spirit of God led them to do things contrary to the example of Christ or the teaching of the Word are mistaken and are being led astray by Satan. Jesus is the truth (John 14:6), and the Word is truth (John 17:17), and the Holy Spirit is “the Spirit of Truth.” Where the Holy Spirit is at work, there must be truth.

The phrase “He [the Spirit] shall not speak of Himself” (John 16:13) does not mean that the Spirit never refers to Himself, for when He wrote the Bible, the Spirit often mentioned Himself. Rather, it means that He does not speak apart from the Father and the Son; He does not “manufacture” a different message. You have the entire Godhead mentioned in John 16:13, because the Spirit of God does not ignore either the Father or the Son. They work harmoniously together.

The teaching of the Spirit through the Apostles was not different from the teaching of the Spirit through Jesus Christ. Some theologians like to contrast the “Christianity of Christ” with the “Christianity of Paul.” They claim that Paul “ruined” Christianity by making it so theological and complicating the “simple message” of Jesus Christ. What a sad interpretation this is. What Jesus said in John 14:26 and 16:13 completely refutes this false teaching. The same Holy Spirit communicated the truths found in the four Gospels, the epistles, and the Book of Revelation; and He also wrote the history and doctrine found in Acts.

It is the ministry of the Spirit to enrich us with the treasures of God's truth. He enlightens us with God's truth and enriches us with God's treasures. The Word of God is a rich mine of gold, silver, and precious jewels (Prov. 3:13–15; 8:10–21). What a joy it is to have the Spirit illumine His Word.

We do not study the Word of God in order to “argue religion” with people, or to show off our grasp of spiritual things. We study the Word to see Jesus Christ, to know God better, to glorify Him in our lives. As we witness in this hostile world, the Spirit uses the Word He has taught us; and we share Jesus Christ with the lost. It is our job to witness; it is the Spirit's job to convict.

Perhaps some of us need to quit acting like prosecuting attorneys—or judges—so that the Spirit can use us as faithful witnesses.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

LET THERE BE JOY!

John 16:16–33

This section—John 16:16–33—concludes the Upper Room Discourse and deals primarily with the emotions of the disciples. They were sorrowing, they were confused about some of Jesus' teaching, and they were afraid. It is an encouragement to me to know that the disciples were real men with real problems, yet the Lord was able to use them. We sometimes get the false impression that these men were different from us, especially endowed with spiritual knowledge and courage; but such was not the case. They were human!

One of the recurring themes in this section is *joy* (John 16:20–22, 24, 33). The Eleven were certainly not experiencing much joy that night! But what Jesus said to them eventually made a difference in their lives, just as it can make a difference in our lives today. Tenderly and patiently, our Lord explained how His people can have joy in their lives.

There Is a Principle to Grasp (John 16:16–22)

The principle is simply this: God brings joy to our lives, not by substitution, but by transformation. His illustration of the woman giving birth makes this clear. *The same baby that caused the pain also caused the joy.* In birth, God does not substitute something else to relieve the mother's pain. Instead, He uses what is there already but transforms it.

Every parent knows what it is like to have an unhappy child because a toy is broken or a playmate has gone home. The parent can do one of two things: substitute something else for the broken toy or absent friend, or transform the situation into a new experience for the unhappy child. If Mother always gets a new toy for the child each time a toy is broken, that child will grow up expecting every problem to be solved by substitution. If Mother always phones another playmate and invites him or her over, the child will grow up expecting people to come to his rescue whenever there is a crisis. The result either way is a spoiled child who will not be able to cope with reality.

The way of substitution for solving problems is the way of immaturity. The way of transformation is the way of faith and maturity. We cannot mature emotionally or spiritually if somebody is always replacing our broken toys.

Jesus did not say that the mother's sorrow (pain) was replaced by joy, but that the sorrow was transformed into joy. The same baby that caused the pain also caused the joy! And so it is in the Christian life: God takes seemingly impossible situations, adds the miracle of His grace, and transforms trial into triumph and sorrow into joy. "The Lord thy God turned the curse into a blessing" (Deut. 23:5; see Neh. 13:2).

Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave, and Potiphar put him into prison as a criminal; but God transformed that hopeless situation of defeat into victory. Egypt's persecution of Israel only caused them to multiply and prosper the more. King Saul's murderous pursuit of David only made him more a man of God and helped produce the psalms that encourage our hearts today. Even Jesus took the cross, a symbol of defeat and shame, and transformed it into a symbol of victory and glory.

Now that we understand this principle, we can better understand the problems and questions of the disciples.

In John 16:16, Jesus announced that in a little while, they would not see Him; then, in a little while, they would see Him. It was a deliberately puzzling statement (John 16:25, He spoke in proverbs ["dark sayings"]) and the disciples did not understand. This also encourages me as I study my Bible and find statements that I cannot understand. Even the disciples had their hours of spiritual ignorance!

What did Jesus mean? Possibly He was talking about the soon-to-occur events in connection with His death and resurrection. After His burial, they would not see Him for a little while; but then He would rise from the dead and they would see Him again. He had told them on previous occasions that He would rise from the dead after three days, but His words did not sink into their minds and hearts.

However, I think that Jesus was speaking primarily about His return to the Father ("Because I go to the Father"—John 16:16). This ties in with John 16:10—"Because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more." The disciples did not live to see the return of Christ, but they did die and see Him when they arrived in glory. In comparison to eternity, the time that the church has been awaiting the Lord's return has really been but "a little while" (see 2 Cor. 4:16–18). In fact, the phrase "a little while" is used in this very

sense in Hebrews 10:37—"For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry."

Instead of asking Jesus to explain His words, the men began to discuss it among themselves, almost as though they were embarrassed to admit their ignorance. However, you do not get very far by exchanging your ignorance! It is when we come to the Lord and ask for His help that we learn the important lessons of life.

Egypt was glad when Israel departed (Ps. 105:38), and the world was glad when Jesus Christ moved off the scene. Both the religious and political leaders of that day expected to see the early believers die out and the "Christian movement" disappear; but such was not the case. Jesus sent His Holy Spirit to His church, and the church is carrying the Word of His grace to the ends of the earth. The early believers even rejoiced when they were persecuted (Acts 5:41).

To the mother experiencing birth pains, every minute may seem an hour. Our concept of time changes with our feelings. Thirty minutes in the dentist chair may seem like hours, while hours fishing or dining with friends may seem like a very short time. The mother feels as though the birth is taking a long time, when really it may be only "a little while." When the baby has been born, pain is forgotten as joy fills her heart.

The world today does not want Jesus Christ or His church. The world is rejoicing while we are suffering, longing for our Lord to return. In fact, all of creation is suffering "birth pangs" because of sin, awaiting His return (Rom. 8:22). When the Bridegroom is away, the bride mourns (Matt. 9:15). But, in "a little while" He shall return and we shall go with Him to heaven to enjoy the Father's house.

While the immediate application may have been to the sorrowing hearts of the disciples, the ultimate application is to all of God's people as they await the coming of Jesus Christ. To us, it seems like a long wait; but God does not measure time as we do (see 2 Peter 3). But while we are waiting, we must deal with our trials and hurts on the basis of *transformation* and not *substitution*, if we expect to mature in the Christian life.

There Is a Promise to Believe (John 16:23–28)

The central theme of this paragraph is prayer: "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24). It is important to note that the text uses two different words for "ask," although they can be used interchangeably. The word used in John 16:19, 23a, and 26 means "to ask a question" or "to ask a request." It is used when someone makes a request of someone equal. The word translated "ask" in John 16:23b, 24, and 26b ("pray") means "to request something of a superior." This latter word was never used by Jesus in His prayer life because He is equal to the Father. We come as inferiors to God, asking for His blessing; but He came as the very Son of God, equal with the Father.

In John 16:23, what period of time did Jesus mean by "in that day"? I think He was referring to the time after the coming of the Spirit. He promised them in John 16:22 that He would see them again, and He kept His promise. He spent forty days with them after His resurrection, teaching them clearly the truths they needed to know in order to take His place and minister on earth (Acts 1:3ff). "That day" cannot refer to the day of His return for His church, because there is no evidence in Scripture that we shall pray to Him after we get to heaven.

Jesus knew that they wanted to ask Him a question (John 16:19). He assured them that a day would soon come when they would not ask Him questions. Instead, they would pray to the Father and He would meet their needs. This was the promise that they desperately needed to believe: that the Father loved them and would hear their requests and meet their needs. While Jesus was on earth, He met all the needs of His disciples. Now He would return to the Father, but the Father would meet their needs. Here is the wonderful promise and privilege of prayer.

Our Lord had mentioned prayer many times in His ministry, and He had set the example for prayer in His own life. He was indeed a man of prayer. In His Upper Room message, Jesus emphasized prayer (John 14:12–14; 15:7, 16; 16:23–26). He made it clear that believing prayer is one of the secrets of a fruitful Christian life.

In John 16:25–27, Jesus explained that there would be a new situation because of His resurrection and ascension, and because of the coming of the Holy Spirit. He would no longer speak to them in terms that demanded spiritual insight for their understanding. He would speak to them plainly and reveal the Father to them. There in the Upper Room, He had used a number of symbolic images to get His message across: the washing of their feet, the “Father’s house,” the vine and branches, and the birth of a baby. In the days that followed, these images would become clearer to the disciples as they would be taught by the Spirit of God.

The purpose of Bible study is not simply to understand profound truths, but to get to know the Father better. “I will show you plainly of the Father” (John 16:25). If our reading and Bible study falls short of this, it does more harm than good.

There would be not only a new situation in teaching, but also a new situation in their praying. He had already intimated this in John 16:23. Jesus would return to heaven to be with the Father, and there He would minister as our High Priest, making intercession for us (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). He would also minister as our Advocate (1 John 2:1). As our High Priest, Jesus gives us grace to keep us from sinning. As our Advocate, He restores us when we confess our sins. His ministry in heaven makes possible our ministry of witness on earth, through the power of the Spirit.

When you read the Book of Acts, you discover that the early church depended on prayer. They believed the promises of God and asked God for what they needed. It would do all of God’s people good if they reviewed regularly what Jesus taught about prayer in this Upper Room Discourse. There is indeed joy in praying and in receiving answers to prayer. There is joy in meeting the conditions Jesus has laid down for successful praying. I think it was George Müller who said that true prayer was not overcoming God’s reluctance, but overcoming God’s willingness.

There is joy in prayer, and there is joy in realizing the principle of *transformation*. Jesus shared a third kind of joy, the joy of sharing His victory over the world.

There Is a Position to Claim (John 16:29–33)

In John 16:29–30, the disciples suddenly moved out of their spiritual stupor and made a tremendous affirmation of faith. First, they claimed to understand what He had been teaching them, though this claim was probably presumptuous, as their subsequent actions proved. They seemed unable to grasp the meaning of His promised resurrection. They were bewildered even after His resurrection as to the future of Israel

(Acts 1:6ff). I am not criticizing them, because we today have just as many blind spots when it comes to understanding His Word. All I am suggesting is that their affirmation was a bit presumptuous.

They not only affirmed their understanding, but they also affirmed their faith and assurance. "Now we are sure ... by this we believe." It was quite a statement of faith, and I believe the Lord accepted it. In His prayer recorded in the next chapter, Jesus told the Father about His disciples and reported on their spiritual condition (John 17:6–8). Certainly He knew their weaknesses, but He was quick to approve their growing evidences of faith and assurance.

But it is possible to have faith, understanding, and assurance *and still fail the Lord*. Unless we practice that faith, apply that understanding, and rest on that assurance, we will fail when the time of testing comes. That is what happened to the disciples, and Jesus warned them that it would happen.

He had already warned Peter that he would deny Him, but now He warned the entire band of disciples that they would all forsake Him. John does not quote the Old Testament prophecy (Zech. 13:7); it is quoted in Matthew 26:31. This statement from the Lord should have been a warning to Peter not to follow Jesus when He was arrested. "Let these go their way!" was our Lord's word in the Garden (John 18:8). He knew that it was not safe for them to tarry.

Jesus has promised never to leave us alone (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5); yet His own disciples left Him alone. Peter, James, and John went into the Garden with Him, but then fell asleep. Jesus knew that the Father would be with Him. "I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent Me" (John 8:16). "And He that sent Me is with Me. The Father hath not left Me alone" (John 8:29). What an encouragement it was to the Son to know that He was doing the Father's will and that He could depend on the Father's help.

At one point, however, Jesus did feel the absence of the Father: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46; Ps. 22:1) When He was made sin for us, He was separated from the Father. He was alone that we might never be alone. He was forsaken that we might never be forsaken.

John 16:33 is the summary and climax of the Upper Room message. Why did He give this message? So that the disciples might have peace in a world of tribulation. Note the contrast between "in Me" and "in the world." In Christ there is peace; in the world there is tribulation. This is the position we need to claim: we are *in Christ*, and therefore we can overcome the world and all of its hatred.

George Morrison defined peace as "the possession of adequate resources." In Jesus Christ, we have all the resources that we need. But peace depends also on appropriate relationships, because spiritual resources depend on spiritual relationships. "In Me" is the key. In ourselves, we have nothing; but "in Christ" we have all that we need.

Every believer is either *overcome* or an *overcomer*. "And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). The world wants to overcome us; this is why Satan uses the world to persecute and pressure believers. The world wants us to conform; it does not want us to be different. When we yield ourselves to Christ and trust Him, He enables us to be overcomers. We must claim our spiritual position in Christ and believe Him for victory.

“Be of good cheer!” is one of our Lord’s repeated statements of encouragement. Literally it means, “Cheer up!” There is the “good cheer” of His pardon (Matt. 9:1–8), His power (Matt. 9:18–22), and His presence (Matt. 14:22–27). Here in John 16:33, He announces the “good cheer” of His victory over the world. We are overcomers because He has first overcome for us.

As we review this section, we can see how these three explanations our Lord gave all fit together. He revealed a wonderful principle—God transforms sorrow into joy. But this principle will not work in our lives unless we believe His promise and pray. God has ordained that His work is accomplished through believing prayer. But we will not be able to pray effectively if we do not claim our position as conquerors in Jesus Christ.

But John 16:33 is also a preface to His great High Priestly Prayer. He had taught them the Word; now He would pray for them. The Word and prayer must always go together (Acts 6:4). He used the word *world* nineteen times in this prayer, for in it He shows us how to overcome the world. He Himself was facing the hatred of the world *and the devil*, yet He would be able to endure the suffering and win the victory.

There is joy when we permit God to transform sorrow into joy. There is joy when God answers prayer. There is joy when we overcome the world.

Let there be joy!

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE PRAYER OF THE OVERCOMER

John 17

Most scholars who have sought to harmonize the accounts in the four Gospels have the Lord Jesus praying the prayer of John 17 in the Upper Room after He had finished His instructions to the disciples. Then He and the disciples sang the traditional Passover psalms, left the Upper Room, and headed for the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus had been accustomed to meet with them and pray (see Matthew 26:30–46 and Mark 14:26–42).

Whether He prayed it in the Upper Room or en route to the Garden, this much is sure: it is the greatest prayer ever prayed on earth and the greatest prayer recorded anywhere in Scripture. John 17 is certainly the “holy of holies” of the Gospel record, and we must approach this chapter in a spirit of humility and worship. To think that we are privileged to listen in as God the Son converses with His Father just as He is about to give His life as a ransom for sinners!

No matter what events occurred later that evening, this prayer makes it clear that Jesus was and is the Overcomer. He was not a “victim”; He was and is the Victor! “Be of good cheer,” He had encouraged His disciples; “I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). The word *world* is used nineteen times in this prayer, so it is easy to see the

connection between the prayer and John 16:33. If you and I will understand and apply the truths revealed in this profound prayer, it will enable us to be overcomers too.

The progression of thought in this prayer is not difficult to discover. Jesus first prayed for Himself and told the Father that His work on earth had been finished (John 17:1–5). Then He prayed for His disciples, that the Father would *keep them* and *sanctify them* (John 17:6–19). He closed His prayer by praying for you and me and the whole church, that we might be unified in Him and one day share His glory (John 17:20–26).

Why did Jesus pray this prayer? Certainly He was preparing Himself for the sufferings that lay ahead. As He contemplated the glory that the Father promised Him, He would receive new strength for His sacrifice (Heb. 12:1–3). But He also had His disciples in mind (John 17:13). What an encouragement this prayer should have been to them! He prayed about their security, their joy, their unity, and their future glory! He also prayed it for us today, so that we would know all that He has done for us and given to us, and all that He will do for us when we get to heaven.

In this prayer, our Lord declares four wonderful privileges we have as His children, privileges that help to make us overcomers.

We Share His Life (John 17:1–5)

Our Lord began this prayer by praying for Himself, but in praying for Himself, He was also praying for us. “A prayer for self is not by any means necessarily a selfish prayer,” wrote Dr. R.A. Torrey, and an examination of Bible prayers shows that this is true. Our Lord’s burden was the glory of God, and this glory would be realized in His finished work on the cross. The servant of God has every right to ask his Father for the help needed to glorify His name. “Hallowed be Thy name” is the first petition in the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6:9), and it is the first emphasis in this prayer.

“Father, the hour is come,” reminds us of the many times in John’s Gospel when “the hour” is mentioned, beginning at John 2:4. Jesus had lived on a “divine timetable” while on earth and He knew He was in the will of the Father. “My times are in Thy hand” (Ps. 31:15).

The important word *glory* is used five times in these verses, and we must carefully distinguish the various “glories” that Jesus mentions. In John 17:5, He referred to His preincarnate glory with the Father, the glory that He laid aside when He came to earth to be born, to serve, to suffer, and to die. In John 17:4, He reported to the Father that His life and ministry on earth had glorified Him, because He (Jesus) had finished the work the Father gave Him to do. In John 17:1 and 5, our Lord asked that His preincarnate glory be given to Him again, so that the Son might glorify the Father in His return to heaven.

The word *glory* is used eight times in this prayer, so it is an important theme. He glorified the Father in His miracles (John 2:11; 11:40), to be sure; but He brought the greatest glory to the Father through His sufferings and death (see John 12:23–25; 13:31–32). From the human point of view, Calvary was a revolting display of man’s sin; but from the divine point of view, the cross revealed and magnified the grace and glory of God. Jesus anticipated His return to heaven when He said, “I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do” (John 17:4). This “work” included His messages and

miracles on earth (John 5:17–19), the training of the disciples for future service, and most of all, His sacrifice on the cross (Heb. 9:24–28; 10:11–18).

It is on the basis of this “finished work” that we as believers have the gift of eternal life (John 17:2–3). The word *give* is used in one form or another in this prayer at least seventeen times. Seven times Jesus states that believers are the Father’s gift to His Son (John 17:2, 6, 9, 11–12, 24). We are accustomed to thinking of Jesus as the Father’s love gift to us (John 3:16), but the Lord affirms that believers are the Father’s “love gift” to His beloved Son!

“Eternal [everlasting] life” is an important theme in John’s Gospel; it is mentioned at least seventeen times. Eternal life is God’s free gift to those who believe on His Son (John 3:15–16, 36; 6:47; 10:28). The Father gave His Son the authority to give eternal life to those whom the Father gave to the Son. From the human viewpoint, we receive the gift of eternal life when we believe on Jesus Christ. But from the divine viewpoint, we have already been given to the Son in divine election. This is a mystery that the human mind cannot fully understand or explain; we must accept it by faith.

What is “eternal life”? It is knowing God personally. Not just knowing *about* Him, but having a personal relationship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ. We cannot know the Father apart from the Son (John 14:6–11). It is not enough simply to “believe in God”; this will never save a lost soul from eternal hell. “The devils [demons] also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19). Our Lord’s debate with the Jewish leaders (John 8:12ff) makes it clear that people may be devoutly religious and still not know God. Eternal life is not something we earn by character or conduct; it is a gift we receive by admitting we are sinners, repenting, and believing on Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone.

The Father answered His Son’s request and gave Him the glory. There is in heaven today a glorified Man, the God-Man, Jesus Christ! Because He has been glorified in heaven, sinners can be saved on earth. Anyone who trusts Jesus Christ will receive the gift of eternal life.

Because we share His life, we are overcomers; for we also share His victory! “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). When you were born the first time, you were born “in Adam” and were a loser. When you are born again through faith in Christ, you are born a winner!

Satan has tried to obscure the precious truth of the finished work of Jesus Christ, because he knows it is a basis for spiritual victory. “And they overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 12:11). Don’t let Satan rob you of your overcoming power through Christ’s finished work.

We Know His Name (John 17:6–12)

Christ has given His own eternal life (John 17:2), but He has also given them the revelation of the Father’s name (John 17:6). The Old Testament Jew knew his God as “Jehovah,” the great I AM (Ex. 3:11–14). Jesus took this sacred name “I AM” and made it meaningful to His disciples: “I am the Bread of Life” (John 6:35); “I am the Light of the world” (John 8:12); “I am the Good Shepherd” (John 10:11); etc. In other words, Jesus

revealed the Father's gracious name by showing His disciples that He was everything they needed.

But the Father's name includes much more than this, for Jesus also taught His disciples that God—the great I AM—was their Heavenly Father. The word *Father* is used 53 times in John 13–17, and 122 times in John's Gospel! In His messages to the Jews, Jesus made it clear that the Father sent Him, that He was equal to the Father, and that His words and works came from the Father. It was a clear claim to Deity, but they refused to believe.

In the Bible, “name” refers to “nature,” because names so often were given to reveal something special about the nature of the person bearing the name. Jacob was a schemer, and his name comes from a Hebrew root that means “to take by the heel,” i.e., to trip up, to deceive (Gen. 25:26). The name *Isaac* means “laughter” (Gen. 21:6) because he brought joy to Abraham and Sarah. Even the name Jesus reveals that He is the Saviour (Matt. 1:21).

“I have manifested Thy name” means “I have revealed the nature of God.” One of the ministries of the Son was to declare the Father (John 1:18). The Greek word translated “declared” means, “to unfold, to lead, to show the way.” Jesus did not instantly reveal the Father in a blaze of blinding glory, because His disciples could not have endured that kind of experience. Gradually, by His words and His deeds, He revealed to them the nature of God, as they were able to bear it (John 16:12).

The emphasis in this section is on the safety of the believer; God keeps His own (John 17:11–12). Our safety depends on the nature of God, not our own character or conduct. When He was on earth, Jesus kept His disciples and they could depend on Him. “I kept them in Thy name” (John 17:12). If the limited Saviour, in a human body, could keep His own while He was on earth, should He not be able to keep them now that He is glorified in heaven? He and the Father, together with the Holy Spirit, are surely able to guard and secure God's people!

Furthermore, God's people are the Father's gift to His Son. Would the Father present His Son with a gift that would not last? The disciples had belonged to the Father by creation and by covenant (they were Jews), but now they belonged to the Son. How precious we are in His sight! How He watches over us and even now prays for us! Whenever you feel as though the Lord has forgotten you, or that His love seems far away, read Romans 8:28–39—and rejoice!

Our security rests in another fact: we are here to glorify Him (John 17:10). With all of their failures and faults, the disciples still receive this word of commendation: “I am glorified in them.” Would it bring glory to God if one of His own, who trusted in the Saviour, did not make it to heaven? Certainly not! This was Moses' argument when the nation of Israel sinned: “Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, ‘For mischief did He bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth?’ ” (Ex. 32:12) Certainly God knows all things, so why save them at all if He knows they will fail along the way? Whatever God starts, He finishes (Phil. 1:6).

God has provided the divine resources for us to glorify Him and be faithful. We have His Word (John 17:7–8), and His Word reveals to us all that we have in Jesus Christ. The Word gives us faith and assurance. We have the Son of God interceding for us (John 17:9; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 4:14–16). Since the Father always answers the prayers of His Son (John 11:41–42), this intercessory ministry helps to keep us safe and secure.

We also have the fellowship of the church: “that they may be one, as we are” (John 17:11). The New Testament knows nothing of isolated believers; wherever you find saints, you find them in fellowship. Why? Because God's people need each other. Jesus opened His Upper Room message by washing the disciples' feet and teaching them to minister to one another. In the hours that would follow, these men (including confident Peter!) would discover how weak they were and how much they needed each other's encouragement.

The believer, then, is secure in Christ for many reasons: the very nature of God, the nature of salvation, the glory of God, and the intercessory ministry of Christ. But what about Judas? Was he secure? How did he fall? Why did Jesus not keep him safe? For the simple reason that *Judas was never one of Christ's own*. Jesus faithfully kept all that the Father gave to Him, but Judas had never been given to Him by the Father. Judas was not a believer (John 6:64–71); he had never been cleansed (John 13:11); he had not been among the chosen (John 13:18); he had never been given to Christ (John 18:8–9).

No, Judas is not an example of a believer who “lost his salvation.” He is an example of an unbeliever who *pretended to have salvation* but was finally exposed as a fraud. Jesus keeps all whom the Father gives to Him (John 10:26–30).

We are overcomers because we share His life. There is a third privilege that enables us to overcome.

We Have His Word (John 17:13–19)

“I have given them Thy Word” (John 17:14, and see v. 8). The Word of God is the gift of God to us. The Father gave the words to His Son (John 17:8), and the Son gave them to His disciples who, in turn, have passed them along to us as they were inspired by the Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21). The Word is divine in origin, a precious gift from heaven. We must never take God's Word for granted, for those who are overcomers know the Word and how to use it in daily life.

How does the Word of God enable us to overcome the world? To begin with, *it gives us joy* (John 17:13); and this inward joy gives us the strength to overcome (Neh. 8:10). We commonly think of Jesus Christ as “a man of sorrows” (Isa. 53:3), and indeed He was; but He was also a person of deep abiding joy. John 17:13 is the very heart of this prayer, *and its theme is joy!*

Jesus had referred to His joy already (John 15:11) and had explained that joy comes by transformation and not substitution (John 16:20–22). Joy also comes from answered prayer (John 16:23–24). Now He made it clear that joy comes from the Word also. The believer does not find his joy in the world but in the Word. Like John the Baptist, we should rejoice greatly when we hear the Bridegroom's voice! (John 3:29)

We must never picture Jesus going around with a long face and a melancholy disposition. He was a man of joy and He revealed that joy to others. His joy was not the fleeting levity of a sinful world but the abiding enjoyment of the Father and the Word. He did not depend on outward circumstances but on inward spiritual resources that were hidden from the world. This is the kind of joy He wants us to have, and we can have it through His Word. “Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart” (Jer.

15:16). "I have rejoiced in the way of Thy testimonies, as much as in all riches" (Ps. 119:14). "I rejoice at Thy word, as one that findeth great spoil" (Ps. 119:162).

The Word not only imparts the joy of the Lord, but it also *assures us of His love* (John 17:14). The world hates us, but we are able to confront this hatred with God's own love, a love imparted to us by the Spirit through the Word. The world hates us because we do not belong to its system (John 15:18–19) and will not be conformed to its practices and standards (Rom. 12:2). The Word reveals to us what the world is really like; the Word exposes the world's deceptions and dangerous devices.

The world competes for the Father's love (1 John 2:15–17), but the Word of God enables us to enjoy the Father's love. One of the first steps toward a worldly life is the neglect of the Word of God. D.L. Moody wrote in the front of his Bible, "This book will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from this book." Just as the pillar of fire was darkness to the Egyptians but light to Israel, so God's Word is our light in this dark world, but the world cannot understand the things of God (Ex. 14:20; 1 Cor. 2:12–16).

The Word of God not only brings us God's joy and love, but it also imparts God's power for holy living (John 17:15–17). The burden of our Lord's prayer in John 17:6–12 was *security*, but here it is *sanctity*, practical holy living to the glory of God. We are *in* the world but not *of* the world, and we must not live *like* the world. Sometimes we think it would be easier if we were "out of the world," but this is not true. Wherever we go, we take our own sinful self with us, and the powers of darkness will follow us. I have met people who have gone into "spiritual isolation" in order to become more holy, only to discover that it does not always work.

True sanctification (being set apart for God) comes through the ministry of the Word of God. "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3). When you were saved, you were set apart for God. As you grow in your faith, you are more and more experiencing sanctification. You love sin less and you love God more. You want to serve Him and be a blessing to others. All of this comes through the Word.

God's truth has been given to us in three "editions": His Word is truth (John 17:17); His Son is the truth (John 14:6); and His Spirit is the truth (1 John 5:6). We need all three if we are to experience true sanctification, a sanctification that touches every part of our inner person. With the mind, we *learn* God's truth through the Word. With the heart, we *love* God's truth, His Son. With the will, we yield to the Spirit and *live* God's truth day by day. It takes all three for a balanced experience of sanctification.

It is not enough merely to study the Bible and learn a great deal of doctrinal truth. We must also love Jesus Christ more as we learn all that He is and all He has done for us. Learning and loving should lead to living, allowing the Spirit of God to enable us to obey His Word. This is how we glorify Him in this present evil world.

The Word gives us joy, love, and power to live a holy life. It also gives us what we need to serve Him as witnesses in this world (John 17:18–19). Sanctification is not for the purpose of selfish enjoyment or boasting; it is so that we might represent Christ in this world and win others to Him. Jesus set Himself apart for us, and now He has set us apart for Him. The Father sent Him into the world, and now He sends us into the world. We are people "under orders" and we had better obey! Jesus is now "set apart" in heaven, praying for us, that our witness will bear fruit as many repent of their sins and turn to the Lord.

How can we be overcome by the world when we have the Word of God to enlighten us, enable us, and encourage us?

We Share His Glory (John 17:20–26)

Here our Lord focuses our attention on the future. He begins to pray for us who live today, for the whole church throughout all ages. He has already prayed about security and sanctity; now the burden of His prayer is *unity*. He is concerned that His people experience a spiritual unity that is like the oneness of the Father and the Son. Christians may belong to different fellowships, but they all belong to the Lord and to each other.

The disciples had often exhibited a spirit of selfishness, competition, and disunity; and this must have broken the Saviour's heart. I wonder how He feels when He sees the condition of the church today! The Puritan preacher Thomas Brooks wrote: "Discord and division become no Christian. For wolves to worry the lambs is no wonder, but for one lamb to worry another, this is unnatural and monstrous."

What is the basis for true Christian unity? The person and work of Jesus Christ and His glory (John 17:2–5). He has already given His glory to us, and He promises that we will further experience that glory when we get to heaven! All true believers have God's glory within, no matter what they may look like on the outside. Christian harmony is not based on the externals of the flesh but the internals and eternal of the Spirit in the inner person. We must look beyond the elements of our first birth—race, color, abilities, etc.—and build our fellowship on the essentials of our new birth.

We already possess His glory within (John 17:22, and note Rom. 8:29), and one day we shall behold His glory in heaven (John 17:24). As we grow in the Lord, the glory within begins to grow and to reveal itself in what we say and do and the way we say and do it. People do not see us and glorify us; they see the Lord and glorify Him (Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 6:19–20).

One of the things that most impresses the world is the way Christians love each other and live together in harmony. It is this witness that our Lord wants in the world "that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me" (John 17:21). The lost world cannot see God, but they can see Christians; and what they see in us is what they will believe about God. If they see love and unity, they will believe that God is love. If they see hatred and division, they will reject the message of the Gospel.

Jesus has assured us that some will believe because of our witness (John 17:20), but we must make sure that our witness is true and loving. Some Christians are prosecuting attorneys and judges instead of faithful witnesses, and this only turns lost sinners away from the Saviour.

There is every reason why believers should love one another and live in unity. We trust the same Saviour and share the same glory. We will one day enjoy the same heaven! We belong to the same Father and seek to do the same work, witnessing to a lost world that Jesus Christ alone saves from sin. We believe the same truth, even though we may have different views of minor doctrinal matters; and we follow the same example that Jesus set for His people, to live a holy life. Yes, believers do have their differences; but we have much more in common, and this should encourage us to love one another and promote true spiritual unity.

I have often used John 17:24 as a text for funeral meditations. How do we know that Christians go to heaven? Because of the price that Jesus paid (1 Thes. 5:9–10), and the promise that Jesus made (John 14:1–6), and the prayer that Jesus prayed (John 17:24). The Father always answers His Son's prayers, so we know that believers who die do go to heaven to behold the glory of God.

In John 17:25–26, there are no petitions. Jesus simply reported to His Father about the ministry in the world, and He made several declarations that are important to us. He declared that the world does not know the Father, but that we believers know Him because the Son has revealed the Father to us. The world certainly has many opportunities to get to know the Father, but it prefers to go on in blindness and hardness of heart. Our task as Christians is to bear witness to the lost world and share God's saving message.

He also declares the importance of truth and love in the church. Believers know God's name (nature) and even share in that divine nature. Jesus makes it clear that *truth* and *love* must go together (see Eph. 4:15). It has well been said that truth without love is brutality, but love without truth is hypocrisy. The mind grows by taking in truth, but the heart grows by giving out in love. Knowledge alone can lead to pride (1 Cor. 8:1), and love alone can lead to wrong decisions (see Phil. 1:9–10). Christian love must not be blind!

As you review this prayer, you see the spiritual priorities that were in the Saviour's heart: the glory of God; the sanctity of God's people; the unity of the church; the ministry of sharing the Gospel with a lost world. We today would be wise to focus on these same priorities.

One day, each of us will have to give an account of his or her ministry. It is a solemn thought that we shall stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and give our "final report."

I trust that we will be able to say, "I have glorified Thee on the earth; I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4).

CHAPTER NINETEEN

GUILT AND GRACE IN THE GARDEN

John 18:1–27

The private ministry of our Lord with His disciples has now ended, and the public drama of redemption is about to begin. Man will do his worst, and God will respond with His very best. "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20).

Perhaps the best way to see the truths in John 18:1–27, and grasp the lessons they convey, is to pay attention to the symbolism that is involved. John's Gospel is saturated

with symbols, some more obvious than others; and these symbols convey some important spiritual truths. There are five such symbols in this section.

The Garden—Obedience (John 18:1)

The Kidron Valley is located east of Jerusalem, between the city wall and the Mount of Olives; and the Garden of Gethsemane is on the western slope of Olivet. Jesus often went to this Garden with His disciples, no doubt to rest, meditate, and pray (Luke 22:39). Jerusalem was filled with pilgrims attending the Passover, and Jesus would want to get away from the crowded city to a private place. He knew that Judas would come for Him there, and He was ready.

Human history began in a Garden (Gen. 2:8ff), and the first sin of man was committed in that Garden. The first Adam disobeyed God and was cast out of the Garden, but the Last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45) was obedient as He went into the Garden of Gethsemane. In a Garden, the first Adam brought sin and death to mankind; but Jesus, by His obedience, brought righteousness and life to all who will trust Him. He was “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8).

History will one day end in another garden, the heavenly city that John describes in Revelation 21 and 22. In that garden, there will be no more death and no more curse. The river of the water of life will flow ceaselessly and the tree of life will produce bountiful fruit. Eden was the Garden of disobedience and sin; Gethsemane was the Garden of obedience and submission; and heaven shall be the eternal garden of delight and satisfaction, to the glory of God.

The name *Gethsemane* means “oil press.” Even today there are ancient olive trees in Gethsemane, though certainly not the ones that were there in Jesus’ day. The olives would be picked and put into the press for their oil. What a picture of suffering! So our Lord would go through the “oil press” and the “winepress” (Isa. 63:3) and taste our judgment for us.

The Brook Kidron is also significant. The name means “dusky, gloomy,” referring to the dark waters that were often stained by the blood from the temple sacrifices. Our Lord and His disciples were about to go through “dark waters,” and Jesus would experience the “waves and billows” of God’s wrath (Ps. 42:7; also note Jonah 2:3).

The Kidron had special historical significance, for King David crossed the Kidron when he was rejected by his nation and betrayed by his own son, Absalom (2 Sam. 15; also note John 18:23). Jesus had been rejected by His people and at that very moment was being betrayed by one of His own disciples! It is interesting that David’s treacherous counselor Ahithophel hanged himself (2 Sam. 17:23), and David’s treacherous son Absalom was caught in a tree and killed while hanging there (2 Sam. 18:9–17). Judas, of course, went out and hanged himself (Matt. 27:3–10).

Jesus fully knew what lay before Him, yet He went to the Garden in obedience to the Father’s will. He left eight of the men near the entrance, and took Peter, James, and John and went to another part of the Garden to pray (Matt. 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42). His human soul longed for the kind of encouragement and companionship they could give Him at this critical hour; but, alas, they went to sleep! It was easy for the men to boast about their devotion to Christ, but when the test came, they failed miserably. Before we judge them too severely, however, we had better examine our own hearts.

The Kiss—Treachery (John 18:2–9)

Judas had lived with the Lord Jesus for perhaps three years, and had listened to Him teach; yet he knew very little about Him. The traitor actually brought a company of temple guards, armed with swords and clubs! (Matt. 26:55) Just think of the privileges Judas despised and the opportunities he wasted! The word *band* in John 18:3 could be translated “cohort.” A Roman cohort was a tenth of a legion, and this would be 600 men! It is not likely that Judas brought that many to the Garden, but apparently a full cohort was made available to him had he needed it. Did he not realize that the Lamb of God would meekly submit and that there would be no need to battle?

Jesus was in full control; He knew what would happen (see John 13:1, 3, 11; 16:19). Judas expected some kind of deception, so he arranged to identify Jesus by kissing Him (Matt. 26:48–49). But Jesus shocked both Judas and the arresting officers by boldly presenting Himself to them. He had nothing to fear and nothing to hide; He would *willingly* lay down His life for His sheep. Furthermore, by surrendering to the officers, Jesus helped to protect His disciples. He kept them safe not only spiritually (John 17:11–12) but also physically.

Why did the arresting soldiers draw back and fall to the ground when Jesus told them, “I am He”? The Jews present would be struck by His “I AM” statement, an affirmation of Deity. The Romans, who were in the majority, would be struck by His bearing, for it was obvious that He was in command. It was an emotionally charged situation, and we do not know what Judas had told them about Jesus to help prepare them for this confrontation. The Jewish leaders had tried to have Jesus arrested before and always without success. The band was prepared for conflict, and when they met with surrender and calm, they were overwhelmed.

Perhaps it was a manifestation of divine power, or an exhibition of the majesty of Jesus Christ. “When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell” (Ps. 27:2).

Judas' kiss, which was given repeatedly to the Lord, was certainly one of the basest acts of treachery recorded anywhere in sacred or secular history. In that day, a kiss was a sign of affection and devotion. Members of the family kissed each other in meeting and in parting, but Judas was not a member of God's family. Disciples greeted a rabbi by kissing him; it was a sign of devotion and obedience. But Judas was not truly a disciple of Jesus Christ, though he belonged to the disciple band. In the Garden, Judas stood with the enemy, not with Jesus' friends!

When people today pretend to know and love the Lord, they are committing the sin of Judas. It is bad enough to betray Christ, but to do it with *a kiss*, a sign of affection, is the basest treachery of all. It was born in the pit of hell.

The Sword—Rebellion (John 18:10)

All of the disciples had courageously affirmed their devotion to Christ (Matt. 26:35), and Peter decided to prove it; so he quickly drew out a small sword and started to fight! He certainly misunderstood what Jesus had said about swords earlier that evening (Luke 22:35–38). He had warned them that from now on the situation would change, and men would treat them as transgressors. He was not suggesting that they use material

swords to fight spiritual battles, but that they get a new mind-set and expect opposition and even danger. He had provided for them and protected them while He was with them on earth, but now He was returning to the Father. They would have to depend on the Holy Spirit and exercise wisdom. Peter apparently took His words literally and thought he was supposed to declare war!

Peter's sword symbolizes rebellion against the will of God. Peter should have known that Jesus would be arrested and that He would willingly surrender to His enemies (Matt. 16:21ff; 17:22–23; 20:17–19). Peter made every mistake possible! He fought the wrong enemy, used the wrong weapon, had the wrong motive, and accomplished the wrong result! He was openly resisting the will of God and hindering the work that Jesus came to accomplish! While we admire his courage and sincerity, it was certainly a demonstration of zeal without knowledge.

Why did Peter fail so miserably? For one thing, he had argued with the Lord when Jesus warned him that he would deny his Master that very night. Peter had slept when he should have been praying, and he talked when he should have been listening. He imitated the very enemies who came to arrest Jesus, for they too were armed with swords. Peter would discover that the sword of the Spirit is the weapon God's servants use in fighting their spiritual battles (Heb. 4:12; Eph. 6:17). He would use that sword at Pentecost and "slay" 3,000 souls!

Jesus did not need Peter's protection. He could have summoned legions of angels had He wanted to be delivered (Matt. 26:52–54). Luke tells us that Jesus healed Malchus' ear (Luke 22:51), which was certainly an act of grace on His part. It was gracious from Peter's point of view; for had He not healed Malchus, Peter might have been arrested and crucified! Peter was acting like one of the Jewish "zealots" and not like a disciple of Jesus Christ.

But it was also an act of grace toward Malchus. After all, he was only a servant; and why worry about what happens to a servant? He was also an enemy, standing with the men who came to arrest Jesus; so he ought to suffer! Is it possible that Malchus had actually laid hold of Jesus? We do not know; but if he did, he laid hands on the holy Son of God. However, our Lord did not judge Malchus, though he was a sinner deserving the wrath of God. Instead, He healed him! It was our Lord's last public miracle before the cross.

Keep in mind that this miracle reveals His grace toward us. If Jesus had the power to stun an armed mob and heal a severed ear, He could have saved Himself from arrest, trial, and death. *But He willingly submitted!* And He did it for us!

It is a sad thing when well-meaning but ignorant Christians take up the sword to "defend" the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter hurt Malchus, something no believer should do. Peter hurt the testimony of Christ and gave the false impression that His disciples hate their enemies and try to destroy them. (Note our Lord's reply to Pilate in John 18:36.)

The Cup—Submission (John 18:11–14)

Peter had a sword in his hand, but our Lord had a cup in His hand. Peter was resisting God's will but the Saviour was accepting God's will. Earlier, Jesus had prayed, "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39). The cup represented the suffering He would endure and the

separation from the Father that He would experience on the cross. He prayed this prayer three times, evidence that His whole being was sensitive to the price He would pay for our salvation. His holy soul must have been stirred to the depths when He contemplated being made sin!

The drinking of a cup is often used in Scripture to illustrate experiencing suffering and sorrow. When Babylon captured Jerusalem, the city had “drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling” (Isa. 51:17). Jeremiah pictured God’s wrath against the nations as the pouring out of a cup (Jer. 25:15–28). There is also a cup of consolation (Jer. 16:7) and the overflowing cup of joy (Ps. 23:5).

Jesus had compared His own sufferings to the drinking of a cup and the experiencing of a baptism (Matt. 20:22–23). When He instituted the supper, He compared the cup to His blood, shed for the remission of sins (Matt. 26:27–28). The image was a familiar one to His disciples, and it is not an unfamiliar image today. To “drink the cup” means to go through with a difficult experience; and “not my cup of tea” means saying no to a certain course of action. The fact that some trophies are designed like cups suggests that winners have been through demanding experiences and had to “swallow a lot.”

Jesus was able to accept the cup because it was mixed by the Father and given to Him from the Father’s hand. He did not resist the Father’s will, because He came to do the Father’s will and finish the work the Father gave Him to do. “I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart” (Ps. 40:8). Since the Father had mixed and measured the contents of the cup, Jesus knew He had nothing to fear.

This is a good lesson to us: we need never fear the cups that the Father hands to us. To begin with, our Saviour has already drunk the cup before us, and we are only following in His steps. We need never fear what is in the cup because the Father has prepared it for us in love. If we ask for bread, He will never give us a stone; and the cup He prepares will never contain anything that will harm us. We may suffer pain and heartbreak, but He will eventually transform that suffering into glory.

Jesus deliberately gave Himself to His enemies. They bound Him and led Him to the house of Annas, which was not too far away. Annas had served as high priest until he was deposed by the Romans; now his son-in-law Caiaphas was the high priest. God had ordained that one man should serve as high priest for a lifetime, so it is easy to see that the Jewish religious establishment was in sad condition. It is generally believed that the high priest’s family was in charge of the temple “business,” and the fact that Jesus twice cleansed the temple must have aroused their anger against Him.

The “trial” before Annas was more like an informal hearing. It was illegal and it was brutal. Imagine a guard being allowed to strike a prisoner! Imagine a man not holding an office interrogating a prisoner!

Annas, of course, was looking for some kind of evidence on which to base an accusation that would lead to a verdict of capital punishment. What doctrine was Jesus teaching? Was it subversive? Jesus told him to ask the people who listened to Him, because He had said nothing secretly. In fact, Annas himself could have come and listened!

What about our Lord’s disciples? Were they organized to overthrow the government? Did not one of them use his sword in the Garden? Jesus was careful to

say nothing about His disciples. Think of it: while Peter was in the courtyard denying his Lord, Jesus was on trial protecting Peter!

Jewish law demanded that witnesses be called before a prisoner was questioned. Annas defied this law, and eventually the council hired *false* witnesses. Jesus knew His rights (“bear witness of the evil”—John 18:23), but He did not insist on them. He is an example to us when we suffer wrongfully (1 Peter 2:19–25; 4:12–19).

The Fire—Denial (John 18:15–27)

Jesus had predicted that Peter would deny Him three times (Matt. 26:34; John 13:38), but that he would be restored to fellowship and service (Luke 22:32). Peter followed the crowd when he should have been fleeing (John 18:8; and see Matt. 26:30–32). Had he gone his way, he would never have denied the Lord. While we certainly admire his love and courage, we cannot agree with his actions; for he walked right into temptation. This is what Jesus warned him about in the Garden (Matt. 26:41).

We do not know who the other disciple was who went with Peter into the courtyard of the home of the high priest. It was probably John, though it is difficult to understand how a fisherman could be acquainted with the high priest and his household. Was this “other disciple” possibly Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea? They would certainly have access to this home.

As you watch Peter, you see him gradually moving into the place of temptation and sin; and his actions parallel the description in Psalm 1:1. First, Peter walked “in the counsel of the ungodly” when he followed Jesus and went into the high priest’s courtyard. Peter should have followed the counsel of Jesus and gotten out of there in a hurry! Then, Peter *stood* with the enemy by the fire (John 18:16, 18); and before long, he *sat* with the enemy (Luke 22:55). It was now too late and within a short time, he would deny his Lord three times.

First, a servant girl asked, “Art not thou also one of this Man’s disciples?” The Greek text indicates that she expected a negative answer, and that is what she got! Peter denied Christ by denying that he belonged to the band of disciples.

Peter remained by the fire, so it is no wonder that he was approached again. (That same night, Jesus had been perspiring as He had prayed in the Garden!) Another servant girl asked the same question, again expecting a negative reply. The pronoun *they* in John 18:25 suggests that others in the circle around the fire took up the question and one by one hurled it at Peter.

The third question came from one of Malchus’ relatives! The Greek construction indicates that he expected an *affirmative* answer: “I saw you in the Garden with Jesus, didn’t I? Yes, I did!” After all, this man had gotten a good look at Peter because he was probably standing with Malchus when Jesus was arrested. Some of the bystanders took up the discussion (Matt. 26:73; Mark 14:70) so that Peter may have been surrounded by challengers.

At that point, Peter’s resistance broke down completely. He began to “curse and swear” (Matt. 26:74). This does not mean that Peter let loose a volley of blasphemies, but rather that he put himself under a curse in order to emphasize his statement. He was on trial, so he put himself under an oath to convince his accusers that he was telling the truth.

It was at that point that the cock began to crow (John 18:27) just as Jesus had predicted (Matt. 26:34). There were four "watches": evening (6–9 p.m.), midnight (9–12), cockcrowing (12 midnight to 3 a.m.), and morning (3–6 a.m.) (see Mark 13:35). The crowing of the cock reminded Peter of the Lord's words, and he went out and wept bitterly.

The crowing of the cock was assurance to Peter that Jesus was totally in control of the situation, even though He was bound and being harassed by the authorities. By controlling one bird, Jesus affirmed His sovereignty. According to Genesis 1:26, God gave man authority over the fish, the fowl, and the animals. Peter had seen Jesus exercise authority over the fish (Matt. 17:24–27; Luke 5:1–11) and the animals (Matt. 21:1–11); but now he recognized His authority over the birds.

But the cockcrowing was also an invitation to repentance. "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32). Luke tells us that Jesus turned and looked at Peter (Luke 22:61), and this look of love broke Peter's heart. Peter had been a witness of Christ's sufferings (1 Peter 5:1), and by his own denials he added to those sufferings.

Keep in mind that the crowing of the cock was the announcement of the dawning of a new day! "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Ps. 30:5). It is worthwhile to contrast Peter and Judas. Peter wept over his sins and repented, while Judas admitted his sins but never really repented. Judas experienced remorse, not repentance. When Judas went out from the Upper Room, "it was night" (John 13:30); but when Peter went out to weep bitterly, there was the dawning of a new day. It is the contrast between godly sorrow that leads to true repentance, and the sorrow of the world (regret and remorse) that leads to death (2 Cor. 7:9–10). We will discover that Jesus restored Peter (John 21) and enabled him to serve with great power and blessing.

In the Garden that night, you would find both guilt and grace. Peter was guilty of resisting God's will. Judas was guilty of the basest kind of treachery. The mob was guilty of rejecting the Son of God and treating Him as though He were the lowest kind of criminal.

But Jesus was gracious! Like King David, He crossed the Kidron, fully conscious that Judas was betraying Him. He went into the Garden of Gethsemane surrendered to the Father's will. He healed Malchus' ear. He protected His disciples. He yielded Himself into the hands of sinners that He might suffer and die for us. "Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all!"

What is in your hand today—the sword, or the cup?

CHAPTER TWENTY

"SUFFERED UNDER PONTIUS PILATE"

John 18:28–19:16

Long before the Jewish leaders had Jesus arrested in the Garden, they had determined to kill Him (John 11:47–54). However, the Jewish council did not have the right to execute prisoners; so it was necessary to get the cooperation and approval of Rome. This meant a visit to the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate.

There were three stages in both the Jewish “trial” and the Roman “trial.” After His arrest, Jesus was taken to the home of Annas and there interrogated informally (John 18:12–14, 19–23). Annas hoped to get information that would implicate Jesus as an enemy of the state. He wanted to prove that both His doctrine and His disciples were anti-Roman, for then He would be worthy of death.

Stage two of the Jewish trial took place before Caiaphas and whatever members of the Sanhedrin the high priest could assemble at that hour of the night (Matt. 26:57–68; Mark 14:53–65). When Jesus confessed clearly that He was the Christ, the council found Him guilty of blasphemy and therefore, according to their law, worthy of death. However, it was necessary for the council to meet early the next morning and give their verdict, since it was not considered legal to try capital cases at night. So, stage three of the Jewish trial took place as early as possible, and the leaders condemned Jesus to death (Matt. 27:1; Luke 22:66–71).

The three stages of the Roman trial were: the first appearance before Pilate (John 18:28–38), the appearance before Herod (Luke 23:6–12), and the second appearance before Pilate (John 18:39–19:16; and see Matt. 27:15–26; Mark 15:6–15; and Luke 23:13–25). As you can see, the Apostle John records only the interrogations by Annas and Pilate, and mentions Caiaphas only in passing. He focuses primarily on the Roman trial. By the time he wrote this Gospel, the Jewish nation had been scattered by Rome, Jerusalem had been destroyed, and Roman power was all that really mattered.

Pontius Pilate was in office from a.d. 26–36 and was not greatly liked by the Jews. He could be ruthless when he wanted to be (see Luke 13:1–2), but he also understood the Jewish power structures and knew how to use them. His handling of the trial of Jesus reveals an indecisive man, a weak man, a compromising man. Rome's motto was, “Let justice be done though the heavens fall!” Pilate was not concerned about justice; his only concern was to protect himself, his job, and Rome. Alas, he failed in all three!

As you read John's account, you see Pilate seeking to find some “loophole” that would please both sides. He was afraid of the crowd, but then he grew more and more afraid of the prisoner! At least three times he announced that Jesus was not guilty of any crime (Luke 23:14; John 19:4; Luke 23:22; John 19:6). Yet he refused to release Him!

The Roman “trial,” conducted by Pilate, revolved around four key questions.

“What Is the Accusation?” (John 18:28–32)

As soon as the Sanhedrin had voted to condemn Jesus, the officers took Him to the palace where Pilate was living during the Passover season. It was customary for the Roman governor to be in Jerusalem during Passover in case there were any outbursts of Jewish nationalism. The religious leaders did not hesitate to condemn an innocent man, but they were careful not to be defiled by walking on Gentile ground! It would be tragic to be ceremonially defiled during the seven days of Passover!

It was logical for Pilate to ask for the official accusation. Instead of stating the charges clearly, the Jewish leaders “beat around the bush” and probably made the astute politician suspicious. Luke 23:2 lists three “official charges”: (1) He led the nation astray; (2) He opposed paying tribute to Caesar; and (3) He claimed to be the Jewish Messiah and King.

Pilate was not anxious to get involved in a Jewish court case, especially at Passover; so he tried to evade the issue. After all, if the prisoner was creating problems for the Jews, let the Jews try Him under their own law. Rome had permitted the Jews to retain a certain amount of jurisdiction, especially in matters relating to their religious laws and customs. (See Acts 18:12–16 for another example.)

But had the Jews *alone* judged Jesus and found Him guilty, He would have been killed by stoning; and God had determined that the Son would be crucified (see John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32–33). Jesus was to bear the curse of the law and become a curse for us; and in order to do this, He had to hang on a tree (Deut. 21:22–23; Gal. 3:13). The fact that the Romans allowed the Jews to stone Stephen to death indicates that Rome was lenient with the Sanhedrin on some capital cases (Acts 7:57–60).

When you seriously consider the three accusations against Jesus, you quickly see that they were completely unsupportable. For one thing, He had not “subverted” the nation, either politically or religiously. Of course, He had publicly denounced the Pharisees and their hypocritical religious system, but He was not the first one—or the only one—to do that. Jesus had blessed the nation and brought them new hope. The fact that some of the militant Jews saw in Him a potential King (John 6:15) was not our Lord’s fault, and He fled from all such political demonstrations.

As for opposing paying tribute to Caesar, *He taught just the opposite!* “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s,” He said, “and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matt. 22:21).

He did claim to be King but not in a political sense. Even His own disciples did not fully understand these truths until after His resurrection (Acts 1:1–8). It is no wonder the common people sometimes misunderstood Him (Luke 19:11). Of course, the Jewish religious leaders were groping for any piece of evidence they could find on which they could build a case; and they were even willing to secure false witnesses!

“Are You the King of the Jews?” (John 18:33–38)

The question asking Jesus if He was King of the Jews is recorded by each of the Gospel writers. As Roman governor, Pilate would certainly be interested in the claims of any king. Messianic expectations always ran high at Passover season, and it would be easy for a Jewish pretender to incite the people into a riot or a rebellion against Rome. Pilate no doubt felt himself on safe ground when he asked about Christ’s kingship.

However, he was not prepared for His answer. “It is as you say” (Matt. 27:11, nasb). But then Jesus added a question of His own: “Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?” (John 18:34, nasb) What was our Lord really asking? “What kind of a king do you have in mind? A Roman king or a Jewish king? A political king or a spiritual king?” Jesus was not evading the issue; He was forcing Pilate to clarify the matter *for his own sake*. After all, it was not Jesus that was on trial; it was Pilate!

If Pilate had a Roman king in mind, then Jesus could be considered a rebel. If the governor was thinking about a Jewish kind of king, then political matters could be set aside. It is interesting that Pilate called Jesus "king" at least four times during the trial, and even used that title for the placard he hung on the cross (John 18:39; 19:3, 14–15, 19).

Pilate's reply to Jesus showed what the Romans thought of the Jews: "Am I a Jew?" No doubt there was an obvious note of disdain and sarcasm in his voice. Jesus was not a prisoner because Pilate had arrested him, but because His own nation's leaders had arrested Him! Where there is smoke there must be fire; so Pilate asked, "What have You done?"

Graciously, Jesus consented to explain Himself and His kingdom. Yes, He admitted that He is a King; but His kingdom (reign) does not come from the authority of the world. The Jews were under Roman authority, and Pilate was under the authority of the emperor; but Jesus derived His authority from God. His kingdom is spiritual, in the hearts of His followers; and He does not depend on worldly or fleshly means to advance His cause. If His kingdom were from the world, by now His followers would have assembled an army and fought to release Him.

Jesus did not say that He had no kingdom in this world, or that He would never rule on earth. He does have a kingdom in this world, wherever there are people who have trusted Him and yielded to His sovereignty. One day He shall return and establish a righteous kingdom on earth (Dan. 7:13–28). Pilate's concern was the source of this kingdom: where did Jesus derive His authority?

In John 18:37, Jesus explained who He is and what kind of kingdom belonged to Him. Pilate probably did not grasp the significance of these profound words, but we today can discern some of the meaning Jesus had in mind. He was "born," which indicates His humanity; but He also "came into the world," which indicates His deity. The fact that Jesus came "into the world" means that He had existed before His birth at Bethlehem; and this is an important and repeated truth in John's Gospel (John 1:9–10; 3:17, 19; 9:39; 10:36; 12:46; 16:28; 17:18).

But Jesus not only told Pilate of His origin; He also explained His ministry: to bear witness unto the truth. His was a spiritual kingdom of truth; and He won people to His cause, not through force, but through conviction and persuasion. He spoke the truth of God's Word, and all who were His people would respond to His call (see John 8:47; 10:27). Rome's weapon was the sword; but our Lord's weapon was the truth of God, the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17).

We do not know with what attitude Pilate asked his now-famous question, "What is truth?" In his classic essay "Of Truth," Francis Bacon wrote, " 'What is Truth?' said jesting Pilate; and would not stay for an answer." But we are not certain that Pilate was jesting. Perhaps he was sincere. For centuries, Roman and Greek philosophers had discussed and debated this very question and had come to no settled conclusions. Whether Pilate was sneering or sighing as he asked the question, we do not know; so it would be unwise to pass judgment.

At least he had the courage to face the crowd and declare his verdict: "I find in Him no fault at all." But he did not get the response he desired, for the chief priests and elders only began to accuse Jesus all the more! (see Matt. 27:12–14) Jesus was silent before His accusers (1 Peter 2:21–23) and this silence amazed Pilate. Could this King

not even defend Himself? If He did not speak, how could anyone secure any evidence? Pilate faced a dilemma.

But the chief priests and elders solved his problem when they shouted that Jesus had stirred up the people even in Galilee (Luke 23:5). Galilee! That was Herod's responsibility, so why not send the prisoner to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem for the feast? Between John 18:38 and 39 you have the events recorded in Luke 23:6–12. Pilate's maneuver did not solve his problem, because Herod sent Jesus back! All that it accomplished was the healing of the breach between these two rulers. Pilate still had to deal with Jesus and the Jews.

“Shall I Release the King of the Jews?” (John 18:39–19:7)

The fact that Herod had found nothing worthy of death in Jesus encouraged Pilate to confront the Jewish leaders and seek to release the prisoner. He summoned the chief priests and rulers and told them that he found no guilt in Jesus, that Herod had found no guilt in Jesus, and that the next step would be to punish Jesus and release Him. The Jews had already made it clear that they wanted Jesus to die (John 18:31), but Pilate was feebly trying to do the noble thing.

Hoping to strengthen this suggestion, Pilate offered to bargain with the Jewish leaders. It was a custom at Passover for the governor to release a prisoner and please the Jews; so, why not release Jesus? Or, he could release Barabbas; but why would the Jews want Barabbas set free? After all, he was a robber (John 18:40), a notorious prisoner (Matt. 27:16), an insurrectionist and a murderer (Luke 23:19). Who would want *that* kind of a prisoner turned loose?

Incredible as it seems, the crowd asked for Barabbas! The people were persuaded by the chief priests and elders (Matt. 27:20) whose religious convictions did not motivate them toward justice and equity. National feelings always increased during Passover, and a vote *for* Barabbas was a vote *against* Rome. Even though Jesus had been a popular figure among the people, many of them no doubt were disappointed that He had not led a popular uprising to overthrow Rome. Perhaps they had even hoped that His “triumphal entry” a few days before would be the start of Jewish liberation.

There is no explaining how a mob chooses its heroes. No doubt many of the Jews admired Barabbas for his cunning and courage, and they rejoiced that he was fighting Rome. Had they honestly compared and contrasted the two “candidates,” the people would have had to vote for Jesus Christ. But when a mob is manipulated by crafty leaders, in an atmosphere of patriotic fervor, it loses itself and starts to think with its feelings instead of its brains. Their condemning vote said nothing about the Son of God, but it said a great deal about them.

Never at a loss for an idea, Pilate tried a new approach—sympathy. The crowd had cried “Crucify Him!” (Mark 15:14) but perhaps they would be placated if Jesus were scourged. What man could behold a scourged prisoner and still want the victim crucified? The scourge was a leather whip, knotted and weighted with pieces of metal or bone; and many a prisoner never survived the whipping. It pains us to think that the sinless Son of God was subjected to such cruelty. He was innocent, yet He was treated as though He were guilty; and He did it for us. He was slapped in the face before Annas (John 18:22), and spat on and beaten before Caiaphas and the council (Matt. 26:67).

Pilate scourged Him and the soldiers smote Him (John 19:1–3); and before they led Him to Calvary, the soldiers mocked Him and beat Him with a rod (Mark 15:19). How much He suffered for us!

Pilate had called Him “King of the Jews” (John 18:39), so the soldiers decided that the “king” should have a crown and a robe. The Jews had mocked His claim to being a Prophet (Matt. 26:67–68), and now the Gentiles mocked His claim to being a King. The verb tenses in the Greek text in John 19:3 indicate that the soldiers *repeatedly* came to Him, mocked Him, and beat Him with their hands. The forces of hell were having a heyday in Pilate’s hall.

Sin had brought thorns and thistles into the world (Gen. 3:17–19), so it was only fitting that the Creator wear a crown of thorns as He bore the sins of the world on the cross. The very metal He had created and placed in the ground was used to make nails to pound through His hands and feet.

For the third time, Pilate went out to face the people (John 18:29, 38; 19:4), this time bringing Jesus with him. Surely the sight of this scourged and humiliated prisoner would arouse some pity in their hearts; but it did not. For the second time, Pilate declared that he found no fault in Jesus, but his words only aroused their hateful passions more. “Behold the man!” carries the idea, “Look at this poor fellow! Hasn’t He suffered enough? Take pity on Him and let me release Him.” It was a noble effort on Pilate’s part, but it failed.

The failure of Pilate’s plan teaches us an important lesson: it takes more than human sentiment to bring the lost sinner to salvation. There is a view of the Atonement called “the moral influence theory” that would fit right into the governor’s approach. It states that the realization of our Lord’s sufferings moves the heart of the sinner so that he turns from sin and begins to love God. It is purely subjective and has no bearing on the holiness of God or the importance of satisfying divine justice.

If any crowd should have been moved by pity, it was the Jewish crowd that waited on Pilate. What nation has suffered more than the Jews? Here was one of their own, a Jewish prophet, suffering unjustly at the hands of the Romans, and the Jews did not repent or even show any touch of pity! If sinners who actually saw Christ in His suffering did not repent, what hope is there for people twenty centuries later who only read about His agonies?

The cross involves much more than an exhibition of innocent suffering. On that cross, the Son of God paid the price for the sins of the world and thereby declared the love of God and defended the holiness and justice of God. We are not saved by feeling pity for Jesus. We are saved by repenting of our sins and trusting Jesus, the sinless Substitute. “If Christ was not actually doing something by His death,” wrote Dr. Leon Morris, “then we are confronted with a piece of showmanship, nothing more.”

This does not mean that it is wrong for the believer to contemplate the cross and meditate on Christ’s sufferings. The familiar hymn “When I Survey the Wond’rous Cross” helps us realize afresh the price that Jesus paid for us, but we must not confuse sentimentality with true spiritual emotion. It is one thing to shed tears during a church service and quite something else to sacrifice, suffer, and serve after the meeting has ended. We do not simply contemplate the cross; we carry it.

For the third time, Pilate announced, “I find no fault in Him!” The crowd might well have shouted, “Then why did you have Him scourged?” Pilate’s actions belied his

words. He was a weak-willed man who, like many politicians, hoped to find a happy compromise that would please everybody. The Chinese teacher Confucius defined "cowardice" as "to know what is right and not do it."

The religious leaders were not at a loss for a powerful reply: "We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God" (John 19:7). This statement is not found in the other Gospels (but see Matt. 26:63–64); however, it fits right into John's purpose in writing his Gospel (John 20:31).

"Where Are You From?" (John 19:8–16)

The Romans and Greeks had numerous myths about the gods coming to earth as men (note Acts 14:8–13), so it is likely that Pilate responded to the phrase "Son of God" with these stories in mind. Already the governor had been impressed by the words and demeanor of our Lord; he had never met a prisoner like Him before. Was He indeed a god come to earth? Did He have supernatural powers? No wonder Pilate was starting to be afraid! Also, Pilate's wife had sent him a strange message that he should have nothing to do with Jesus (Matt. 27:19). Jesus had even come into her dreams!

Why did Jesus not answer Pilate's question? Because He had already answered it (John 18:36–37). It is a basic spiritual principle that God does not reveal new truth to us if we fail to act on the truth we already know. Furthermore, Pilate had already made it clear that he was not personally interested in spiritual truth. All he was concerned about was maintaining peace in Jerusalem as he tried to expedite the trial of Jesus of Nazareth. Pilate did not deserve an answer!

Fear and anger often go together. When we are afraid we are weak, we go the other extreme and try to appear strong. This is what Pilate did as he reminded Jesus of his Roman authority. But his statement did not demonstrate his power; it demonstrated his weakness. For if he had the authority to release Jesus, *why did he not do it?* He condemned himself with his own boastful words.

Of course, our Lord's silence before both Herod and Pilate was a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:7. Peter later used this as an example for suffering Christians to follow (1 Peter 2:18–23).

John 19:11 records our Lord's last words to Pilate, words that reveal His faith in the Father and His surrender to His will (see 1 Peter 2:23; 4:19). All authority comes from God (Rom. 13:1ff). Jesus was able to surrender to Rome and the Jews because He was first of all yielded to God. Pilate was boasting about his authority (John 19:10), but Jesus reminded him that his so-called authority was only delegated to him from God. One day God would call him to account for the way he had used his privileges and responsibilities.

To whom was Jesus referring when He said "he that delivered Me up unto thee"? Certainly not God, because God does not and cannot sin. Jesus was referring to Caiaphas, the corrupt high priest who had long before determined that Jesus must die (John 11:47–54). Caiaphas knew the Scriptures and had been given every opportunity to examine the evidence. He had willfully closed his eyes and hardened his heart. He had seen to it that Jesus was not given a fair trial. It was his associates who were inciting the mob to cry, "Let Him be crucified!" Pilate was a spiritually blind pagan, but

Caiaphas was a Jew who had a knowledge of Scripture. Therefore, it was Caiaphas, not Pilate, who had the greater sin.

What a dilemma Pilate was in! How would he go about investigating the claim that Jesus was “the Son of God”? And there was no evidence that He was a troublemaker or a seditionist. In a final burst of courage, Pilate tried to release Jesus. John does not tell us what steps Pilate took (the Greek text says “he kept seeking to release Him”), but they all failed. In fact, the crowd started to accuse *Pilate* of being a traitor to Caesar! This was too much for the governor, so he gave his official verdict and delivered Jesus to be crucified. Matthew tells us that Pilate washed his hands before the crowd (Matt. 27:24), but this did not cleanse his heart. Alas, it was Pilate who was on trial, not Jesus!

It is likely that John used Roman time, so that “the sixth hour” would have been 6 a.m. Mark tells us that Jesus was crucified “the third hour,” which, in Jewish reckoning, would have been 9 a.m. Since John wrote “*about* the sixth hour,” we need not try to figure out why it took three hours to get Jesus from Pilate’s hall to Calvary.

The “preparation” refers to the preparation for the Sabbath (see John 19:31) which would begin at sundown that day (Friday). Being the Passover Sabbath, it was an especially holy day. The religious leaders were more concerned about their traditions than they were knowing the truth and obeying the will of God. On a high and holy day, they crucified their own Messiah, Jesus the Son of God!

The crowd had the last word: “We have no king but Caesar!” “We will not have this man to reign over us!” (Luke 19:14) Well-meaning preachers have often said that the crowd that on Palm Sunday shouted “Hosannah!” turned right around and shouted “Crucify Him!” on Good Friday. However, it was two different crowds. The Palm Sunday crowd came primarily from Galilee where Jesus was very popular. The crowd at Pilate’s hall was from Judea and Jerusalem where the religious leaders were very much in control. If the Galilean disciples had had their way, they would have revolted and delivered Jesus!

From the human standpoint, the trial of Jesus was the greatest crime and tragedy in history. From the divine viewpoint, it was the fulfillment of prophecy and the accomplishment of the will of God. The fact that God had planned all of this did not absolve the participants of their responsibility. In fact, at Pentecost, Peter put both ideas together in one statement! (Acts 2:23)

When Israel asked to have a king, and God gave them Saul, the nation rejected God the Father (1 Sam. 8:5–7). When they asked for Barabbas, they rejected God the Son. Today, they are rejecting the pleading of God the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51; Rom. 10:21). Yet there will come a day when they shall see their King, believe, and be saved (Zech. 12:10–11; Matt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7).

Both the nation and the governor were on trial, and both failed miserably.

May we not fail!

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

“EVEN THE DEATH OF THE CROSS”

John 19:17–42

The Apostle's Creed states it without embellishment: “He was crucified, dead, and buried.” These three events are described in John 19:17–42, momentous events that we should understand not only from the historical point of view but also from the doctrinal. *What* happened is important; *why* it happened is also important, if you hope to go to heaven.

Crucified (John 19:17–27)

Pilate delivered Jesus to the chief priests; and they, with the help of the Roman soldiers, took Jesus to be crucified. “It was the most cruel and shameful of all punishments,” said the Roman statesman-philosopher Cicero. “Let it never come near the body of a Roman citizen; nay, not even near his thoughts or eyes or ears.”

Crucifixion probably had its origin among the Persians and Phoenicians, but it was the Romans who made special use of it. No Roman citizen could be crucified, though there were exceptions. This mode of capital punishment was reserved for the lowest kind of criminals, particularly those who promoted insurrection. Today, we think of the cross as a symbol of glory and victory; but in Pilate's day, the cross stood for the basest kind of rejection, shame, and suffering. It was Jesus who made the difference.

It was customary for the criminal to carry his cross, or at least the crossbeam, from the hall of judgment to the place of execution. Jesus began the mile-long walk carrying His cross, but He was relieved by Simon of Cyrene whom the Roman soldiers “drafted” to do the job. We do not know why Jesus was relieved of this burden; the Scriptures are silent. Was He too weak from the scourgings to carry the load? Was His weakness holding back the procession at a time when the Jews were anxious to get it over with so they could celebrate their Passover Sabbath? One thing is sure: the bearing of the cross was a mark of guilt; *and Jesus was not guilty* (see Mark 15:20–21 and Rom. 16:13).

It was also required that the criminal wear a placard announcing his crime. The only announcement recorded in the Gospels is the one that Pilate wrote: “This is Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.” The chief priests protested the title, but Pilate refused to change it. It was his final thrust against the Jewish religious establishment. He knew that the priests and elders envied Jesus and wanted to destroy Him (Matt. 27:18). A shrewd politician like Pilate well understood the workings of the Jewish religious establishment. He knew that his placard would insult and embarrass them, and that is exactly what he wanted.

The fact that this title was written in Hebrew (Aramaic), Greek, and Latin is significant. For one thing, it shows that our Lord was crucified in a place where many peoples and nations met, a cosmopolitan place. Hebrew is the language of religion, Greek of philosophy, and Latin of law; and all three combined to crucify the Son of God. But what He did on the cross, He did for the whole world! In this Gospel, John emphasizes the worldwide dimensions of the work of Christ. Without realizing it, Pilate

wrote a "Gospel tract" when he prepared this title; for one of the thieves discovered that Jesus was King, and he asked entrance into His kingdom.

Jesus was crucified outside the city (Heb. 13:11–13) between two other victims, possibly associates of Barabbas. We do not know where our Saviour's cross stood. There have been so many changes in the topography of Jerusalem since a.d. 70 when Titus and the Romans destroyed it, that it is impossible to determine accurately either our Lord's route to the cross or where the cross stood. Pilgrims to the Holy Land today are shown both the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and "Gordon's Calvary" near the garden tomb.

The Hebrew word *Golgotha* means "cranium, skull"; Calvary is the Latin equivalent. We are not told why it had this peculiar name. Certainly Jewish people would not permit unclean skulls to be left at a place of public execution! For that matter, the bodies (with heads intact) were usually disposed of by burial (if the victims had friends) or by throwing them on the public garbage dump. "Gordon's Calvary" does resemble a skull, but did the terrain look like that 2,000 years ago?

That Jesus was crucified with two notorious thieves only added to the shame. But it also fulfilled Isaiah 53:12, "He was numbered with the transgressors." He was treated like a common criminal!

Modern executions are usually carried out in almost clinical privacy, but Jesus was nailed to a cross and hung up for everyone to see. It was Passover season and there were thousands of visitors in the city. The place of execution was outside the city where many people would pass. Jesus was a well-known figure, so His arrest and condemnation would be topics for discussion. It was natural for people to gather and watch the grim scene.

Of course, the soldiers had to be there; that was their job. At most Roman executions, a centurion would be assigned with four soldiers to assist him. Since Jesus was a popular teacher with many followers, Pilate may have assigned more guards to Golgotha. It was the privilege of the soldiers to share whatever personal belongings the victims had; so they divided up all that Jesus owned—His personal clothing. He would have had a turban, a pair of sandals, an undergarment (the seamless robe), an outer garment, and a girdle. The four men each took a piece of clothing, and then they gambled for the seamless robe. This fulfilled Psalm 22:18.

John does not record it, but the other Gospel writers tell us that some of the people passing by reviled Jesus, no doubt at the instigation of the chief priests and scribes (Mark 15:29–32). When you read Psalm 22, you see how David used the image of *animals* to describe the people who persecuted our Lord: bulls (Ps. 22:12), lions (Ps. 22:13, 21), and dogs (Ps. 22:16, 20). When men reject their Lord, they become like animals.

A group of women, along with the Apostle John, stood near the cross. (Later, they would move farther away and join other friends of Jesus [Matt. 27:55–56; Mark 15:40–41].) John specifies four women: Mary, the mother of Jesus; His mother's sister, Salome, the mother of James and John; Mary, the wife of Clopas (Cleophas); and Mary Magdalene. It took courage to stand there in the midst of such hatred and ridicule, but their being there must have encouraged our Lord.

The first time we meet Mary in the Gospel of John, she is attending a wedding (John 2:1–11); now she is preparing for a burial. The hour had come! She was experiencing

“the sword” that had been predicted years before (Luke 2:35). Her silence is significant; for if anyone could have rescued Jesus, it was His mother. All she had to do was announce that His claims were false—but she said nothing! What a testimony to the deity of Christ.

Jesus assured her of His love, and He gave His choicest disciple, who rested on His bosom, to be her adopted son and to care for her. Whether that moment John took Mary away from the scene and took her home, we do not know. We do know that he cared for her and that she was among the believers in the Upper Room as they awaited Pentecost (Acts 1:14). Even while He was performing the great work of redemption, Jesus was faithful to His responsibilities as a son. What an honor it was for John to take his Lord's place in Mary's life!

Do not confuse Mary Magdalene with the “sinful woman” described in Luke 7:36ff. Jesus had delivered Mary Magdalene from demons (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2), and she used her resources to assist Jesus in His ministry. Salome had asked Jesus for thrones for her two sons (Matt. 20:20–29), and He had denied her request. You wonder what she was thinking about as she stood there and beheld Jesus dying on the cross. The scene must have rebuked her selfishness.

Dead (John 19:28–30)

Our Lord knew what was going on; He was fully in control as He obeyed the Father's will. He had refused to drink the pain-deadening wine that was always offered to those about to be crucified (Matt. 27:34). In order to fulfill the Scriptures (Ps. 69:21), He said, “I thirst.” He was enduring real physical suffering, for He had a real human body. He had just emerged from three hours of darkness when He felt the wrath of God and separation from God (Matt. 27:45–49). When you combine darkness, thirst, and isolation, you have—hell! There were physical reasons for His thirst (Ps. 22:15), but there were also spiritual reasons (Ps. 42:1–2).

One of the soldiers took pity on Jesus and moistened His lips with the cheap vinegar wine the soldiers drank. We must not imagine Jesus hanging many feet up in the air, almost inaccessible. His feet were perhaps three or four feet from the ground, so it would be easy for the man to put a sponge at the end of a reed and give Jesus a drink. You and I today can “give Jesus a drink” by sharing what we have with those in need (Matt. 25:34–40).

Psalm 69 has strong messianic overtones. note Psalm 69:3, “My throat is dried.” Psalm 69:4 is referred to by Jesus in John 15:25, and Psalm 69:8 should be connected with John 7:3–5. Psalm 69:9 is quoted in John 2:17, and Psalm 69:21 is referred to in John 19:28–29. Note the emphasis on “reproach” (Ps. 69:7–10, 19–20) and the image of the “deep waters” (Ps. 69:14–15, and see Luke 12:50).

Our Lord made seven statements while He was on the cross; they are known as “the seven words from the cross.” First, He thought of others: those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34), the believing thief (Luke 23:39–43), and His mother (John 19:25–27). The central word had to do with His relationship to the Father (Matt. 27:45–49); and the last three statements focused on Himself: His body (John 19:28–29), His soul (John 19:30; and see Isa. 53:10), and His spirit (Luke 23:46).

The drink of vinegar did not fully quench His thirst, but it did enable Him to utter that shout of triumph, in a loud voice, "It is finished!" In the Greek text, it is *tetelestai*; and it means, "It is finished, it stands finished, and it always will be finished!" While it is true that our Lord's sufferings were now finished, there is much more included in this dramatic word. Many of the Old Testament types and prophecies were now fulfilled, and the once-for-all sacrifice for sin had now been completed.

The word *tetelestai* is unfamiliar to us, but it was used by various people in everyday life in those days. A servant would use it when reporting to his or her master, "I have completed the work assigned to me" (see John 17:4). When a priest examined an animal sacrifice and found it faultless, this word would apply. Jesus, of course, is the perfect Lamb of God, without spot or blemish. When an artist completed a picture, or a writer a manuscript, he or she might say, "It is finished!" The death of Jesus on the cross "completes the picture" that God had been painting, the story that He had been writing, for centuries. Because of the cross, we understand the ceremonies and prophecies in the Old Testament.

Perhaps the most meaningful meaning of *tetelestai* was that used by the merchants: "The debt is paid in full!" When He gave Himself on the cross, Jesus fully met the righteous demands of a holy law; He paid our debt in full. None of the Old Testament sacrifices could take away sins; their blood only *covered* sin. But the Lamb of God shed His blood, and that blood can *take away* the sins of the world (John 1:29; Heb. 9:24–28).

There was once a rather eccentric evangelist named Alexander Wooten, who was approached by a flippant young man who asked, "What must I do to be saved?"

"It's too late!" Wooten replied, and went about his work.

The young man became alarmed. "Do you mean that it's too late for me to be saved?" he asked. "Is there nothing I can do?"

"Too late!" said Wooten. "*It's already been done!* The only thing you can do is believe."

The death of Jesus Christ is a major theme in the Gospel of John. It was announced by John the Baptist even before Jesus had officially begun His ministry (John 1:29, 35–36). Our Lord's first mention is in John 3:14, where the image is certainly that of crucifixion (and see John 8:28; 12:32). Jesus often spoke of "taking up the cross" (Matt. 10:38; 16:24). After Peter's confession of faith, Jesus clearly announced that He would be killed (Matt. 16:21), and later He told the disciples that He would be crucified (Matt. 20:17–19).

In John's Gospel, you find a number of pictures of our Lord's death: the slaying of the lamb (John 1:29); the destroying of the temple (John 2:19); the lifting up of the serpent (John 3:14); the shepherd laying down his life for the sheep (John 10:11–18); and the planting of the seed in the ground (John 12:20–25). These pictures make it clear that Jesus' death was not an accident; it was a divine appointment. He was not murdered in the strictest sense: He willingly gave His life for us. His death was an atonement, not just an example. He actually accomplished the work of redemption on the cross.

Some unbelievers have invented the idea that Jesus did not really die, that He only "swooned" on the cross and was then revived in the "cool tomb." But there are too many witnesses that Jesus Christ actually died: the centurion (Mark 15:44–45); all the Gospel

writers; the angels (Matt. 28:5, 7); the Jews (Acts 5:28); Christ Himself (Luke 24:46; Rev. 1:18); and even the worshiping hosts in heaven (Rev. 5:9, 12). Of course, Paul, Peter, and John mention the death of Christ in their letters.

His death was voluntary: He willingly dismissed His spirit (John 19:30; and note 10:17–18). He “gave Himself” (Gal. 2:20). He offered Himself as a ransom (Mark 10:45), as a sacrifice to God (Eph. 5:2), and as a propitiation for sin (1 John 2:2). In Luke 9:31, His death is called a “decease,” which in the Greek is “exodus,” suggesting the Passover lamb and the deliverance from bondage. It will take eternity to reveal all that happened when Jesus Christ died on the cross.

Buried (John 19:31–42)

Two groups of people were involved in our Lord's burial: the Roman soldiers (John 19:31–37), and the Jewish believers (John 19:38–42). It was not unusual for victims to remain on the cross in a lingering death, so the Jewish religious leaders did all they could to hasten the death of Jesus and the two thieves. However, our Lord was in control; and He dismissed His spirit at “the ninth hour,” which was 3 p.m. (see Matt. 27:45–50). The last three “words from the cross” were spoken within a short period of time just before He laid down His life.

It is remarkable that the Roman soldiers *did not do* what they were commanded to do—break the victims' legs—but they *did do* what they were not supposed to do—pierce the Saviour's side! In both matters, they fulfilled the very Word of God! The bones of the Passover lamb were not to be broken (Ex. 12:46; Num. 9:12; and note Ps. 34:20), so our Lord's bones were protected by the Lord. His side was to be pierced (Zech. 12:10; Rev. 1:7), so that was done by one of the soldiers.

John saw a special significance to the blood and water that came from the wound in the side. For one thing, it proved that Jesus had a real body (see 1 John 1:1–4) and experienced a real death. By the time John wrote this book, there were false teachers in the church claiming that Jesus did not have a truly human body. There may also be a symbolic meaning: the blood speaks of our justification, the water of our sanctification and cleansing. The blood takes care of the guilt of sin; the water deals with the stain of sin. Some students connect John 19:34 with 1 John 5:6, but perhaps the connection is weak. In 1 John 5, John deals with evidence that Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh; and he presents three witnesses: the Spirit, the water, and the blood (1 John 5:6, 8). The Spirit relates to Pentecost, the water to His baptism, and the blood to His crucifixion. In each of these events, God made it clear that Jesus Christ is what He claimed to be, God come in the flesh. In fact, in John 19:35, the apostle makes it clear that the water and blood should encourage his readers to believe that Jesus is the Christ (see John 20:31).

When the soldiers were through with their gruesome work, our Lord's friends took over; and from that point on, as far as the record is concerned, no unbelievers touched the body of Jesus. God had prepared two high-ranking men to prepare His body for burial and to place it in a proper tomb. Had Joseph and Nicodemus not been there, it is likely that the body of Jesus would have been “carried off to some obscure and accursed ditch,” as James Stalker states in his classic *The Trial and Death of Jesus*

Christ. If the friends of any victims appeared, the Romans were only too happy to give them the bodies and get them off their hands.

When you assemble the data available about Joseph of Arimathea, you learn that he was rich (Matt. 27:57), a prominent member of the Jewish council (Mark 15:43), a good and righteous man who had not consented to what the council did (Luke 23:50–51), a member of that “believing minority” of Jews who were praying for Messiah to come (Mark 15:43, and note Luke 2:25–38), and a disciple of Jesus Christ (John 19:38). It was he who asked for the body of Jesus and, with his friend Nicodemus, gave the Saviour a decent burial.

But there are some mysteries about Joseph that perplex us and invite closer investigation. Why did he have a tomb so near to a place of execution? Most pious Jews wanted to be buried in the Holy City, but a rich man like Joseph could certainly afford a better site for his final resting place. Imagine his relatives coming to pay their respects and having to listen to the curses and cries of criminals on crosses not far away! (note John 19:41.)

Matthew, Luke, and John all tell us that the tomb was new and had never been used. It was “his [Joseph’s] own new tomb” (Matt. 27:60); he had hewn it out for himself. *Or did he hew it out for Jesus?*

John informs us that Joseph was a “secret disciple for fear of the Jews.” The Greek word translated “secretly” is a perfect passive participle and could be translated “having been secreted.” In Matthew 13:35, this same verb form is translated “have been kept secret.” In other words, Joseph was God’s “secret agent” in the Sanhedrin! From the human standpoint, Joseph kept “under cover” because he feared the Jews (John 7:13; 9:22; 12:42); but from the divine standpoint, he was being protected so he could be available to bury the body of Jesus.

We have already met Nicodemus in our study of John 1–12. Note that each time he is named, he is identified as the man who came to Jesus by night (John 3:1ff; 7:50–53). But the man who started off with confusion at night (John 3) ended up with open confession in the daylight! Nicodemus came out of the dark and into the light and, with Joseph, was not ashamed to publicly identify with Jesus Christ. Of course, when the two men touched His dead body, they defiled themselves and could not participate in Passover. But, what difference did it make? They had found the Lamb of God!

It seems evident that Joseph and Nicodemus carefully planned their activities at Calvary. They certainly could not secure a tomb at the last minute, nor would they be able to purchase sixty-five pounds of costly spices so quickly during the Passover when many merchants would not be doing business. No sooner had Jesus died than Joseph went to Pilate and received permission to take the body. Nicodemus stayed at the cross to make sure nothing happened to his Lord’s body. The two men might even have been waiting *in the new tomb*, with the spices and wrappings, ready for the moment when the Saviour would lay down His life.

Haste was important and the men worked quickly. They could not give Jesus’ body the full ministry of washing and anointing that was traditional, but they did the best they could. It was important to get the body safely away from the Romans and the Jewish leaders. Of course, Mary of Bethany had already anointed His body for burial (Mark 14:8; John 12:1–8). Some of the other women watched the two men minister to Jesus,

and they witnessed His burial (Matt. 27:61; Mark 15:47). They planned to return after the Sabbath and complete the burial procedures (Luke 23:55–24:1).

All of this raises the question, “How did Joseph and Nicodemus know to prepare for His burial?” What follows is only conjecture on my part but, to me, it seems reasonable.

When Nicodemus first visited Jesus, he was impressed with His miracles and His teachings; but he could not understand what it meant to be born again. Certainly after that interview, Nicodemus searched the Scriptures and asked God for guidance concerning these important spiritual matters.

At the critical council meeting recorded in John 7:45–53, Nicodemus boldly stood up and defended the Saviour! His associates ridiculed him for thinking that a prophet could come out of Galilee! “Search, and look!” they said—and that is exactly what Nicodemus did. It is likely that Joseph quietly joined him and revealed the fact that he too was more and more convinced that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed Israel’s Messiah, the Son of God.

As Nicodemus and Joseph searched the Old Testament, they would find the messianic prophecies and discover that many of them had been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Certainly they would see Him as the “Lamb of God” and conclude that He would be sacrificed at Passover. Jesus had already told Nicodemus that He would be “lifted up” (John 3:14), and this meant crucifixion. Since the Passover lambs were slain about 3 p.m., the two men could know almost the exact time when God’s Lamb would die on the cross! Surely they would read Isaiah 53 and notice verse 9—“And He made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death.” Jesus would be buried in a rich man’s tomb!

Joseph arranged to have the tomb hewn out, and the men assembled the cloths and spices needed for the burial. They may have been hiding in the tomb all during the six hours of our Lord’s agony on the cross. When they heard, “It is finished! Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit!” they knew that He was dead; and they went to work. They boldly identified with Jesus Christ at a time when He seemed like a failure and His cause hopelessly defeated. As far as we know, of all the disciples, only John was with them at the cross.

The Sabbath was about to dawn. Jesus had finished the work of the “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17), and now He would rest.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE DAWNING OF A NEW DAY

John 20:1–18

If the Gospel of John were an ordinary biography, there would be no chapter 20. I am an incurable reader of biographies, and I notice that almost all of them conclude with the

death and burial of the subject. I have yet to read one that describes the subject's resurrection from the dead! The fact that John continued his account and shared the excitement of the Resurrection miracle is proof that Jesus Christ is not like any other man. He is, indeed, the Son of God.

The Resurrection is an essential part of the Gospel message (1 Cor. 15:1–8) and a key doctrine in the Christian faith. It proves that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Acts 2:32–36; Rom. 1:4) and that His atoning work on the cross has been completed and is effective (Rom. 4:24–25). The empty cross and the empty tomb are God's "receipts" telling us that the debt has been paid. Jesus Christ is not only the Saviour, but He is also the Sanctifier (Rom. 6:4–10) and the Intercessor (Rom. 8:34). One day He shall return as Judge (Acts 17:30–31).

From the very beginning, the enemies of the Lord tried to deny the historic fact of the Resurrection. The Jewish leaders claimed that the Lord's body had been stolen from the tomb. This statement is absurd, for if the body was stolen by His followers, how did they do it? The tomb was guarded by Roman soldiers and the stone sealed by an official Roman seal. Furthermore, His disciples *did not believe* that He was to be raised from the dead; it was His enemies who remembered His words (Matt. 27:62–66). *They* certainly would not have taken the body! The last thing they wanted was anyone believing that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. If His friends *could not* steal the body, and His enemies *would not*, then who took it?

Perhaps the disciples had "visions" of the risen Lord and interpreted them as evidences for the Resurrection. But they did not *expect* to see Him, and that is not the kind of psychological preparation from which hallucinations are made. And how could more than 500 people have the same hallucination at the same time? (1 Cor. 15:6)

Did the followers of our Lord perhaps go to the wrong tomb? Not likely. They carefully watched where He was buried (Matt. 27:61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55–56). They loved the Master and were not likely to get confused about His resting place. In fact, as the women approached the tomb, they were worried about who would roll back the heavy stone (Mark 16:1–3); so they were acquainted with the situation.

As to the foolish argument that Jesus did not die, but only swooned and was later revived, little need be said. It was proved by many witnesses that Jesus was dead when His body was taken from the cross. Later, He was seen alive by dependable witnesses. The only logical conclusion is that He kept His promise and arose from the dead.

But the glorious truth of the Resurrection was not understood immediately by even His closest followers. It gradually dawned on these grieving people that their Master was not dead, but alive! And what a difference it made when the full realization of His resurrection took hold of them! For Mary Magdalene it meant moving from tears to joy (John 20:1–18); for the ten disciples it meant going from fear to courage (John 20:19–23); and for Thomas it meant moving from doubt to assurance (John 20:24–31). With Mary, the emphasis is on love; with the ten, the emphasis is on hope; and with Thomas, the emphasis is on faith.

As we consider Mary Magdalene's experience that Lord's Day morning, we can see three stages in her comprehension of the truth of the Resurrection. Peter and John are also a part of this experience.

Faith Eclipsed (John 20:1–2)

Mary Magdalene and several other women agreed to go to the tomb early on the first day of the week, so that they might show their love for Christ in completing the burial preparations. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had been forced by circumstances to prepare His body hastily, and the women wanted to finish the task. Their great concern was how to get into the tomb. Perhaps the Roman soldiers would take pity on them and give them a hand.

What they did not know was that an earthquake had occurred and the stone had been rolled back by an angel! It seems that Mary Magdalene went ahead of the other women and got to the tomb first. When she saw the stone rolled away from the door of the tomb, she concluded that somebody had broken into the tomb and stolen the body of her Lord. We may criticize Mary for jumping to conclusions; but when you consider the circumstances, it is difficult to see how she would have reached any other conclusion. It was still dark, she was alone, and, like the other followers of Jesus, she did not believe that He would return from the dead.

She ran to give the news to Peter and John, who must have been living together at a place known to the other believers. Perhaps it was the Upper Room where they had met with Jesus. Mary's use of the pronoun "we" is interesting, for it included the other women who at that moment were discovering that Jesus was alive! (see Mark 16:1–8 and Luke 24:1–8) The women left the tomb and carried the angels' message to the other disciples.

It is significant that the first witnesses of the resurrection of Christ were *believing women*. Among the Jews in that day, the testimony of women was not held in high regard. "It is better that the words of the Law be burned," said the rabbis, "than be delivered to a woman." But these Christian women had a greater message than that of the Law, for they knew that their Saviour was alive.

Mary's faith was not extinguished; it was only eclipsed. The light was still there, but it was covered. Peter and John were in the same spiritual condition, but soon all three of them would move out of the shadows and into the light.

Faith Dawning (John 20:3–10)

John 20:3 suggests that Peter started off first to run to the tomb, but John 20:4 reports that John got there first. Perhaps John was a younger man in better physical condition, or perhaps John was just a better runner. It is tempting to "spiritualize" this footrace and relate it to Isaiah 40:31 and Hebrews 12:1–2. When a believer is out of fellowship with the Lord, it is difficult to run the race of faith. However, both men deserve credit for having the courage to run into enemy territory, not knowing what lay before them. The whole thing could have been a clever trap to catch the disciples.

When John arrived at the tomb, he cautiously remained outside and looked in. Perhaps he wanted Peter to be with him when he went into the burial chamber. What did John see? The graveclothes lying on the stone shelf without any evidence of violence or crime. *But the graveclothes were empty!* They lay there like an empty cocoon, still retaining the shape of Jesus' body.

Peter arrived and impulsively went into the tomb, just as we would expect him to do. He also saw the linen clothes lying there empty and the cloth for the head carefully rolled and lying by itself. Grave robbers do not carefully unwrap the corpse and then

leave the graveclothes neatly behind. In fact, with the presence of the spices in the folds of the clothes, it would be almost impossible to unwrap a corpse without damaging the wrappings. The only way those linen clothes could be left in that condition would be if Jesus *passed through them* as He arose from the dead.

John then entered the tomb and looked at the evidence. "He saw, and believed."

When John wrote this account, he used three different Greek words for *seeing*. In John 20:5, the verb simply means "to glance in, to look in." In John 20:6, the word means "to look carefully, to observe." The word "saw" in John 20:8 means "to perceive with intelligent comprehension." Their Resurrection faith was now dawning!

It seems incredible that the followers of Jesus did not expect Him to come out of the tomb alive. After all, He had told them many times that He would be raised from the dead. Early in His ministry He had said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). After His resurrection, the disciples remembered that He had said this (John 2:22); however, His enemies remembered it too (Matt. 27:40, 63–64).

He compared Himself to Jonah (Matt. 12:40), and on two occasions clearly announced His resurrection after three days (Matt. 16:21; 20:19). On Thursday of His last week of ministry He again promised to be raised up and meet them in Galilee (Matt. 26:32, and see Luke 24:6–7).

What kind of faith did Peter and John have at that stage in their spiritual experience? They had faith based on evidence. They could see the graveclothes; they knew that the body of Jesus was not there. However, as good as evidence is to convince the mind, it can never change the life. Those of us who live centuries later cannot examine the evidence, for the material evidence (the tomb, the graveclothes) is no longer there for us to inspect. But we have the record in the Word of God (John 20:9) and that record is true (John 19:35; 21:24). In fact, it is faith *in the Word* that the Lord really wanted to cultivate in His disciples (see John 2:22; 12:16; 14:26). Peter made it clear that the Word of God, not personal experiences, should be the basis for our faith (1 Peter 1:12–21).

The disciples had only the Old Testament Scriptures, so that is what is referred to in John 20:9. The early church used the Old Testament to prove to both Jews and Gentiles that Jesus is the Christ, that He died for sinners, and that He arose again (Acts 9:22; 13:16ff; 17:1–4; etc.). The Gospel includes "and that He arose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:4). What Scriptures did Paul and John have in mind?

Paul saw the Resurrection in Psalm 2:7 (Acts 13:33). Peter saw it in Psalm 16:8–11 (Acts 2:23–36 and note 13:35). Peter also referred to Psalm 110:1 (Acts 2:34–35). The statement "He shall prolong His days" in Isaiah 53:10 is also interpreted as a prediction of Christ's resurrection. Jesus Himself used the Prophet Jonah to illustrate His own death, burial, and resurrection (Matt. 12:38–40); and this would include the "three days" part of the message. Paul saw in the Feast of Firstfruits a picture of the Resurrection (Lev. 23:9–14; 1 Cor. 15:20–23), and again, this would include "the third day." Some students see the Resurrection and "the third day" in Hosea 6:2.

After His resurrection, our Lord did not reveal Himself to everyone, but only to selected witnesses who would share the good news with others (Acts 10:39–43). This witness is now found in Scripture, the New Testament; and both the Old Testament and

the New Testament agree in their witness. The Law, the Psalms, the Prophets, and the Apostles together bear witness that Jesus Christ is alive!

Peter and John saw the evidence and believed. Later, the Holy Spirit confirmed their faith through the Old Testament Scriptures. That evening, they would meet the Master personally! Faith that was eclipsed has now started to dawn, and the light will get brighter.

Faith Shining (John 20:11–18)

When I think of Mary Magdalene lingering alone in the garden, I recall Proverbs 8:17—“I love them that love Me; and those that seek Me early shall find Me.” Mary loved her Lord and came early to the garden to express that love. Peter and John had gone home by the time Mary got back to the tomb, so they did not convey to her what conclusion they had reached from the evidence they had examined. Mary still thought that Jesus was dead. Another verse comes to mind—Psalm 30:5, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”

Mary's weeping was the loud lamentation so characteristic of Jewish people when they express their sorrow (John 11:31, 33). There is certainly nothing wrong with sincere sorrow, because God made us to shed tears; and weeping is good therapy for broken hearts. The sorrow of the Christian, however, must be different from the hopeless sorrow of the world (1 Thes. 4:13–18), because we have been born again “unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3, nasb). We weep—not because our believing loved ones have gone to heaven—but because they have left us and we miss them.

When Mary looked into the sepulcher, she saw two men in white. Their position at either end of the shelf where the body had been lying makes us think of the cherubim on the mercy seat (Ex. 25:17–19). It is as though God is saying, “There is now a new mercy seat! My Son has paid the price for sin, and the way is open into the presence of God!” Mary apparently was not disturbed at seeing these men, and there is no evidence that she knew they were angels. The brief conversation neither dried her tears nor quieted her mind. She was determined to find the body of Jesus.

Why did Mary turn back and not continue her conversation with the two strangers? Did she hear a sound behind her? Or did the angels stand and recognize the presence of their Lord? Perhaps both of these speculations are true or neither is true. She was certain that the Lord's body was not in the tomb, so why linger there any longer?

Why did she not recognize the One for whom she was so earnestly searching? Jesus may have deliberately concealed Himself from her, as He would later do when He walked with the Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:13–32). It was still early and perhaps dark in that part of the garden. Her eyes were probably blinded by her tears as well.

Jesus asked her the same question that the angels had asked, “Why are you weeping?” How tragic that she was weeping when she could have been praising, had she realized that her Lord was alive! Then He added, “Whom are you seeking?” (He had asked the mob the same question in the Garden—John 18:4.) It is encouraging to us to know that “Jesus knows all about our sorrows.” The Saviour knew that Mary's heart was broken and that her mind was confused. He did not rebuke her; tenderly, He revealed Himself to her.

All He had to do was to speak her name, and Mary immediately recognized Him. His sheep hear [recognize] His voice and He calls them by name (John 10:3). Apparently Mary had turned away from Jesus, for when He spoke her name, she had to turn back to look at Him again. What a blessed surprise it was to see the face of her beloved Master!

All she could say was, "Rabboni—my Master, my Teacher." The title *Rabboni* is used in only one other place in the Gospels, Mark 10:51 (in the Greek text "Lord" is "Rabboni"). "Rabbi" and "Rabboni" were equivalent terms of respect. In later years, the Jews recognized three levels of teachers: rab (the lowest), rabbi, and rabboni (the highest).

Mary not only spoke to Him, but she grasped His feet and held on to Him. This was a natural gesture: now that she had found Him, she did not want to lose Him. She and the other believers still had a great deal to learn about His new state of glory; they still wanted to relate to Him as they had done during the years of His ministry before the cross.

Jesus permitted the other women to hold His feet (Matt. 28:9), and He did not forbid them. Why did He say to Mary, "Do not cling to Me"? One reason was that she would see Him again because He had not yet ascended to the Father. He remained on earth for forty days after His resurrection and often appeared to the believers to teach them spiritual truth (Acts 1:1–9). Mary had no need to panic; this was not her last and final meeting with the Lord.

A second reason is that she had a job to do—to go tell His brethren that He was alive and would ascend to the Father. "He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb. 2:11). "I will declare Thy name unto My brethren" (Ps. 22:22). He had called His own *servants* (John 13:16) and *friends* (John 15:15), but now He called them *brethren*. This meant that they shared His resurrection power and glory.

Some students feel that Jesus did return to the Father on that morning, and that was the ascension He was referring to; but no other New Testament passage corroborates this interpretation. To say that He was fulfilling the symbolism of the Day of Atonement and presenting the blood to the Father is, I think, stretching a type too far (Lev. 16). For that matter, *He had no blood to present*; He had presented that on the cross when He was made sin for us. In His resurrection glory, Jesus was "flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39), not "flesh and blood." The Resurrection itself was proof that the work of redemption had been completed ("raised because of our justification"—Rom. 4:24–25, nasb). What more could He do?

Our Lord never used the phrases "our Father" or "our God." His relationship to the Father was different from that of the disciples, and He was careful to make that distinction. We say "our Father" and "our God" because all believers belong to the same family and have an equal standing before God. He reminded Mary and the other believers that God was their Father and that He would be with the Father in heaven after His ascension. In His Upper Room message, He had taught them that He would return to the Father so that the Spirit might come to them.

Though it was the same Jesus, only in a glorified body, it was not quite the same relationship. We must be careful not to relate to Christ "after the flesh" (1 Cor. 5:13), that is, relate to Him as though He were still in His state of humiliation. He is today the exalted Son of God in glory, and we must honor Him as such. The juvenile familiarity

that some people display in public when they testify, pray, or sing only reveals that they have little understanding of Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:16. When John was with Jesus at the table, he leaned against His bosom (John 13:23); but when John saw Jesus on the Isle of Patmos, he fell at His feet as dead! (Rev. 1:17)

It would have been selfish and disobedient for Mary to have clung to Jesus and kept Him to herself. She arose and went to where the disciples were gathered and gave them the good news that she had seen Jesus alive. "I have seen the Lord!" (note John 20:14, 18, 20, 25, 29.) Mark reports that these believers were mourning and weeping—and that they would not believe her! (Mark 16:9–11) Mary herself had been weeping, and Jesus had turned her sorrow into joy. If they had believed, their sorrow would also have turned to joy. Unbelief has a terribly deadening effect on a person. No wonder God warns us against "an evil heart of unbelief" (Heb. 3:12).

Mary not only shared the fact of His resurrection and that she had seen Him personally, but she also reported the words that He had spoken to her. Again, we see the importance of the Word of God. Mary could not transfer her experience over to them, but she could share the Word; and it is the Word that generates faith (Rom. 10:17). The living Christ shared His living Word (1 Peter 1:23–25).

It is good to have faith that is based on solid evidence, but the evidence should lead us to the Word, and the Word should lead us to the Saviour. It is one thing to accept a doctrine and defend it; it is something else to have a personal relationship to the living Lord. Peter and John believed that Jesus was alive, but it was not until that evening that they met the risen Christ in person along with the other disciples. (Jesus appeared to Peter sometime during the afternoon, Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5.) Evidence that does not lead to experience is nothing but dead dogma. The key is faith in the Word of God.

Dr. Robert W. Dale, one of Great Britain's leading Congregational pastors and theologians, was one day preparing an Easter sermon when a realization of the risen Lord struck him with new power.

"Christ is alive!" he said to himself. "Alive—alive—alive!" He paused, and then said, "Can that really be true? *Living* as really as I myself am?"

He got up from his desk and began to walk about the study, repeating, "Christ is living! Christ is living!"

Dr. Dale had known and believed this doctrine for years, but the reality of it overwhelmed him that day. From that time on, "the living Christ" was the theme of his preaching, and he had his congregation sing an Easter hymn every Sunday morning. "I want my people to get hold of the glorious fact that Christ is alive, and to rejoice over it; and Sunday, you know, is the day on which Christ left the dead."

Historical faith says, "Christ lives!"

Saving faith says, "Christ lives *in me!*"

Do you have saving faith?

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION

John 20:19–31

The news that Jesus was alive began to spread among His followers, at first with hesitation, but then with enthusiasm. Even His disciples did not believe the first reports, and Thomas demanded proof. But wherever people were confronted with the reality of His resurrection, their lives were transformed. In fact, that same transforming experience can be yours today. As you see in John 20:19–31 the changes that took place in the lives of people, ask yourself, “Have I personally met the risen Christ? Has He changed *my* life?”

From Fear to Courage (John 20:19–25)

Our Lord rested in the tomb on the Sabbath and arose from the dead on the first day of the week. Many people sincerely call Sunday “the Christian Sabbath,” but Sunday is not the Sabbath Day. The seventh day of the week, the Sabbath, commemorates God’s finished work of Creation (Gen. 2:1–3). The Lord’s Day commemorates Christ’s finished work of redemption, the “new creation.” God the Father worked for six days and then rested. God the Son suffered on the cross for six hours and then rested.

God gave the Sabbath to Israel as a special “sign” that they belonged to Him (Ex. 20:8–11; 31:13–17; Neh. 9:14). The nation was to use that day for physical rest and refreshment both for man and beast; but for Israel, it was not commanded as a special day of assembly and worship. Unfortunately, the scribes and Pharisees added all kinds of restrictions to the Sabbath observance until it became a day of bondage instead of a day of blessing. Jesus deliberately violated the Sabbath traditions, though He honored the Sabbath Day.

There were at least five Resurrection appearances of our Lord on that first day of the week: to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11–18), the other women (Matt. 28:9–10), Peter (1 Cor. 15:5 and Luke 24:34), the two Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:13–32), and the disciples minus Thomas (John 20:19–25). The next Sunday, the disciples met again and Thomas was with them (John 20:26–31). It would appear that the believers from the very first met together on Sunday evening, which came to be called “the Lord’s Day” (Rev. 1:10). It appears that the early church met on the first day of the week to worship the Lord and commemorate His death and resurrection (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1–2).

The Sabbath was over when Jesus arose from the dead (Mark 16:1). He arose on the first day of the week (Matt. 28:1; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). The change from the seventh day to the first day was not effected by some church decree; it was brought about from the beginning by the faith and witness of the first believers. For centuries, the Jewish Sabbath had been associated with Law: six days of work, and then you rest. But the Lord’s Day, the first day of the week, is associated with grace: first there is faith in the living Christ, then there will be works.

There is no evidence in Scripture that God ever gave the original Sabbath command to the Gentiles, or that it was repeated for the church to obey. Nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the church epistles, but the Sabbath commandment is

not repeated. However, Paul makes it clear that believers must not make “special days” a test of fellowship or spirituality (Rom. 14:5ff; Col. 2:16–23).

How did our Lord transform His disciples' fear into courage? For one thing, *He came to them*. We do not know where these ten frightened men met behind locked doors, but Jesus came to them and reassured them. In His resurrection body, He was able to enter the room without opening the doors! It was a solid body, for He asked them to touch Him—and He even ate some fish (Luke 24:41–43). But it was a different kind of body, one that was not limited by what we call “the laws of nature.”

It is remarkable that these men were actually afraid. The women had reported to them that Jesus was alive, and the two Emmaus disciples had added their personal witness (Luke 24:33–35). It is likely that Jesus had appeared personally to Peter sometime that afternoon (Mark 16:7; Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5), though Peter's *public* restoration would not take place until later (John 21). No wonder Jesus reproached them at that time “with their unbelief and hardness of heart” (Mark 16:14).

But His first word to them was the traditional greeting, “Shalom—peace!” He could have rebuked them for their unfaithfulness and cowardice the previous weekend, but He did not. “He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities” (Ps. 103:10). The work of the cross is peace (Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:14–17), and the message they would carry would be the Gospel of peace (Rom. 10:15). Man had declared war on God (Ps. 2; Acts 4:23–30), but God would declare “Peace!” to those who would believe.

Not only did Jesus come to them, but *He reassured them*. He showed them His wounded hands and side and gave them opportunity to discover that it was indeed their Master, and that He was not a phantom. (The Gospels do not record wounds in His feet, but Psalm 22:16 indicates that His feet were also nailed to the cross.)

But the wounds meant more than identification; they also were evidence that the price for salvation had been paid and man indeed could have “peace with God.” The basis for all our peace is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He died for us, He arose from the dead in victory, and now He lives for us. In our fears, we cannot lock Him out! He comes to us in grace and reassures us through His Word. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Prov. 27:6).

When Jesus saw that the disciples' fear had now turned to joy, *He commissioned them*: “As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you” (John 20:21). Keep in mind that the original disciples were not the only ones present; others, including the Emmaus disciples, were also in the room. This commission was not the “formal ordination” of a church order; rather, it was the dedication of His followers to the task of world evangelism. We are to take His place in this world (John 17:18). What a tremendous privilege and what a great responsibility! It is humbling to realize that Jesus loves us as the Father loves Him (John 15:9; 17:26), and that we are in the Father just as He is (John 17:21–22). It is equally as humbling to realize that He has sent us into the world just as the Father sent Him. As He was about to ascend to heaven, He again reminded them of their commission to take the message to the whole world (Matt. 28:18–20).

It must have given the men great joy to realize that, in spite of their many failures, their Lord was entrusting them with His Word and His work. They had forsaken Him and fled, but now He was sending them out to represent Him. Peter had denied Him three

times; and yet in a few days, Peter would preach the Word (and accuse the Jews of denying Him—Acts 3:13–14!) and thousands would be saved.

Jesus came to them and reassured them; but He also *enabled them* through the Holy Spirit. John 20:22 reminds us of Genesis 2:7 when God breathed life into the first man. In both Hebrew and Greek, the word for “breath” also means “spirit.” The breath of God in the first creation meant physical life, and the breath of Jesus Christ in the new creation meant spiritual life. The believers would receive the baptism of the Spirit at Pentecost and be empowered for ministry (Acts 1:4–5; 2:1–4). Apart from the filling of the Spirit, they could not go forth to witness effectively. The Spirit had dwelt *with* them in the person of Christ, but now the Spirit would be *in* them (John 14:17).

John 20:23 must not be interpreted to mean that Jesus gave to a select body of people the right to forgive sins and let people into heaven. Jesus had spoken similar words before (Matt. 16:19), but He was not setting aside the disciples (and their successors) as a “spiritual elite” to deal with the sins of the world. Remember, there were others in the room besides the disciples, and Thomas was missing!

A correct understanding of the Greek text helps us here. Some years ago, I corresponded with the eminent Greek scholar Dr. Julius R. Mantey (now deceased) about this verse, and he assured me that the correct translation both here and in Matthew 16:19 should be: “Whosoever sins you remit [forgive] shall have already been forgiven them, and whosoever sins you retain [do not forgive] shall have already not been forgiven them.” In other words, the disciples did not provide forgiveness; they proclaimed forgiveness on the basis of the message of the Gospel. Another Greek scholar, Dr. Kenneth Wuest, translates it “they have been previously forgiven them.”

As the early believers went forth into the world, they announced the good news of salvation. If sinners would repent and believe on Jesus Christ, their sins would be forgiven them! “Who can forgive sins but God only?” (Mark 2:7) All that the Christian can do is announce the message of forgiveness; God performs the miracle of forgiveness. If sinners will believe on Jesus Christ, we can authoritatively declare to them that their sins have been forgiven; but we are not the ones who provide the forgiveness.

By now, their fears had vanished. They were sure that the Lord was alive and that He was caring for them. They had both “peace with God” and the “peace of God” (Phil. 4:6–7). They had a high and holy commission and the power provided to accomplish it. And they had been given the great privilege of bearing the good news of forgiveness to the whole world. All they now had to do was tarry in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit would be given.

From Unbelief to Confidence (John 20:26–28)

Why was Thomas not with the other disciples when they met on the evening of Resurrection Day? Was he so disappointed that he did not want to be with his friends? But when we are discouraged and defeated, we need our friends all the more! Solitude only feeds discouragement and helps it grow into self-pity, which is even worse.

Perhaps Thomas was afraid. But John 11:16 seems to indicate that he was basically a courageous man, willing to go to Judea and die with the Lord! John 14:5 reveals that Thomas was a spiritually minded man who wanted to know the truth and was not ashamed to ask questions. There seems to have been a “pessimistic” outlook in

Thomas. We call him "Doubting Thomas," but Jesus did not rebuke him for his doubts. He rebuked him for unbelief: "Be not faithless, but believing." Doubt is often an intellectual problem: we want to believe, but the faith is overwhelmed by problems and questions. Unbelief is a moral problem; we simply will not believe.

What was it that Thomas would not believe? The reports of the other Christians that Jesus Christ was alive. The verb *said* in John 20:25 means that the disciples "kept saying to him" that they had seen the Lord Jesus Christ alive. No doubt the women and the Emmaus pilgrims also added their witness to this testimony. On the one hand, we admire Thomas for wanting *personal* experience; but on the other hand, we must fault him for laying down conditions for the Lord to meet.

Like most people in that day, he had two names: "Thomas" is Aramaic, "Didymus" is Greek, and they both mean "twin." Who was Thomas' twin? We do not know—but sometimes you and I feel as if we might be his twins! How often we have refused to believe and have insisted that God prove Himself to us!

Thomas is a good warning to all of us not to miss meeting with God's people on the Lord's Day (Heb. 10:22–25). Because Thomas was not there, he missed seeing Jesus Christ, hearing His words of peace, and receiving His commission and gift of spiritual life. He had to endure a week of fear and unbelief when he could have been experiencing joy and peace! Remember Thomas when you are tempted to stay home from church. You never know what special blessing you might miss!

But let's give him credit for showing up the next week. The other ten men had told Thomas that they had seen the Lord's hands and side (John 20:20), so Thomas made that the test. Thomas had been there when Jesus raised Lazarus, so why should he question our Lord's own resurrection? But, he still wanted proof; "seeing is believing."

Thomas' words help us to understand the difference between *doubt* and *unbelief*. Doubt says, "I cannot believe! There are too many problems!" Unbelief says, "I *will not* believe unless you give me the evidence I ask for!" In fact, in the Greek text, there is a double negative: "I positively will not believe!"

Jesus had heard Thomas' words; nobody had to report them to Him. So, the next Lord's Day, the Lord appeared in the room (again, the doors were locked) and dealt personally with Thomas and his unbelief. He still greeted them with "Shalom—peace!" Even Thomas' unbelief could not rob the other disciples of their peace and joy in the Lord.

How gracious our Lord is to stoop to our level of experience in order to lift us where we ought to be. The Lord granted Gideon the "tests of faith" that he requested (Judg. 6:36–40), and He granted Thomas his request as well. There is no record that Thomas ever accepted the Lord's invitation. When the time came to prove his faith, Thomas needed no more proof!

Our Lord's words translate literally, "Stop becoming faithless but become a believer." Jesus saw a dangerous process at work in Thomas' heart, and He wanted to put a stop to it. The best commentary on this is Hebrews 3, where God warns against "an evil heart of unbelief" (Heb. 3:12).

It is not easy to understand the psychology of doubt and unbelief. Perhaps it is linked to personality traits; some people are more trustful than others. Perhaps Thomas was so depressed that he was ready to quit, so he "threw out a challenge" and never

really expected Jesus to accept it. At any rate, Thomas was faced with his own words, and he had to make a decision.

John 20:29 indicates that Thomas' testimony did not come from his *touching* Jesus, but from his *seeing* Jesus. "My Lord and my God!" is the last of the testimonies that John records to the deity of Jesus Christ. The others are: John the Baptist (John 1:34); Nathanael (John 1:49); Jesus Himself (John 5:25; 10:36); Peter (John 6:69); the healed blind man (John 9:35); Martha (John 11:27); and, of course, John himself (John 20:30–31).

It is an encouragement to us to know that the Lord had a personal interest in and concern for "Doubting Thomas." He wanted to strengthen his faith and include him in the blessings that lay in store for His followers. Thomas reminds us that unbelief robs us of blessings and opportunities. It may sound sophisticated and intellectual to question what Jesus did, but such questions are usually evidence of hard hearts, not of searching minds. Thomas represents the "scientific approach" to life—and it did not work! After all, when a skeptic says, "I will not believe unless—" he is already admitting that he does believe! He believes in the validity of the test or experiment that he has devised! If he can have faith in his own "scientific approach," why can he not have faith in what God has revealed?

We need to remind ourselves that everybody lives by faith. The difference is in the *object* of that faith. Christians put their faith in God and His Word, while unsaved people put their faith in themselves.

From Death to Life (John 20:29–31)

John could not end his book without bringing the Resurrection miracle to his own readers. We must not look at Thomas and the other disciples and envy them, as though the power of Christ's resurrection could never be experienced in our lives today. *That was why John wrote this Gospel*—so that people in *every* age could know that Jesus is God and that faith in Him brings everlasting life.

It is not necessary to "see" Jesus Christ in order to believe. Yes, it was a blessing for the early Christians to see their Lord and know that He was alive; but that is not what saved them. They were saved, not by seeing, but by believing. The emphasis throughout the Gospel of John is on *believing*. There are nearly 100 references in this Gospel to believing on Jesus Christ.

You and I today cannot see Christ, nor can we see Him perform the miracles (signs) that John wrote about in this book. But the record is there, and that is all that we need. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17; and note 1 John 5:9–13). As you read John's record, you come face to face with Jesus Christ, how He lived, what He said, and what He did. All of the evidence points to the conclusion that He is indeed God come in the flesh, the Saviour of the world.

The signs that John selected and described in this book are proof of the deity of Christ. They are important. But sinners are not saved by believing in miracles; they are saved by believing on Jesus Christ. Many of the Jews in Jerusalem believed on Jesus because of His miracles, but He did not believe in them! (John 2:23–25) Great crowds followed Him because of His miracles (John 6:2); but in the end, most of them left Him

for good (John 6:66). Even the religious leaders who plotted His death believed that He did miracles, but this "faith" did not save them (John 11:47ff).

Faith in His miracles should lead to faith in His Word, and to personal faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Jesus Himself pointed out that faith in His works (miracles) was but *the first step* toward faith in the Word of God (John 5:36–40). The sinner must "hear" the Word if he is to be saved (John 5:24).

There was no need for John to describe every miracle that our Lord performed; in fact, he supposed that a complete record could never be written (John 21:25). The life and ministry of Jesus Christ were simply too rich and full for any writer, even an inspired one, to give a complete record. But a complete record is not necessary. All of the basic facts are here for us to read and consider. There is sufficient truth for any sinner to believe and be saved!

The *subject* of John's Gospel is "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." He presented a threefold proof of this thesis: our Lord's works, our Lord's walk, and our Lord's words. In this Gospel, you see Jesus performing miracles; you watch Him living a perfect life in the midst of His enemies; and you hear Him speaking words that nobody else could speak.

Either Jesus was a madman, or He was deluded, or He was all that He claimed to be. While some of His enemies did call Him deranged and deluded, the majority of people who watched Him and listened to Him concluded that He was unique, unlike anyone else they had ever known. How could a madman or a deluded man accomplish what Jesus accomplished? *When people trusted Him, their lives were transformed!* That does not happen when you trust a madman or a deceiver.

He claimed to be God come in the flesh, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. That is what He is!

John was not content simply to explain a subject. He was an evangelist who wanted to achieve an object. He wanted his readers to believe in Jesus Christ and be saved! He was not writing a biography to entertain or a history to enlighten. He was writing an evangel to change men's lives.

"Life" is one of John's key words; he uses it at least thirty-six times. Jesus offers sinners abundant life and eternal life; and the only way they can get it is through personal faith in Him.

If sinners need life, then the implication is that they are *dead*. "And you hath He quickened [made alive, resurrected] who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). Salvation is not resuscitation; it is resurrection (John 5:24). The lost sinner is not sick or weak; *he is dead*.

This life comes "through His name." What is His name? In John's Gospel, the emphasis is on His name "I AM." Jesus makes seven great "I AM" statements in this Gospel, offering the lost sinner all that he needs.

Eternal life is not "endless time," for even lost people are going to live forever in hell. "Eternal life" means *the very life of God experienced today*. It is a quality of life, not a quantity of time. It is the spiritual experience of "heaven on earth" today. The Christian does not have to die to have this eternal life; he possesses it in Christ today.

The ten disciples were changed from fear to courage, and Thomas was changed from unbelief to confidence. Now, John invites *you* to trust Jesus Christ and be changed from death to eternal life.

If you have already made this life-changing decision, give thanks to God for the precious gift of eternal life.

If you have never made this decision, *do so right now*.

“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36).

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

TRANSFORMED TO SERVE

John 21

The average reader would conclude that John completed his book with the dramatic testimony of Thomas (John 20:28–31), and the reader would wonder why John added another chapter. The main reason is the Apostle Peter, John's close associate in ministry (Acts 3:1). John did not want to end his Gospel without telling his readers that Peter was restored to his apostleship. Apart from the information in this chapter, we would wonder why Peter was so prominent in the first twelve chapters of the Book of Acts.

John had another purpose in mind: he wanted to refute the foolish rumor that had spread among the believers that John would live until the return of the Lord (John 21:23). John made it clear that our Lord's words had been greatly misunderstood.

I think John may have had another purpose in mind: he wanted to teach us how to relate to the risen Christ. During the forty days between His resurrection and ascension, our Lord appeared and disappeared at will, visiting with the disciples and preparing them for the coming of the Spirit and their future ministries (Acts 1:1–9). They never knew when He would appear, so they had to stay alert! (The fact that He may return for His people *today* ought to keep us on our toes!) It was an important time for the disciples because they were about to take His place in the world and begin to carry the message to others.

I see in this chapter three pictures of the believer and a responsibility attached to each picture.

We Are Fishers of Men—Obey Him (John 21:1–8)

The Lord had instructed His disciples to meet Him in Galilee, which helps to explain why they were at the Sea of Galilee, or Sea of Tiberias (Matt. 26:32; 28:7–10; Mark 16:7). But John did not explain why Peter decided to go fishing, and Bible students are not in agreement in their suggestions. Some claim that he was perfectly within his rights, that he needed to pay his bills and the best way to get money was to go fishing. Why sit around idle? Get busy!

Others believe that Peter had been called *from* that kind of life (Luke 5:1–11) and that it was wrong for him to return. Furthermore, when he went fishing, Peter took six other men with him! If he was wrong, they were wrong too; and it is a sad thing when a believer leads others astray.

By the way, it is interesting that at least seven of the twelve disciples were probably fishermen. Why did Jesus call so many fishermen to follow Him? For one thing, fishermen are courageous, and Jesus needs brave people to follow Him. They are also dedicated to one thing and cannot easily be distracted. Fishermen do not quit! (We are thinking, of course, of professional fishermen, not idle people on vacation!) They know how to take orders, and they know how to work together.

Whether Peter and his friends were right or wrong we cannot prove—though I personally think that they were wrong—but we do know this: their efforts were in vain. Had they forgotten the Lord's words, "For without Me, ye can do nothing"? (John 15:5) They toiled all night and caught nothing. Certainly, Peter must have remembered what happened two years before, when Jesus called him into full-time discipleship (Luke 5:1–11). On that occasion, Peter had fished all night and caught nothing, but Jesus had turned his failure into success.

Perhaps Peter's impulsiveness and self-confidence were revealing themselves again. He was sincere, and he worked hard, but there were no results. How like some believers in the service of the Lord! They sincerely believe that they are doing God's will, but their labors are in vain. They are serving without direction from the Lord, so they cannot expect blessing from the Lord.

After His resurrection, our Lord was sometimes not recognized (Luke 24:16; John 20:14); so it was that His disciples did not recognize Him when, at dawning, He appeared on the shore. His question expected a negative reply: "You have not caught anything to eat, have you?" Their reply was brief and perhaps a bit embarrassed: "No."

It was time for Jesus to take over the situation, just as He did when He called Peter into discipleship. He told them where to cast the net; they obeyed, and they caught 153 fish! The difference between success and failure was the width of the ship! We are never far from success when we permit Jesus to give the orders, and we are usually closer to success than we realize.

It was John who first realized that the stranger on the shore was their own Lord and Master. It was John who leaned on the Lord's breast at the table (John 13:23) and who stood by the cross when his Lord suffered and died (John 19:26). It is love that recognizes the Lord and shares that good news with others: "It is the Lord!"

With characteristic impulsiveness, Peter quickly put on his outer garment ("naked" simply means "stripped for work") and dove into the water! He wanted to get to Jesus! This is in contrast to Luke 5:8 where Peter told the Lord to depart from him. The other six men followed in the boat, bringing the net full of fish. In the experience recorded in Luke 5, the nets began to break; but in this experience, the net held fast.

Perhaps we can see in these two "fishing miracles" an illustration of how the Lord helps His people fish for lost souls. All of our efforts are useless apart from His direction and blessing. During this present age, we do not know how many fish we have caught, and it often appears that the nets are breaking! But at the end of the age, when we see the Lord, not one fish will be lost and we will discover how many there are.

Jesus called the disciples and us to be “fishers of men.” This phrase was not invented by Jesus; it had been used for years by Greek and Roman teachers. To be a “fisher of men” in that day meant to seek to persuade men and “catch” them with the truth. A fisherman catches living fish, but when he gets them, they die. A Christian witness seeks to catch “dead fish” (dead in their sins), and when he or she “catches” them, they are made alive in Christ!

Now we can understand why Jesus had so many fishermen in the disciple band. Fishermen know how to work. They have courage and faith to go out “into the deep.” They have much patience and persistence, and they will not quit. They know how to cooperate with one another, and they are skilled in using the equipment and the boat. What examples for us to follow as we seek to “catch fish” for Jesus Christ!

We are indeed “fishers of men,” and there are “fish” all around us. If we obey His directions, we will catch the fish.

We Are Shepherds—Love Him (John 21:9–18)

Jesus met His disciples on the beach where He had already prepared breakfast for them. This entire scene must have stirred Peter's memory and touched his conscience. Surely he was recalling that first catch of fish (Luke 5:1–11) and perhaps even the feeding of the 5,000 with bread and fish (John 6). It was at the close of the latter event that Peter had given his clear-cut witness of faith in Jesus Christ (John 6:66–71). The “fire of coals” would certainly remind him of the fire at which he denied the Lord (John 18:18). It is good for us to remember the past; we may have something to confess.

Three “invitations” stand out in John's Gospel: “Come and see” (John 1:39); “Come and drink” (John 7:37); and “Come and dine” (John 21:12). How loving of Jesus to feed Peter before He dealt with his spiritual needs. He gave Peter opportunity to dry off, get warm, satisfy his hunger, and enjoy personal fellowship. This is a good example for us to follow as we care for God's people. Certainly the spiritual is more important than the physical, but caring for the physical can prepare the way for spiritual ministry. Our Lord does not so emphasize “the soul” that He neglects the body.

Peter and his Lord had already met privately and no doubt taken care of Peter's sins (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5), but since Peter had denied the Lord *publicly*, it was important that there be a public restoration. Sin should be dealt with only to the extent that it is known. Private sins should be confessed in private, public sins in public. Since Peter had denied his Lord three times, Jesus asked him three personal questions. He also encouraged him by giving a threefold commission that restored Peter to his ministry.

The key issue is Peter's love for the Lord Jesus, and that should be a key matter with us today. But what did the Lord mean by “more than these”? Was He asking, “Do you love Me more than you love these other men?” Not likely, because this had never been a problem among the disciples. They all loved the Lord Jesus supremely, even though they did not always obey Him completely. Perhaps Jesus meant, “Do you love Me more than you love these boats and nets and fish?” Again, this is not likely, for there is no evidence that Peter ever desired to go back permanently into the fishing business. Fishing did not seem to compete with the Saviour's love.

The question probably meant, “Do you love Me—as you claimed—more than these other disciples love Me?” Peter had boasted of his love for Christ and had even

contrasted it with that of the other men. "I will lay down my life for Thy sake!" (John 13:37) "Though all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended!" (Matt. 26:33) There is more than a hint in these boastful statements that Peter believed that he loved the Lord more than did the other disciples.

Many commentaries point out that, in this conversation, two different words are used for "love." In His questions in John 21:15–16, our Lord used *agape*, which is the Greek word for the highest kind of love, sacrificing love, divine love. Peter always used *phileo*, which is the love of friend for friend, fondness for another. In John 21:17, Jesus and Peter both used *phileo*.

However, it is doubtful that we should make too much of an issue over this, because the two words are often used interchangeably in the Gospel of John. In John 3:16, God's love for man is *agape* love; but in John 16:27, it is *phileo* love. The Father's love for His Son is *agape* love in John 3:35 but *phileo* love in John 5:20. Christians are supposed to love one another. In John 13:34, this love is *agape* love; but in John 15:19, it is *phileo* love. It would appear that John used these two words as synonyms, whatever fine distinctions there might have been between them.

Before we judge Peter too severely, two other matters should be considered. When answering the first two questions, Peter did affirm his *agape* love when he said, "Yes, Lord!" The fact that Peter himself used *phileo* did not negate his wholehearted assent to the Lord's use of *agape*. Second, Peter and Jesus undoubtedly spoke in Aramaic, even though the Holy Spirit recorded the conversation in common Greek. It might be unwise for us to press the Greek too far in this case.

In spite of his faults and failures, Peter did indeed love the Lord, and he was not ashamed to admit it. The other men were certainly listening "over Peter's shoulder" and benefiting from the conversation, for they too had failed the Lord after boasting of their devotion. Peter had already confessed his sin and been forgiven. Now he was being restored to apostleship and leadership.

The image, however, changes from that of the fisherman to that of the shepherd. Peter was to minister both as an evangelist (catching the fish) and a pastor (shepherding the flock). It is unfortunate when we divorce these two because they should go together. Pastors ought to evangelize (2 Tim. 4:5) and then shepherd the people they have won so that they mature in the Lord.

Jesus gave three admonitions to Peter: "Feed My lambs," "Shepherd My sheep," and "Feed My sheep." Both the lambs and the more mature sheep need feeding and leading, and that is the task of the spiritual shepherd. It is an awesome responsibility to be a shepherd of God's flock! (1 Peter 5:2) There are enemies that want to destroy the flock, and the shepherd must be alert and courageous (Acts 20:28–35). By nature, sheep are ignorant and defenseless, and they need the protection and guidance of the shepherd.

While it is true that the Holy Spirit equips people to serve as shepherds, and gives these people to churches (Eph. 4:11ff), it is also true that each individual Christian must help to care for the flock. Each of us has a gift or gifts from the Lord, and we should use what He has given us to help protect and perfect the flock. Sheep are prone to wander, and we must look after each other and encourage each other.

Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), the Great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20–21), and the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). Pastors are "under-shepherds" who must

obey Him as they minister to the flock. *The most important thing the pastor can do is to love Jesus Christ.* If he truly loves Jesus Christ, the pastor will also love His sheep and tenderly care for them. The Greek word for “sheep” at the end of John 21:17 means “dear sheep.” Our Lord’s sheep are dear to Him and He wants His ministers to love them and care for them personally and lovingly. (See Ezek. 34 for God’s indictment of unfaithful shepherds, the leaders of Judah.) A pastor who loves the flock will serve it faithfully, no matter what the cost.

We Are Disciples—Follow Him (John 21:19–25)

Jesus had just spoken about Peter’s life and ministry, and now He talks about Peter’s death. This must have been a shock to Peter, to have the Lord discuss his death in such an open manner. No doubt Peter was rejoicing that he had been restored to fellowship and apostleship. Why bring up martyrdom?

The first time Jesus spoke about His own death, Peter had opposed it (Matt. 16:21ff). Peter had even used his sword in the Garden in a futile attempt to protect his Lord. Yet Peter had boasted he would die for the Lord Jesus! But when the pressure was on, Peter failed miserably. (You and I probably would have done worse!) Anyone who yields himself to serve the Lord must honestly confront this matter of death.

When a person has settled the matter of death, then he is ready to live and to serve! Our Lord’s own death is a repeated theme in John’s Gospel: He knew that His “hour” would come, and He was prepared to obey the Father’s will. We as His followers must yield ourselves—just as He yielded Himself for us—and be “living sacrifices” (Rom. 12:1–2) who are “ready to be offered” (2 Tim. 4:6–8) if it is the will of God.

Earlier that morning, Peter had “girded himself” and hurried to shore to meet Jesus (John 21:7). The day would come when another would take charge of Peter—and kill him (see 2 Peter 1:13–14). Tradition tells us that Peter was indeed crucified, but that he asked to be crucified upside down, because he was not worthy to die exactly as his Master had died.

But Peter’s death would not be a tragedy; it would glorify God! The death of Lazarus glorified God (John 11:4, 40) and so did the death of Jesus (John 12:23ff). Paul’s great concern was that he glorify God, whether by life or by death (Phil. 1:20–21). This should be our desire as well.

Our Lord’s words, “Follow Me!” must have brought new joy and love to Peter’s heart. Literally, Jesus said, “Keep on following Me.” Immediately, Peter began to follow Jesus, just as he had done before his great denial. However, for a moment *Peter took his eyes off the Lord Jesus*, a mistake he had made at least two other times. After that first great catch of fish, Peter took his eyes off his Lord and looked at *himself*. “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” (Luke 5:8) When he was walking on the stormy sea with Jesus, Peter looked away from the Lord and began to look at the wind and waves; and immediately he began to sink (Matt. 14:30). It is dangerous to look at the circumstances instead of looking to the Lord.

Why did Peter look away from his Lord and start to look back? He heard somebody walking behind him. It was the Apostle John who was also following Jesus Christ. Peter did a foolish thing and asked Jesus, “What shall this man do?” In other words, “Lord, you just told me what will happen to me; now, what will happen to John?”

The Lord rebuked Peter and reminded him that his job was to follow, not to meddle into the lives of other believers. Beware when you get your eyes off the Lord and start to look at other Christians! "Looking unto Jesus" should be the aim and practice of every believer (Heb. 12:1–2). To be distracted by ourselves, our circumstances, or by other Christians, is to disobey the Lord and possibly get detoured out of the will of God. Keep your eyes of faith on Him and on Him alone.

This does not mean that we ignore others, because we do have the responsibility of caring for one another (Phil. 2:1–4). Rather, it means that we must not permit our curiosity about others to distract us from following the Lord. God has His plan for us; He also has plans for our Christian friends and associates. How He works in their lives is His business. Our business is to follow Him as He leads us (see Rom. 14:1–13).

I recall a critical time in my own ministry when I was disturbed because other ministers were apparently getting God's "blessing" in abundance while I seemed to be reaping a meager harvest. I must confess that I envied them and wished that God had given their gifts to me. But the Lord tenderly rebuked me with, "What is that to thee? Follow thou Me." It was just the message I needed, and I have tried to heed it ever since.

Jesus did not say that John would live until His return, but that is the way some of the misguided believers understood it. More problems are caused by confused saints than by lost sinners! Misinterpreting the Word of God only creates misunderstanding about God's people and God's plans for His people.

However, there is a somewhat enigmatic quality to what the Lord said about John. Jesus did not say that John would live until He returned, nor did He say that John would die before He returned. As it was, John lived the longest of all the disciples and did witness the Lord's return when he saw the visions that he recorded in the Book of Revelation.

As John came to the close of his book, he affirmed again the credibility of his witness. (Remember, *witness* is a key theme in the Gospel of John. The word is used forty-seven times.) John witnessed these events himself and wrote them for us as he was led by the Holy Spirit. He could have included so much more, but he wrote only what the Spirit told him to write.

The book ends with Peter and John together following Jesus, and He led them right into the Book of Acts! What an exciting thing it was to receive the power of the Spirit and to bear witness of Jesus Christ! Had they not trusted Him, been transformed by Him, and followed Him, they would have remained successful fishermen on the Sea of Galilee; and the world would never have heard of them.

Jesus Christ is transforming lives today. Wherever He finds a believer who is willing to yield to His will, listen to His Word, and follow His way, He begins to transform that believer and accomplish remarkable things in that life. He also begins to do wonderful things through that life.

Peter and John have been off the scene (except for their books) for centuries, but you and I are still here. We are taking His place and taking their place. What a responsibility! What a privilege!

We can succeed only as we permit Him to transform us.